



ST THOMAS BECKET ANGLICAN CHURCH

“A welcoming, active and inclusive church, growing in our relationship with God and the wider community.”

Christmas Message from the Chaplain Generosity and Joy

Bing Crosby sang a song 'It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas' and this is certainly true of Hamburg as I am writing this Christmas message. The Christmas Markets are crowded with people getting into the festive mood and the shops are filled with all manner of goodies to tempt us as we buy presents for our loved ones. Christmas parties have started and people all over town are talking about what they will be doing for Christmas. I wonder if Mary and Joseph could ever have imagined just how much impact the birth of their son would have on the world?

This will be my third Christmas in Hamburg and they seem to just keep getting better. I love the change of seasons and the onset of winter, especially the snow. I love seeing the children riding their sleds down white snow covered slopes and the squeals of delight as they gain speed and race each other down the hills. I love the Christmas carols and the decorations and the food. It is indeed the 'Season to be jolly!'

However, this season is anything but jolly for many people in some parts of the world. I am thinking especially of the people of the Philippines and the recent typhoon which caused so much damage and claimed many lives. It has been good to see the international response to such a tragedy. I am delighted to report that our recent Elvis concert raised in excess of €1200 and 20% of this will be going to the Philippines Typhoon Appeal.

For me, this is in keeping with the true meaning of Christmas, helping those who are

in need. When Mary and Joseph arrived in a very crowded Bethlehem, their need was great and urgent. Mary was about to give birth and they desperately needed somewhere to stay. The generosity of the Innkeeper provided such a place, as the popular song, Mary's Boy Child, tells us:

Now, Joseph and his wife, Mary,
Came to Bethlehem that night,
They found no place to bear her child,
Not a single room was in sight.

By and by, they found a little nook,
In a stable all forlorn,
And in a manger cold and dark,
Mary's little Boy was born!

We have, again this year, built a life-size Stable inside the church building. I hope people will bring their children and grandchildren to spend some time reflecting on just how powerful generosity is within this familiar story. We have also written a very simple version of the Christmas Story, in English and German, and we hope that people will take copies home and read them to the children.

Another way we can be generous is to support the Bishop's Advent Appeal. This year the money is being used to support a school project in Peru. More information about this important appeal can be found here

<http://europe.anglican.org/news/news/post/577-diocese-advent-appeal-launched>

which says in part:

It is focused on the San Mateo Mission and School on the edge of a shanty town on the north-east of Lima. This is a clearly practical project which will make a real and significant difference in a place of real need, and assist the educational and spiritual development of children.

On the day of his retirement, Bishop Geoffrey wrote, "I need not say how important this is as part of Christian witness and service. As we prepare for Christmas, and remember with awe and wonder the love of God shown in his coming among us in the fragility and poverty of the child born in a cow-byre at Bethlehem, I commend this project to you for your support this Advent.

I would also like to say thank you to all those who have so generously supported the parish in the past year. We have had some serious cash flow issues and these are being addressed, albeit slowly. There were many very tired people after our very successful Bazaar which raised more money than the previous year. Many of our parishioners were actively involved in the community Victorian

Christmas Markets and there have been numerous other fundraising events. People have responded generously to the Church Council's appeal for funds and we are seeing some very encouraging signs of growth.

My prayer for us all is that, like Mary and Joseph, who in the midst of difficulty and discomfort, found joy when the Christ child was born, that we too may find joy in the midst of our own struggles. The psalmist says in Psalm 30 'Tears may linger for a night, but joy comes with the morning'. There can be some very long nights but the Christmas story reminds us that joy does come. Our acts of generosity can bring joy to others and other people's acts of generosity can bring joy to us. This Christmas may we find ways of giving and receiving generously and may we truly be able to sing from the depth of our hearts 'Joy to the world.'

I wish you all a Christmas season filled with great joy and peace.

**Every blessing,
Matthew**



The Nativity Stable at the Englische Kirche 2013.
(The candles are LED, not real flame so no fire risk!)

