

It's hard to believe that the month of December is here and Christmas is just around the corner. Sometimes it seems that every year the shops start their advertising earlier! For many, Christmas is a time when family and friends come together to celebrate the season, but it can, of course, be a difficult time of year for lots of people. In the midst of all the glitter and glitz it is easy to lose sight of the heart of the Christmas message: the birth of the baby Jesus. But whether you love the festivities or find them more of a struggle, it is Jesus's birth that is the real gift of Christmas.

Jesus, the Son of God born into poverty, in a room used to house animals, to a family who are about to become refugees; not normal circumstances for the birth of a king! But Jesus is a king who turns our world upside down in all sorts of exciting and unexpected ways. His life, death and resurrection bring to each one of us and to the whole of creation, the promise of new beginnings and a hope for the future.

The weeks running up to Christmas is traditionally known as the Season of Advent, a time of waiting. To help us think about this we will be holding an Advent course on the first three Wednesdays of December (6th at Kennington Vicarage, Ross Court; 13th at the Church Room in Radley; and 20th at Sunningwell Church) at 7:30 p.m. For more information see the website or email revalisonmathew@gmail.com —all very welcome!

Here at St. Swithun's, the birth of the real gift of Christmas, Jesus, will be celebrated in a number of special services to which we would love to welcome you!

Messy Church will take place as normal at 9:30 a.m. on Sunday 17th when we will be thinking what a Messy Christmas looks like! At 7 p.m. on the 17th we hold our Carols by Candlelight service, followed by the traditional mulled wine and mince pies in the hall! On Christmas Eve our Nativity service will take place at 4 pm—perfect for families and young children to hear afresh the story of Christmas—and at 11:30 p.m. we will join in to celebrate the birth of Jesus as we welcome Christmas morning at our Midnight Communion.

There will be Family Communion at 10 a.m. on Christmas morning (bring your favourite present!).

However you celebrate this season, may you know the peace of the Prince of Peace: Jesus. Happy Christmas!

Rev Alison Mathew