

Mike's message

Farewell 2016

I'm writing this as 2016 enters it's final week.

I know that many people will not be sad to see the year come to an end. As in all years there are those who have encountered personal tragedies and bereavements in the last twelve months and for whom memories of 2016 will always be darkened by sadness. In the public realm much has been made of the number of deaths of well known names in spheres as diverse as entertainment, politics and science. All years hold sadness, but seemingly 2016 has brought more than it's fair share.



Then there's the wider world situation. 2016 brought with it the Referendum on the European Union. Which ever way we voted maybe we see the result as having brought growing uncertainty and instability economically and politically. All this at a time when, with terrorist threats from many quarters and the even greater threat of global warming, we need to be standing and working together rather than splitting, dividing and hiding behind national boundaries.

In the political sphere there are signs that alarm. many The USA has elected a President who seems to thrive on spreading hatred and suspicion about different groups. Elsewhere the rise of the political "Far Right" has seen parties and individuals elected who are intolerant of groups and individuals whose background is different. In our own communities Christians have been shocked and saddened to see how those in need, especially refugees and those seeking asylum, have been derided and ridiculed.

There are concerning times. How can Christians witness effectively about the prince of peace? How can we show, and encourage others to show, the love of Christ that knows no boundaries of race, faith or nation?

As we enter 2017 we celebrate the great Christian Feast of the Epiphany. It's the time when we recall the Magi (or Wise Men or Kings) arriving to worship the Infant Jesus. They came from diverse backgrounds; ancient traditions speak of an Arab on a camel, a Persian on horseback and an Indian on an elephant! Epiphany is also a time we are reminded that the atrocities we see in the world today are nothing new. As we see the horrors unfold in Aleppo we are reminded of Matthew's account of the genocide carried out by Herod to protect his 'power and status'. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and maybe others too, were able to flee to Egypt to seek refuge and asylum. As they were welcomed, we too are called to welcome those who need refuge today.

As Christians we celebrated Christmas, and prepare for Epiphany, by talking of light. In days of darkness our services were candlelit as a sign of Christ the Light of the World. If 2016 has been a year in which so often the darkness seemed to be envelop hope and love, let us pray, and by our example demonstrate that 2017 can be a year in which "the true light enlightens everyone". Let us spread the Good News of the "light that darkness can not overcome" as we say:

.....Welcome 2017