

## The forty days of Christmas

Whenever I write a December letter, several people tell me off because I don't major on the theme of Christmas. I have my reasons, not least that I think Advent is important, neglected, and comes first. This year, though, I'll give in (partly) to the clamour.

I'm not against Christmas: I believe in and celebrate the virgin birth and incarnation of the fully human, fully divine, Jesus Christ. I understand that for all sorts of practical reasons we have to do some of the teaching and rejoicing before the day itself: for example, we celebrate with schools before they break up for their holidays, and we try to reach Christmas shoppers through carols and in other ways to help them see a bit more of the meaning of it all. I understand that we live in and reach out to the world as it is, full of commercialisation and shopping for things we don't remotely need which seems to begin earlier each year.

I do wish, though, that within our church communities we could experience the excitement and power, the peace and joy, of Christmas at the right time: from the evening of Christmas Eve, either to twelfth night and the Epiphany on 6 January; or, if we are bold enough, right through to the Presentation of Christ (Candlemas) on 2 February, forty days after we remember the birth. That would have the huge advantage of changing our perception of January to being a month of Christmas light and joy, rather than the dark and miserable time that it is for many now. And wouldn't it be good if we could help the world see the



joy and celebration of Christmas flowing into and through the first month of the year?

On another note: Canon Tim Alban Jones steps down as my chaplain at the end of this month. His role has always been part Chaplain and part Cathedral Canon, but the Cathedral part has been expanding, and after six years this seems the right time for him to become full time Vice Dean. Tim has been a brilliant support to me and my office, and we will miss him very much from that role.

+ Donald

With best wishes  
+Donald

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