Advent and Christmas Services

St Thomas Becket Anglican Church
Hamburg

Sunday, 1 December	10.30 Holy Communion 17.00 Elvis singing Christmas and other songs
Friday, 6 December	18.00 Sing-along Christmas Carols
Saturday, 7 December	17.00 Evensong
Sunday, 8 December	10.30 Holy Communion 13.00 Community Carolling in Grossneumarkt
Sunday, 15 December	10.30 Holy Communion 17.00 Contemporary worship service
Saturday, 21 December	17.00 Nine Lessons and Carols
Sunday, 22 December	10.30 Family Service with Holy Communion and Nativity Play
Tuesday, 24 December	16.00 Children's Christmas Service 23.30 Midnight Mass
Wednesday, 25 December	10.30 Holy Communion
Sunday, 29 December	10.30 Holy Communion
Wednesday, 1 January (New Year's Day)	10.30 Holy Communion
Sunday, 5 January (Epiphany)	10.30 Holy Communion



2013 Christmas Message from Bishop David Hamid

And the Word was made flesh and lived among us (St John 1.14)

These awesome words will soon echo around the world as the Christmas Gospel is proclaimed in churches everywhere. They announce that the ancient promise to God's people is fulfilled in a surprising way, when the Eternal Word of God enters into time and becomes Emmanuel, God with us. The infinite, invisible, mysterious God becomes known and accessible to us in the life of a human being, Jesus Christ.

The original Greek of this text is more nuanced than our translations reveal. "Lived among us" is actually more like "pitched his tent with us". We are drawn back to the Exodus story of the tent or tabernacle in the desert, where God dwelt during the wanderings of God's people following their flight from Egypt. God comes to us and dwells with us in a way that is humble and earthy – close to the soil, like in a tent.

From the doctrine of the Incarnation we know that the mission of the Church is not about bringing God's presence to the world, for the Incarnate One has already done this by "pitching his tent" with us. The mission of the Church and the task of her members is to find out where God's presence, God's Spirit, is active in the world and *pitch our tents* alongside and work alongside that active presence. Thus throughout the Advent Season, the Church prays each morning:

"As we look for your coming among us this day, open our eyes to behold your presence and our hands to do your work."(Morning Prayer in Advent, Common Worship)

It is a task of discernment to open our eyes to see where God's presence is at work. The Gospel teaches us that the very sign of the Incarnation was so humble that very few, except for the poor shepherds, even took notice of it. A little baby, wrapped in swathing bands and laid in a manger is a sign that is so easily overlooked. It is a sign that is far from triumphant; it is not magnificent in splendour, but lowly, gentle and even fragile and vulnerable. At Christmas we celebrate what no other religion teaches, that God, the Creator of heaven and earth, pitched his tent with us, and lived among us. His manner of coming was as a vulnerable child, born among animals in a stable,

to a humble family. This is the nature of God's saving presence with us.

We are in an episcopal interregnum. Those who will make a decision about the next Bishop of Gibraltar in Europe are reflecting on our profile as a diocese. Many of us in the diocese are sojourners, outside our homeland, for a variety of reasons. Many of our congregations have no home of their own. We have no historic endowment or inherited wealth, and we do not have the privileges that come with being an established Church in the countries where we serve. We are accustomed to pitching our tent in borrowed or rented buildings. Whatever else might be discerned about us in this process to appoint the next diocesan bishop, let it also reveal that we are Christians who, remembering the manner of Jesus's birth, seek God's light and love around us, revealed in simple and humble ways. May our communities be a place of welcome for sojourners, even strangers. May we be known as a people, fed by God who comes to us in Word and Sacrament, who then seek God's presence in the world, especially among those, like the shepherds, who do not count for much and survive on the margins. We remember that Jesus teaches us that it is the poor in spirit, those who are peacemakers, who have mercy, who hunger and thirst for righteousness and justice, who will be able to see God.

This Christmas may you rediscover the Incarnate One, the Christ Child, who comes to us in humble form, and be blessed, with your family, your friends and your community, with deep peace and joy, as you serve Him.

+David

