

# Mike's message .....

## Light and Hope

This is the season of Light .... and Hope.

From long before the dawn of Christianity in these islands people have marked this time of year with festivals or rituals that involve fire or light. Many of these have been subsumed into Christian symbolism over the centuries. Some even into secular symbolism too.



At the beginning of November the Christian Church celebrates All Saints Day (1st November) and All Souls Day (2nd November). The old name for the former was "All Hallows" and the day before was "All Hallows Eve", from which the word Halloween is derived. Many people see a link here to the Gaelic or Celtic festival of Samhain. That marked the end of harvest and the beginning of winter or "the dark half of the year". Bonfires and feasting were, and indeed still are in some places, part of the celebration. The light and warmth of fire gives a sense of hope amidst the gathering gloom.

Even the tradition of bonfires on 5th November seems to pre-date Guy Ffawkes. Great fires may have had similar roots to Samhain - an attempt to banish the approaching darkness of winter, with all the dangers that it's darkness and coldness held.

Around the beginning of December (29th November this year) we enter Advent. Advent is a Christian festival that has hope and expectation at it's heart. We often mark it with lighting a candle each week. A herald to the birth of Christ, the Light of the World. Often these days Advent gets lost in the run up to Christmas, but it's a season of it's own. We are called not just to prepare for Christmas and it's celebration of the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem over 2000 years ago, but to prepare our lives to meet him again. As such Advent marks the start of the Church's year - an opportunity for a new start for each of us.

Then comes Christmas which, despite the commercial world's attempts to convince us otherwise, begins on the evening of Christmas Eve - and no earlier - but then lasts until 6th January (Epiphany). Christmas is replete with images of light - the Star of Bethlehem, the light brought by angels to shepherds, and of course the birth of Jesus:

*"The true light that enlightens everyone coming into the world" (John 1 .9)*

Someone said recently:

*"We can always take heart when we see a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel.....  
.... unless of course it's a train coming in the other direction!"*

We need not fear though, even in these distressing times. We are preparing for the arrival of Jesus Christ:

*"What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.  
The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it". (John 1 .3b-5)*