

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

Dear friends,

One of the great joys of ministry in our communities is to see how important attendance at church over the Christmas period is to people. This particularly applies to Christmas Eve at Ingatestone Church. The result was that last year we introduced a second crib service. So now there is a service at 4 o'clock and at 5.30. Last year the 4 o'clock was still incredibly busy, with people arriving thirty minutes early to get a seat! The 5.30 service was also very busy, as was the 7.30 Nine Lessons and Carols and the 11.30 Midnight Communion. We also had a well attended 3 p.m. Crib service at Fryerning Church, which attracted a lot of parents with very young children. With nearly 20% of the entire village community being at these services, it was not surprising that the Christmas morning services, 8 am and 11.15 at Fryerning Church and 9.45 at Ingatestone Church were not so crowded. It is good to see so many people planning being in church as part of their celebration of Christmas. I hope you will want to come along this year. The Midnight Communion is a particularly powerful service. There is something about being in church on a winter's night, surrounded by darkness, that makes all that is being remembered more real.

When we gather in our churches, we are doing what people have done here for over nine hundred years. I find it extra-ordinary to consider all those people from our communities across the centuries that have come to worship in our buildings. I make the point at every baptism and wedding that in our 21st century way we are doing exactly the same as people have done in these spaces for all that length of time. People have been drawn to acknowledge the importance of all that God has done for us and continues to do in individual lives. The Christian faith emphasises the importance of us all individually acknowledging our debt to God and wanting to live our lives in relationship with him. In the fourth century a monk who spent some time in

Jerusalem and in the Egyptian desert, named Evagrius wrote, 'Sin is forgetfulness of God's goodness'. These words are as powerful today as ever.

Our Churches Together celebration of the year on New Years' Eve has also grown in recent years. Being positioned before the fireworks, many people come to both. It is important to spend time looking both back at the year and also forward to the next. Indeed it is a good spiritual discipline to end each day by thinking about all that has happened that day and to see what we have learned both about life, ourselves and God. The end of the year gives us an opportunity to do that about the year that has passed. None of us could have predicted how 2009 would play out in our own lives. Has it been a particularly memorable year? What are the most important occurrences? What have you learnt? These and similar questions, are all worth considering. For our churches, one of the highlights has to be the incredibly generous responses to our appeals for gifts for Harvest for the Hungry and the Shoebox appeal. Giving to those whose lives are so much worse than our own is Christianity in action. If we have a faith that is real and a continually developing relationship with Jesus, we will see the world differently. We will acknowledge all God has done for us and remember his goodness. Our hearts will be touched with compassion for others and we will want to respond. We will look beyond our own lives and needs to the lives and needs of others.

Just as we know now that we did not know all that would happen in 2009, so we cannot predict 2010. No doubt for some of us it will be a year of considerable change. Whatever 2010 has in store, we can be sure that in all of our lives we can place Jesus clearly at the centre. Not the small helpless baby we remember at Christmas, but Jesus the Son of God who took upon himself so much for the sake of us all. It is easy to relate to the miracle of a birth, for each birth is truly a miracle. A baby in a manger or anywhere tugs at our heartstrings. Christmas is an integral part of the faith. But the gifts brought by the magi point to the life and work of the adult Jesus and beyond to his potential kingship in our lives and all that implies. May God bless us all as we look forward with confidence. *Patrick*