

A Message at Christmas

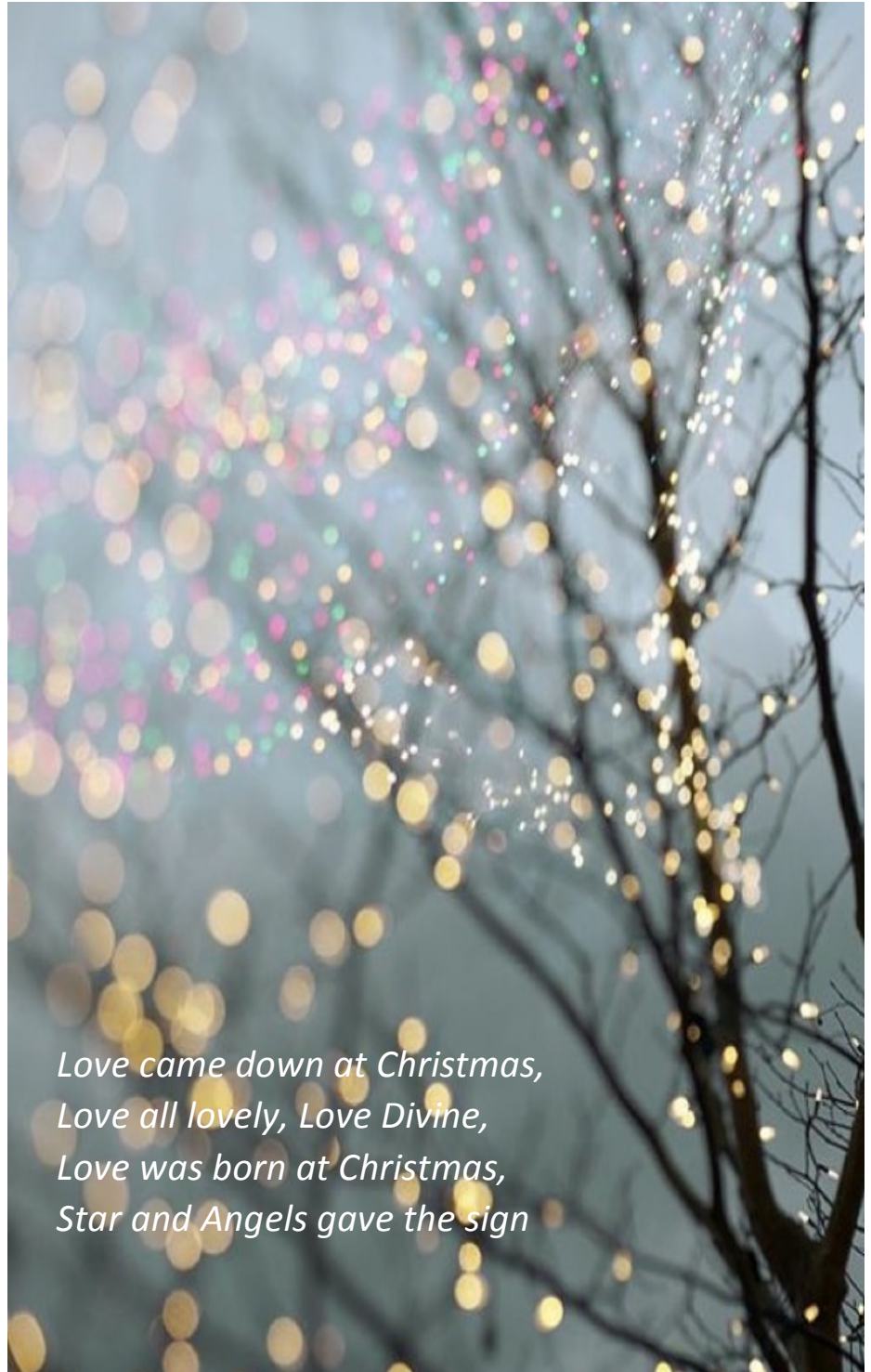
From the Revd. Stephen A. Farrell

Zion Parish, Rathgar. December 2017

Dear friends in Christ,

A story caught my eye this week and I thought it worth sharing. A church in Italy put up its big nativity scene in the piazza outside the church, as it does every year, using life size figures. But this year they removed the manger itself and instead had as the focal point of the scene one of the inflatable orange boats that had been used to transport refugees across the Mediterranean. As an image it is heart breaking. It challenges us to see in the face of every refugee the infant Jesus and reminds us of the peril in which he also spent the early part of his life.

Sadly, the bishop of the diocese had words with the church in question and made them remove the boat and replace the Crib which he said was an essential part of any nativity scene. This strikes me as a shame. The whole point of nativity scenes is to make the passer by stop and reflect. I suspect that these days few pay them much attention, but the bright streak of orange in the midst would have caught the eye and raised challenging questions in the hearts of many. If Saint John can recognise in the cross a throne to which Christ ascends as he is lifted up, surely we can see in the refugee boat the centre of the nativity story.



*Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love Divine,
Love was born at Christmas,
Star and Angels gave the sign*

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Church Services



Wednesday, 20th December
10.30am Holy Communion

Sunday, 24th December
The Fourth Sunday of Advent
Christmas Eve

9.00am Holy Communion
10.30am Matins
11.00 pm - The First Eucharist
of Christmas Day

Christmas Day
9.00 am Holy Communion
10.30 am - A Family Service
of Holy Communion

Tuesday, 26th December - St.Stephen
10.30 am - Holy Communion

No Service on Wednesday 27th December

Continued.

This has to be about the busiest time in the church year. It is great to see people in the church most days, learning nativity plays, rehearsing for carols, practising the piano or organ. The Sunday Club nativity was on Sunday 10th, and was a joyful and exuberant retelling of the birth of the Saviour. Our ever popular Carols by Candlelight took place on Sunday 17th, followed by mince pies and mulled wine in the parish hall. A time when we encounter many new faces along with old friends.

We will celebrate the birth of Jesus on Christmas Eve at 11.00p.m. and Christmas Day at 9.00a.m. and 10.30a.m.

How easily Christmas becomes a festival of materialism, rather than a festival celebrating the birth of a holy child. Coming to church does help us to remember that Christmas is not just for children, not just about presents and glitter and families. It is about the coming of Christ into a world of darkness. And bringing love, truth and hope plus a multitude of other graces into the humdrum existence of our daily life. Christmas is for the elderly, the young, the middle aged and for all of us. It meets us in our human need and frailty, as one born amongst animals and on the edge of the community. It is the light of a simple candle as much as a richly lit Christmas tree; a thought of love as much as the big Christmas present.

I realise that it is not possible for everyone to make it to Church over Christmas. If you would like to receive Holy Communion at home please let me know, it would be my privilege to Celebrate Christmas with you in this way. The twelve days of Christmas end with the Feast of the Epiphany, when the Magi came with gifts to Jesus, symbolising how the wider world beyond the people of Israel would also recognise him as their king. We will mark the Epiphany on Sunday 7th January. At 3 o' Clock in the afternoon there will be a service of Holy Communion for retired members of the Parish using the traditional wording from the Book of Common Prayer, followed by refreshments at the back of the church. You are warmly invited to this service and while we have communicated with our non-online members by post we encourage you to let friends and family know about it.

For now let me wish you a Happy Christmas and all that is best for 2018. SAF