

Our faithful God

I'm writing this on a dull November day with little hope of any sunlight breaking through and lifting the gloom. Outside, the streets are filling up with damp fallen leaves and the plants in my flower beds are starting to die back. I've been planting bulbs and these are now buried deep beneath the soil's surface in the garden.



Most of my vegetables and fruit are harvested – either eaten or in storage, so gone are the days of wandering out into the garden to pick something to eat for lunch or dinner. This could all feel rather depressing, but for the knowledge that this is just for a season and that in a few months, the bulbs will start growing, new leaves will appear on the trees, the days will lengthen and brighten up. In the period beforehand, there is also that lovely time of day when it gets dark and I can draw the curtains and the house feels warm and cosy. There is also Christmas to look forward to – not the protracted season that has already started in our shops, but that time when we reach Christmas Eve and know that the waiting is over!

Seasons are important for me. I love the way that we move from winter to spring to summer to autumn and then begin the cycle all over again. Noticing the seasons keeps me in touch with the natural world around me. Time is never the same and life gets lived differently – in the summer, enjoying sitting outside in the summer sun and in the winter wrapping up warm to venture out on frosty mornings or hunkering down in front of the fire.

The seasons of the church's year are also important to me and I value the annual cycle as we start the year in Advent with a time of reflective waiting and preparing for Christmas. On Christmas Eve, I love the change from a time with no flowers in church, the purple colours and no Gloria sung in our services to a beautifully decorated church, with joyful carols and gold and white furnishings. For me, this transition increases the excitement of the celebration of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In Advent, we are reminded of God's promise to his people that one would come to break into the darkness and bring light and hope to all. We hear the message delivered by the prophets, by John the Baptist, by the angel visiting Mary. This is a two-fold message of expectant waiting – for the birth of a Messiah and for the time when Christ will return to earth. As we wait, we are called to be ready and to prepare ourselves for the celebrations ahead and that time when Jesus returns as our judge.

Our Sunday services during Advent will help us in this time of preparation and we are also having a special day on Thursday, 10th December. From 10.30pm to 3.00pm you are invited to come along to a time of worship, space to reflect, read or be creative and share together in lunch. If you would like to come along, please let me know by Sunday, 6th December for catering purposes. We are also holding our annual Posada with Mary and Joseph (knitted figures!) travelling around our parish and staying in different people's homes which reminds us of their journey and time of waiting.

There will, of course, be plenty of opportunities to celebrate the Christmas season here at St Martin's in all of our usual ways and you can find the details of this elsewhere in the magazine.

We look forward to seeing lots of our friends at these different services as we join together to celebrate the birth of Jesus, God come to earth to live as one of us.

These seasons in the church's year remind us that life is never static, that it is always changing, but that underlying this there is one constant – that our God is faithful and always with us. It is this fact that sustains our church community in our life together through the inevitable changes that we face.

In recent weeks, we have mourned for Chris Shaw whose untimely death has shaken many in Droylsden and further afield. Our prayer for his family and friends is that while life for them has changed dramatically and without warning, they will know the certainty that our faithful God is alongside them, holding them close, offering comfort and hope for the future.

We have said goodbye to Penny who has retired as our Reader. We will miss her ministry among us and wish her well as she takes a well-earned rest from ministry in the coming months. While she will no longer be worshipping with us here in Droylsden and will be settling into St James' Church in Didsbury, we hope that Penny will help lead some of our Quiet Days later on next year. We pray that Penny will sense our faithful God leading her through this time of change into a new phase of her life.

We have also been preparing for the changes that will happen when Jack Hemsworth retires and St Martin's and St Andrew's share a vicar. Recently, this has involved your PCC in making decisions about the pattern of Sunday worship and from the start of 2016 there will be a change in service times. More details about this can be found elsewhere in the magazine. We pray that we will all be aware of God faithfully leading the way and sustaining us as we adapt to these changes.

As we watch the seasons come and go, as we move through the Advent season into Christmas, as we experience changes in our own lives and our church community, may we remember that we have a faithful God, who promises never to leave us or forsake us. For this is the hope that truly will sustain us for all time.

Revd Jo Farnworth