

Mike's message

Come, ye thankful people, come!

September is upon us and with it comes Harvest Festival. At St Andrew's we're having ours on Sunday 25th September (9.30am). I have one at Ryders Green Methodist Church later that day at 4.00pm (Revd Phil Thomas is there at 11.00am). I start earlier in the month though with one at Wesley on Sunday 11th September, with a Family Service at 11.00am.



There's no set date for Harvest Festival. That's logical, as Harvest time as an agricultural event varies depending on where you are in the country. Originally Harvest Festival would have been spontaneous, as soon as the final crops were gathered in, and that would depend on the weather.

I say 'originally' but Harvest Festival is a surprisingly modern invention. It was only in the mid-19th Century that the celebration started being held in church buildings. Prior to that each farm or family would have had a Harvest Home celebration. Some in rural communities still do. But doesn't mean that there wasn't a thanksgiving in the church's life for the fruits of creation. There was a much older festival known as Lammas Day, at the beginning of August, when a loaf made from the first wheat of the harvest was used as the Communion bread. The origins of Lammas Day seem to stretch back to the reign of King Alfred the Great (849 - 899), who, although he founded many churches and monastic foundations, is chiefly remembered for overcooking some of the harvest produce!

Elsewhere in the world Harvest Festivals are celebrated according to local traditions. In Judaism Pentecost (which later gave it's name to a Christian festival too) is a Harvest Festival. In Jesus' day the first fruits of corn were presented in the Temple (Deuteronomy 16.9). It was held fifty days after Passover, hence it's name. Other faiths have their Harvest Festivals too. Within Christianity there is a wide spread of tradition. Perhaps it is the USA that harvest has it's biggest celebration. There 'Thanksgiving Day', on the fourth Thursday in November, has it's origins in the harvest celebrations, and of God's wider provision.

At Harvest Festival we are reminded of how we are dependant on the good things that the earth produces and of our duty to share them responsibly with those in need. Come along and give thanks for the Harvest as we proclaim:

*All good gifts around us, are sent from heaven above;
then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord, for all his love.*

(from a hymn translated by Jane Campbell from the original German of Matthias Claudius)