

FROM THE VICARAGE

Before getting on to the festive matters which are so much a part of this time of year, I must mention that last month I had the pleasure of being interviewed by Tim Gillett of BBC Radio Essex. On Sunday mornings BBC Essex focuses on a specific church and its 'USP' (unique selling point). Tim had heard about Felix, our stained-glass window tortoise, and was keen to find out more – not least because our window may well be the only representation of a tortoise in stained glass in the world. Of course, the real-life Felix still lives in Church Street, as he has done since 1910, making him without doubt the oldest living resident in our street! Along with Felix's story, Tim and I also talked about Advent as a significant preparation-time for Christmas, plus of course our **11th Christmas Tree Festival on Saturday 7th – Sunday 8th December**.

Our short conversation, recorded in the Lady Chapel of St Mary's where you will find the Adoration the Magi window with Felix in the bottom left-and corner, can be heard twice during Peter Holmes' BBC Essex Sunday morning show (6-9.00 am) on **Sunday 1st December at 6.40 and 7.40 am**. Admittedly this may be rather early on a Sunday for some of you, but you can always listen later via the BBC's catch-up service! I'm also delighted to say that the real-life Felix will be the guest of honour at our annual Pet Service next summer.

Here you can see Felix himself admiring his own portrait –

-Pic-

Last month it was almost as if the weather knew by instinct that it was November – the temperature dropped very quickly when the month began. Along with the clocks changing, it seemed by the time Remembrance Sunday was past that autumn had gone and winter was already upon us.

Such wintry weather makes our Advent preparations and Christmas celebrations that much more welcome. We have the usual packed December, the details of which you'll find elsewhere in this issue – our Family Service on Advent Sunday (1st December), our popular Carol Service on Sunday 22nd, plus our usual Midnight Mass and Christmas Day services. Last Christmas we were very pleased with the success of our two Christmas Eve Crib Services, at 4.00 and 6.00 pm, so we're repeating this again this year. It is heartening that this service is so popular that one is no longer enough.

This isn't all, of course: there are our regular Sunday services – **EXCEPT SUNDAY 8TH DECEMBER when there will be NO 11.00 am service due to the Christmas Tree Festival** – plus events with our church school. There's a Christingle service in school on Wednesday 4th December, followed by the school Carol Service in church on Thursday 19th. If you love Christingle, then the **Church Christingle Service for our Benefice will be in All Saints' Feering on Sunday 15th December at 4.00 pm**. And St Mary's also has a wedding on Saturday 21st!

We're also trying something new on **Saturday 21st December: a 'Blue Christmas' Service at 4.00 pm**. Mentioning the weather isn't padding for this piece: some dread the winter months and the shorter, darker days; many dread Christmas itself. For so many people it's a very difficult time indeed, due to loneliness, illness, bereavement or family breakdown, to name just a few reasons.

'Blue Christmas' services (also known as 'Quiet Christmas') have increased over the last decade or so. They are quiet, reflective services which face the difficulty and pain the season can bring, yet still offer the light and hope of the season. Ours will be a short (30-40 minute) service, with the chance to

sit and reflect, and to light a candle if you wish. There will be readings and prayers, plus some of the quieter, more reflective carols too, but there will be no pressure to sing if you'd rather just sit.

Saturday 21st is the shortest day of the year, hence choosing this date. Talking with people privately can reveal how much the at times enforced jollity of our modern consumer-led, commercialized Christmas can be a real burden. This is something that's intended to be different: still clearly an act of worship but pointing in a direction quite different to the usual Christmas celebrations. It's not exclusive in any way – if you find Christmas a strain at times, even if it doesn't make you feel 'blue', then this may be right for you. Some of you who came to our 'In Loving Memory' bereavement service in November may find it particularly helpful.

After all, the Christmas story itself isn't unalloyed joy – the birth itself must have been very difficult and painful for Mary (no hospitals or anaesthetic in those days!) and there is real fear and terror in the holy family's hurried flight into Egypt to escape the murderous wrath of King Herod, unleashed without pity on the hapless children of Bethlehem. In our own day we have seen too many young children maimed and killed in that part of the world.

Mary, Joseph and the Christ-child knew what it was to be at the mercy of powerful forces beyond their control – forced to go and register in Bethlehem, at the other end of the country to Nazareth, and then having to flee to Egypt to escape Herod. Though it hardly feels like it, we are currently in an election campaign; never has there seemed to be so much uncertainty about our country, what people believe and vote for, and the whole future of our nation – even the future of our United (or should that be disunited?) Kingdom itself.

Yet the God revealed in the infant Christ is still the God who comes to, gets intimately involved with and caught up in the mess of the world as it is, and who seeks to save and redeem it from within. The adult Jesus himself was at the mercy of powerful and violent forces as he went to the cross, but through his whole story the love of God for our broken world shines through. May you sense that love and be illumined by that light in this winter dark.

With every blessing for Advent, Christmas, and into the New Year,

Simon

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From the Parish Registers, November 2019

Wedding *We send our congratulations to:*

15 November – Paige Allison Lee and Michael Richard Hume

We offer our prayers for and condolences to the families and friends of:

Funeral

18 November – Lesley Evelyn Stuart Vaughan (Weeley Crematorium)

Burial of Ashes

23 November – Geoffrey William Sutton (St Mary's Burial Ground)

There were no baptisms in St Mary's during November.