

## All Saints' Church

Cottenham with Rampton



### Pastoral Letter #40

16<sup>th</sup> December 2020

Dear Church Family,

Last Saturday, a wonderful time was had recording the music for the Carol Service which will be online this year. Robin Horgan directed the choir (with amazing arm work!); Emma McCaughan played the organ almost continually for three hours; and Chris Lowe and some new friends from 'Thumping Gorilla Productions' took charge of the sound and filming. We are very excited by the result but, most of all, really enjoyed singing Christmas Carols all afternoon.

I wonder what your favourite Christmas carol is.

I would be hard pushed to come down to only one, yet one which particularly intrigues me is '*God rest ye merry gentlemen*', which we did sing on Saturday. The words tell of the story of Jesus and the first verse reads like this:

*God rest ye merry gentlemen  
Let nothing you dismay  
For Jesus Christ our saviour was born on Christmas day  
To save us all from Satan's power when we were gone astray  
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy  
O tidings of comfort and joy.*

It is one of our oldest Christmas carols – over 500 years old. At that time music in churches was very sombre and it wouldn't have been sung in worship. But is really a folk song and it would have been sung heartily to a jolly tune in people's homes. It's somewhat ironic that this year the only singing we are allowed to do in any heartily way is indeed in our homes!

The carol began being sung in churches in the 1800s as Queen Victoria embraced the joy of the Christmas carol. Around that time Charles Dickens wrote 'A Christmas Carol' and it is this Christmas carol that his book references.

Well as wonderful as these intriguing facts are, I think it may be the most misunderstood carol! And that's because of the line that says: 'God rest ye merry gentlemen'.

500 years ago the word 'rest' would not have meant rest as we know it. Instead it meant to 'keep' or to 'make'. So it was really 'God keep you merry gentlemen'.

And the word merry? It didn't mean happy or joyful as we might think. It meant mighty or strong.

So the message of this carol is 'May God keep you strong, gentlemen'. And ladies too of course!

'May God keep you strong'. Therefore, 'let nothing you dismay, for Jesus Christ the Saviour was born on Christmas Day. O tidings of comfort and joy'.

I wonder how strong you have felt this year. For many of us this it has been difficult time. Some of you I know have lost loved ones; we've had to keep physically distanced from each other; some of you are exhausted from your work as key workers, or have lost jobs; our children's education has been disrupted.

It has not been easy. So for me, this carol may be 500 years old but it's a carol for 2020. And that's because it's a prayer that God will keep us strong, and therefore we should 'let nothing us dismay. And why? Because Jesus has come. Jesus is born. Jesus is God himself, coming amongst us to lead us back to our maker when, in the words of the carol, 'we have gone astray'. In this message, we can find comfort and joy despite what is happening around us, because this Christmas is different and not as we had hoped.

So I pray that God will keep you strong and that, wherever you find yourself this Christmas, it *will* be a Christmas full of comfort and joy.

On Sunday afternoon this week at 3.30pm we have our Live Nativity, raising money for The Children's Society. As we're outdoors, we're able to sing, so do come along and join in some socially distanced carols as the Christmas Story is re-told.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and evermore. Amen.

Best wishes,

Revd Lynda Davies

[Rector@allsaintscottenham.org.uk](mailto:Rector@allsaintscottenham.org.uk)

01954 583651