

We have recently celebrated two important birthdays in my family, an 18<sup>th</sup> and an 80<sup>th</sup>. These are great excuses to get together, share a meal and have some fun. As I get older, birthdays seem to come around a lot faster than when I was a child! This year there will be lots of birthday celebrations for the Queen's 90<sup>th</sup>. Birthdays, however we feel about them, mark milestones in all our lives.

This month, churches around the world also celebrate the "Birthday of the Church"—the festival of Pentecost. At Pentecost, Christians remember the coming of God's Holy Spirit who makes God's love for us more real, and guides and encourages us as we follow Jesus on the adventure that is the Christian life. It is called the Birthday of the Church, because following Pentecost the early church saw an explosion of growth. As the young church grew, communities of people from all sorts of backgrounds came together, seeking to bring God's love to the turbulent world around them. This growth was not just in numbers, but also the Spirit brought new life, a deepening of faith and relationships and a commitment to the promise of God's Kingdom: a world where the light of God's love scatters the darkness and brings hope and healing.

But what is spirit? Many today have no time or place for religion. However, ask a different question: do you have a spiritual side? Surprisingly the answer is much more likely to be a "yes". There is a common recognition that there is more to life, more to our existence than the atoms that make up our physical bodies. The Holy Spirit is part of God's very essence; it's like a heartbeat given to help us live life more fully, appreciate our world and each other, to help us to care, to bring hope, healing, peace, love and light, even to the darkest places on earth. This is as true for us today as it was for Jesus's followers at Pentecost and it's a gift open to us all.

There is a lot happening at St Swithun's Church this month. We'd love to welcome you. See below for details and don't forget Messy Church on Pentecost Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> at 9:30 am.

— Alison Mathew