

HALSALL PARISH MAGAZINE



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Christmas at St. Cuthbert's

SUNDAY, 12th DECEMBER

- 2.30 p.m. CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS SERVICE.
Taken by our scholars from the day school.

SUNDAY, 19th DECEMBER

- 3.00 p.m. MASONIC CAROL SERVICE.

You are all invited.

- 6.30 p.m. THE PARISH CAROL SERVICE.

MONDAY, 21st DECEMBER

St. Thomas' Day

- 7.00 a.m. HOLY COMMUNION.

FRIDAY, 24th DECEMBER

Christmas Eve

- 11.30 p.m. THE CHRISTMAS EUCHARIST.

SATURDAY, 25th DECEMBER

- 8.00 a.m. HOLY COMMUNION.
10.30 a.m. SHORT CHRISTMAS SERVICE WITH HOLY COMMUNION.

SUNDAY, 26th DECEMBER

No celebration of Holy Communion at 8 a.m.

- 10.30 a.m. SUNG EUCHARIST.

- 4.00 p.m. EVENSONG.

No Service at 6.30 p.m.

The Rectory,
Halsall.

My Dear Friends,

Every day we kneel and pray "thy kingdom come"; What do we mean? Sunday by Sunday we stand up in Church and say "I believe . . . He shall come to judge the quick and the dead." Again, what do we mean? Is it a fact that if some carping critic were to ask us we should feel stuck? I know what we **could** mean . . . "Thy kingdom come."

First, then, we could mean that we want Jesus to be King in our own life, and in the lives of others whom we contact. When we think about it, we realise that it is not enough to come to God with our blunders and our sins and ask to be forgiven. He will forgive us. He will "save to the uttermost." We know that; we have proved it. But there is more

beyond. Accepting forgiveness is not enough. There must be loyal service as well. Jesus has a right to say to us, "Now that I have given you your freedom, I want also to be your King. I want my Kingdom to come in your life."

That would mean, among other things, we would fight on his side against all selfishness, whether it be in our own life—personal selfishness—or social and national selfishness.

It means bringing our own life under Christ's rule, and working to bring all life under His rule too. As King, He has the right to command; we have the duty to obey.

It means that our time, our money, our powers are all under His rule, His direction. Then His Kingdom has come in our life.

But "Thy Kingdom" has a still wider significance. Christ spoke of the Kingdom coming "upon earth" He said, "Look at the farmer sowing his seed. It grows secretly. One day, before you realise it, you will see the green shoots appear, and by and by the golden harvest." And He added, "The Kingdom is like that." And in that sense, if we have eyes to see, the Kingdom is coming even now upon earth; the age-long prayer is being answered in the world around us.

In spite of the thorns of war, and the threat of war; in spite of the widespread neglect of God, and of the infidel taunt that keeps on asking, "Where is the promise of His coming? for all things continue as they were from the beginning." In spite of living in an age of revolutions, of hurry which cannot wait till the seed has taken root downwards and bears fruit upwards. In spite of an age that has made a "god" of speed; supersonic speed; jet planes and atomic bombs.

But the Kingdom does not come that way. We forget that from the beginning God waited with long patience; long years and centuries. Then, "when the fulness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son." That was the first coming. All down the years the prophets and saints of old had been watching and waiting for that coming, and when He came many of them did not recognise Him, and did not realise that the Kingdom was among them.

In our country, we have witnessed over many years past, the growing awakening of the Social Conscience. But that Social Conscience is nothing else but the working out of the Gospel of Christ; working quietly, secretly, unnoticed, like leaven in dough, but all the time permeating the thought and conduct of individuals and governments. Take a long look back, say fifty years, and the change becomes evident. We may be impatient because the coming is so slow, but the fact of growth is incontrovertible. The Kingdom is coming—not only here, but surely in many parts of the world.

But when we pray "Thy Kingdom come," we mean more than all this; more than the coming of Christ into our own life as our Saviour and our King; more than the spread of the Gospel in all lands. Think of all the "native" Bishops at the Lambeth Conference, for example—converts from all the great non-Christian faiths, from Islam and Hinduism in India, from Paganism in Africa, from Confucianism in Japan. Yes, the Gospel is spreading, the Kingdom is coming "in the earth." And wherever the Kingdom comes, conditions begin to change.

But more than all that; more than the change in social conditions everywhere. When we say "He shall come again to judge the quick and the dead," we are stating our faith that one day Jesus our Lord

will come again in His own person; that He will come, not in humility as when He was born in the stable at Bethlehem; but that He will come "in power and in great glory;" He will come as King of kings and as Judge of the whole earth. "This same Jesus shall come again."

Sometimes we say, "If only we knew just when He would come!" We do not know. Not even the angels in heaven, But we have the sure promise that the Lord is not slack about keeping His word. He is giving time for repentance. And what we do know is that "The Day of the Lord will come as a thief,"—unexpectedly; and that we have a responsibility to be "looking for and hasting, earnestly desiring, the coming of that day." And we know that it will usher in "a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness;" and that our life and conduct and character ought to be such that at His Coming "we may be found in peace, without spot, and blameless."

Which, I suppose, means we shall not only pray for the coming of the King, but we shall prepare ourselves to be ready for His coming.

