

The Rectory, 1 Rectory Close, Fryerning Lane, Ingatestone,
CM40DB
01277352562 patrick.sherring@fryerningparishchurch.org.uk

Dear friends,

We have had an exceptional Lent this year in the churches. The Lent courses have seen record attendances. These Churches Together courses have been happening for many years and are a great witness to the unity of mission held by all the churches in the village. This year, thanks to the preparatory work of Peter Hunt from the U.R.C. we have been focussing on significant Bible texts that give us information on the final week in the life of Jesus. It has been wonderful to see people really getting to grips in small groups in discussion about the significance of these texts and their application for today. Participants grappled with issues and meaning and it has been stretching for us all. Someone who came this year for the first time said that she really enjoyed it and I know she will have benefited.

On the second evening in one group in discussion we moved into considering how we think of Jesus, particularly when we are praying. Do we think of the baby in the manger? Or is it the man teaching the crowds? Or the suffering figure on the cross? Or Christ in splendour reigning in heaven? This is an interesting question. If you visit a church on holiday, look to see the kind of images on display. In an Orthodox church on the ceiling, and this is particularly true if the church has a dome, you will see Christ in majesty in heaven. You will find it hard to find any image like that in an Anglican church. In our own churches in Ingatestone and Fryerning we have images across the spectrum of the life of Jesus, including his suffering on the cross. Our Catholic Church, like many Catholic churches, has the Stations of the Cross, with images leading up to the crucifixion as well as that event and the burial of Jesus. The Elim and U.R.C. churches have no images. An empty cross if it is used reminds of the fact that Jesus has been resurrected. All these are part of the extra-ordinary visual vocabulary of Christianity. For Jesus is the baby in the manger, and the preacher and healer, and the one crucified for our sins, and the resurrected Christ, and Christ in glory in the heavens. Throughout the church year at different

times the church places a different emphasis on parts of the narrative. But all are important.

At Easter we remember particularly on Good Friday the suffering of Jesus. That is why as Churches Together we begin at the Catholic Church with a service of the Stations of the Cross. This is followed by symbolically carrying the cross along the High Street from the Catholic Church, stopping for Prayers at the Elim and United Reformed Church, before bringing the cross to the Parish Church. Then at 2 pm all the church ministers come together for a service for the final hour. If you have never taken part in a Good Friday service, I urge you to do so. Of course it is emotional if you really believe what happened. But the anguish of Good Friday is released in the joy of the resurrection on Easter Day.

We see 20% of the village residents at Ingatestone Parish Church at Christmas, but many less at Easter. I have never really understood why. We should be packed on Easter morning, for the resurrection is the keystone to the faith. All else fits around it. If you regularly just come at Christmas, please join us at Ingatestone or Fryerning on Easter Day. If you are away, be brave and join Christian brothers and sisters elsewhere. There are Anglican churches everywhere in the world, as well as all the other denominations. We are part of a world-wide family of an estimated two billion. Sometimes we forget that Christianity is the largest religion in the world. We do not have to excuse our faith; we should celebrate it. It is only in Europe where Christianity appears to be in decline.

It has been a personal joy to be invited along to Phoenix F.M. the community radio station for Brentwood and Billericay and talk about Christmas last December and recently Lent and Easter. The programme '*Keeping the faith*' is on Wednesdays between 7-8 p.m. Phoenix is on 98FM and the internet. I had contact with someone listening in London who saw my purple jumper on the webcam and asked why I was wearing it! There is interest in faith in our community and wider. May we this Easter understand why, if we are anywhere on the road to understanding why Easter matters, remember and give thanks.
Yours in Christ, *Patrick*.