

All Saints' Church
Cottenham with Rampton



Pastoral Letter #85

November/December 2023

Dear Church Family,

Each year I look forward to seeing Christmas ads on TV for the first time and, as soon as I saw this year's John Lewis offering online, I loved it straight away. For those of you who haven't seen it, a boy buys a seed from a second-hand sale believing it to be from a kit for 'planting a perfect Christmas tree'. He plants it, and it grows into a huge Venus flytrap. The plant happily grows in the corner of the living room until it tries to eat the boy's dog, table lamp and furnishings, so his family throws it out into the garden.

The family replace the Venus flytrap with a traditional Christmas tree whilst the rejected plant looks in through the patio doors, its trap shaped leaf face squished up against the glass in longing. The little boy reaches out to his flytrap friend, taking a beautifully wrapped present out to the garden and then his family, inspired by kindness, do the same. The Venus flytrap eats the presents, then regurgitates them back up and spits them at the family, helpfully unwrapped.

On the face of it this is a rather unusual Christmas advert - it's not sentimental, cosy or sparkly. It features a giant present eating plant that almost ruins Christmas. But if you look a little deeper I think it has something very profound and honest to say about our annual festivities. A clue can be found in the backing track, a song especially written for this advert, with Andrea Bocelli theatrically repeating the lyrics 'La vita è una festa', meaning '*Life is a celebration*'.

The church of England's 2023 Christmas campaign is called '*Join the Song*' and highlights how singing can help draw us closer to God and each other through the journey from Advent to Epiphany; darkness into light. There are songs for every season of the church year, just as there are songs for every season of life, and music throughout Advent and Christmas has the power to comfort and enlighten us. Songs learnt in childhood, such as hymns, carols and Christmas songs, often seem to 'come back' to those whose memory is failing and can be a source of great comfort and joy. In December, we always join with the other churches in the village to take carol services in our two care homes – Cottenham Court and Fitzwilliam House – and it's always a joy to see residents enjoying the familiar carols and readings. In September we launched our First Thursday Club – a lunch for older church family members – those who come to church regularly and those who find it a struggle. We've enjoyed a monthly 'Thought for the Day', games, good conversation and, on occasion, some singing too. Our December gathering is on the *second* Thursday in December (14th) which I'm sure will include a few carols. In 2024, the Thursday Club will move to the

second Thursday of the month. There is room for more so, if you've not tried it yet, do come along.

It might seem that Andrea Bocelli singing 'Life is a celebration' and a Venus flytrap disrupting Christmas don't fit together but Christmas always has been a tale of the unexpected. On the very first Christmas Day a heavenly host of angels frightened a bunch of shepherds witless with their heavenly song about a child born to save the world. The shepherds searched for the child and found that he wasn't a king in a palace but a baby lying in an animal's feeding trough. There was nothing sentimental, cosy or sparkly about this Christmas Day. The apostle Paul wrote to the early church '*May the God of hope fill you with joy and peace*' (Romans 15:13). My prayer is similar, that despite whatever comes our way, we might be able to say, in the words of Andrea Bocelli, 'La vita è una festa' - 'Life is a celebration'.

Do pick up a flyer from Church which tells you when and where our special services for Christmas are taking place. There's something for all, from our popular Live Nativity for the children, to Carols by Candlelight in both churches. Do invite family, friends and neighbours along.

If you are receiving this letter and cannot get to Church, do remember that we are very happy to bring Church to you. If you'd like to receive a visit, have someone pray with you, or receive Home Communion, do let me know. It would be our pleasure.

Wishing you all a lovely Christmas.

Best wishes,

Revd Lynda Davies

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