What then are we preparing for in December 1971? To some people, Christmas is an old, hackneyed, even dreaded routine. The carols are all too familiar, so are the Christmas dishes and we rack our brains to try to think of an original present! None of this, of course, has anything to do with Advent, i.e. with the coming of Him in whose honour these elaborate celebrations are supposed to be made.

If we are tired of Christmas, let us think of Christ for a change. Then we shall be expecting not a jollification that is quickly over, but a Person who comes to stay with us and transform us. This year, it may be that we look for Him to claim us more perfectly in heart and mind than we have ever known before (even if we have borne the name of Christian for a long time); or it may be that we pray "Thy Kingdom come" with fresh urgency and look for Him to claim **our world** which is His by right but is spoiled and alienated in a thousand ways.

Whichever it may be—and it could be both—the four weeks of Advent set us in the right posture for God's people, namely that of eager expectation. Almost the oldest Christian prayer consists of two Aramaic words "Marana tha"—"Our Lord, come!" It is still one of the best prayers we can use today.

Will you help Him to "come" by joining with us in the Christmas Eucharist at 11.30 p.m. on Christmas Eve?

God Bless you and your homes this Christmas.

Your sincere friend,

Herbert Bullough.

CHRISTMAS VACATION

Christmas is the time of family re-union. Children come home from far distant schools; sons and daughters from universities and other places. We look forward with anticipation and pleasure to these re-gatherings! Even so, delightful as these reunions may be, they require a great deal of re-adjustment on the part of those of us who remain at home—and a certain amount of tolerance. The presence of young and energetic people in the house presents a challenge to parents after a lapse of a couple of months or so of domestic peace and quiet. Mind you, it is all to the good! One can get too settled—too much in a groove! I have noticed how many of my male friends alter their habits at this time of the year. They are punctual for meals, and they are more tied to the house. One or two who normally assume an attitude of fine bravado towards domestic arrangements are now seen to retire sheepishly from company at unwonted times. They become positively virtuous! Unfortunately, as the holidays draw to a close, old habits re-assert themselves, and these paragons of December 20th become their old selves by January 10th!

CAN GOD BE?

Whether we like it or not we have entered on a new era—an age where nothing is accepted on trust, where nothing is sacred or sacrosanct. All things must be scrutinised, questioned, doubted, analysed, tried in the fires. This process is being applied to the meaning of marriage, of home life, of education, to the meaning of all sorts and forms and structures which have made up human existence in the past. And it is being fervently applied to the Christian Faith.

It must be admitted religion has in the past lived and supported itself very greatly on the authority of the Church, on the authority of the Bible, on the authority of the ministry. Alongside all these there is the authority of the Prayer Book, the XXXIX Articles, the Creeds and these things have been the essence of people's religion—and that has been greatly if not completely a mental acceptance rather than a spiritual experience. Yet it is not real religion, true faith, the discovery within every man of his spirituality and the spirituality which is in the world.

Religion has been much too concerned with structures and forms and obediences and too little with inward spiritual searchings of the Epistle to the Hebrews clear definition—"Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

Many good Christian people are rightly and naturally sensitive when current modes of thought and examination are applied to the Faith. They see it as sacrilege, profane, anti-religious, yet once past the original distaste should we be offended? An honest man can stand investigation. It is the bogus who fears careful scrutiny.

There are three great pillars regarding Christian belief. There is the pillar of validity. Few people when they are utterly and completely honest are content with the view that human life has really no other meaning than living; that the world, progress, aspiration, endeavour are nought else but a craziness, without ryme, meaning, purpose, significance.

There is an expectancy and a powerful undercurrent not only in us today, but through the ages in all conditions. This includes the life of the Church, in all its parts and with all its structures, theological, philosophical, ecclesiastical, and whatever, good and bad. This expectancy is what gave men the inspiration and will to build great Cathedrals, to create the glory of great music and splendid art. Their soul stretched out and found response.

Few honest people today, divorced though they be from Church and religion, contentedly call themselves atheists or unbelievers.

Secondly, there is the pillar of historicity—the history of Faith found in the Scriptures, the history of the Christian Faith through the ages, its work and worth—there for any honest, sincere person to see. There is the historicity of Jesus Christ, his life and teaching and death and resurrection, his impact on men and the ages.

Thirdly, there is the pillar of deep recurrent religious experience. Granted that much so-called religious feeling is pure sentimentality and phoney-ness—yet can we really accept that this strongest thread in human experience through the ages has nothing to it at all? If that were so, we are all of men most miserable.

Dom Sebastian Moore, at a recent conference on "Change in focus" said "The guiding principle . . . is that the Church must convince; that the Church's hold on people is through laying hold of their imaginations, their hearts, their desire for a fuller life rather than through the exercise of a legal right."

Have we the least doubt, that as we enter this new age, the faith of Christians based on the awareness of spirituality in men and in the world; the historicity of faith; the continuing fact of human religious experience will continue?

At this Christmas time we may come and worship with a new and deeper insight and experience—accepting the forms of religion and church worship as helps to behold the most precious truth of life: "The Word of God was made flesh and we beheld his glory, the Glory of God"—Come and Worship.

CONFIRMATION

The following candidates are now attending Confirmation classes and are desirous of your prayerful remembrance.

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