

February 2018

The Rector writes:

‘GROWING UP’



As many of you will know, one of the reasons Janet and I moved to Chelsfield was that we wanted to be closer to our family, especially to our grandchildren. Being able to watch children grow is a real privilege and they seem to grow up so quickly these days don't they?

Our grandchildren are typical of many others; William is already at school and Isaac is attending pre-school – this means we get lots of pictures and things that they have made, and now instead of reading to them, we are encouraging them to read to us.

In church we are moving on quickly in Jesus life too – the Christmas birth narratives are quickly followed by circumcision, flight into Egypt, return to Nazareth, presentation in the temple, childhood, and baptism. Things happen so quickly, that we get them out of order, have you noticed that we celebrate the ‘Baptism of Christ’ three weeks before his Presentation in the Temple’. That’s what happens when you try to fit a lifetime into an annual cycle of worship, as the church does in order to tell the wonderful gospel story every year.

We know very little about Jesus childhood and can only guess at what life may have been like for a young boy growing up in an earthly family in a Roman occupied country. This special child probably had quite an ordinary upbringing amongst his brothers and sisters, friends and playmates, and learning carpentry skills from Joseph his earthly Father.

Saint Martin of Tours had a fairly ordinary beginning too, born in Hungary to a Roman soldier serving in the Pannonia legion – a famous training ground for the elite soldiers of the day. Several emperors emerged from the ranks, and Martin’s father rose to the rank of military

tribune. Martin’s family were heathen and he grew up during the reign and persecution of the emperor Diocletian. When he was nine his father was posted to the town of Ticinum (5 miles from Milan) in northern Italy. By now Constantine had become emperor and was establishing churches throughout the empire. A church was built in Ticinum, looking like any other villa nearby, but housing a baptistry, teaching and worship space, and lodgings for visiting bishop’s and presbyters. Sulpitius Severus, Martin’s biographer records the following incident:

‘when he was of the age of ten years, he betook himself, against the wish of his parents, to the Church, and begged that he might become a catechumen. Soon afterwards becoming in a wonderful manner completely devoted to the service of God, when he was twelve years old, he desired to enter on the life of a hermit; and he would have followed up that desire with the necessary vows, had not his as yet too youthful age prevented it.’

But instead of fulfilling his desires, Martin was forcibly conscripted into the Roman Army, to fight the barbarian tribes in northern Germany. Because his father was a tribune, Martin had many privileges as a soldier. These allowed him to help fellow soldiers and civilians in distress, as his famous legendary story depicted in his window of our church depicts. His vision of Christ led to Martin continuing to explore Christianity, and he was eventually baptised whilst still in the Army.

All of us follow a journey to faith, growing up and coming to commitment through Baptism and Confirmation. But like Jesus and Martin, our journey doesn’t end there. We are ‘called together’ to mission and ministry. Look out for events linked to our Diocesan vision. As Ken I’Anson reminded us in the last magazine, ‘God has called you by name’ – at the beginning of a New Year you might like to reflect what hr has called you to!

Yours in Christ,
Reverend John, your Rector.