

The Rectory, 1 Rectory Close, Fryerning Lane, Ingatestone,
CM4 0DB. 01277 352562

Patrick.sherring@ingatestoneparishchurch.org.uk

Dear friends,

The cycle of the year is something that helps to give our days weeks, months and years a sense of stability. There has always been a rhythm to the year to which the church has helped to give an extra dimension of meaning. I had a conversation back in December with someone who was quite adamant that there had always been a mid-winter festival onto which the church had placed Christmas. Of course that is true, people have always looked to celebrate to lift them in the dark days of winter. Yet this man only had tinsel and parties and large credit card bills in January, together with cynicism to lighten his days. Let us be honest, they were not very light for him. How I pray that he could see the joy of Christmas in the eyes of a small child and feel engaged like the five hundred children of all ages who came to our crib services. The joy too in the eyes of Steven from Childcare at collecting the five sacks of toys given at those services to go to disadvantaged families in Essex. That is the Christmas spirit, and we all need it in mid-winter.

People talk of February as being dreary and depressing. How sad to face a whole month with negativity. For some people there is Valentine's day to try and lift their spirits, the day when the question is supposedly popped. In March this year I will be taking my 100th wedding since the first one I took in Leyton in the summer of 1998. I am not sure who was the most nervous that day! Actually, I think I am sure!! We will be looking to celebrate marriage on Sunday 12th of February at Ingatestone church this year. The Church of England has looked to promote marriage week in recent years and has produced a special order of service and we will be using it. Look out for more details.

Easter is a time that many people celebrate. As with Christmas and mid winter, it is natural to want to celebrate the coming of Spring and the idea of new life. But how much more real significance is there in the Christian understanding than simply chicks and bunnies? The Christian rhythm of the year gives real

meaning that we would feel has an eternal dimension.

Because for many people Christmas and Easter do not have any real religious significance, then the idea of spiritually preparing for them has no meaning. So Advent, if it exists at all, has simply become an excuse for a daily chocolate courtesy of an Advent calendar. The idea of the need to spiritually prepare for Christmas is lost amongst the frantic dash for presents. And what of Lent? This has simply become a day forty days before Easter to have a pancake. I am sure there is a fortune to be made by someone who can decide on the brilliant way to exploit this commercially. This day of using up dairy products before a time of fasting as preparation for Easter has lost the meaning it had for many people. Frantically dieting in January to try and compensate for over indulgence at Christmas has become an annual activity. Recapturing the idea of how to fast during lent would be healthier. I would suggest to you that we are impoverished physically as well as spiritually by having lost this sense of journey through the year.

For our churches, Lent will again be a significant period of spiritual preparation for Easter. We have tried over the years, with the production of our own booklet of daily readings, to have something that helps us in our daily journey. I do hope that many people take this little time out each day to read and reflect. Again this year the daily reflections have been produced by a wide selection of local people from the local Anglican, Catholic, Elim and United Reformed churches. I feel a great sense of achievement each when I am able to hold the finished booklet in my hand. I hope these readings will be a blessing to you. I hope also that you will look out for details of the Lent course. I always look forward to these weekly times when we can come together to think and listen to each other. The way our churches work together is something to be cherished.

I hope that February will not be a dreary month of just anticipating spring and Easter, but a month of significant decision making about how you are going to use the forty days of Lent 2012. beginning with Ash Wednesday on the 22nd.
Yours in Christ, *Patrick*.