

*Lifton Benefice
online
Advent Calendar*

22nd December 2020



One of the things that never changes is the need for the Vicar to spend extended periods of time in church buildings, whether this is planning and preparing for worship, praying the daily offices, taking services, including weddings and funerals, or attending meetings.

At this time of the year it can be very cold indeed, and one is thankful for thick hiking socks, an old fashioned woollen cassock and a very heavy confessional cloak!



The other thing to be thankful for is heating! I spent the whole day in one of our churches this week, starting with a funeral and finishing with a small but joyful wedding. I am so grateful for the little stove that kept the bitterness of the cold at bay.

The name of the stove is very poignant to me as it features in the first lines of one of the most evocative poems at this time of year, which links all the unnecessary of Christmas with the essential truths of the season.

Just because it is well known, does not mean that we should not continue to share and enjoy it.

I have never used a Tortoise stove before, but now I have, the poem is even more powerful.

Christmas: John Betjeman

The bells of waiting Advent ring,
The Tortoise stove is lit again
And lamp-oil light across the night
Has caught the streaks of winter rain
In many a stained-glass window sheen
From Crimson Lake to Hookers Green.

The holly in the windy hedge
And round the Manor House the yew
Will soon be stripped to deck the ledge,
The altar, font and arch and pew,
So that the villagers can say
'The church looks nice' on Christmas Day.

Provincial Public Houses blaze,
Corporation tramcars clang,
On lighted tenements I gaze,
Where paper decorations hang,
And bunting in the red Town Hall
Says 'Merry Christmas to you all'.

And London shops on Christmas Eve
Are strung with silver bells and flowers
As hurrying clerks the City leave
To pigeon-haunted classic towers,
And marbled clouds go scudding by
The many-steepled London sky.

And girls in slacks remember Dad,
And oafish louts remember Mum,
And sleepless children's hearts are glad.
And Christmas-morning bells say 'Come!'
Even to shining ones who dwell
Safe in the Dorchester Hotel.

And is it true,
This most tremendous tale of all,
Seen in a stained-glass window's hue,
A Baby in an ox's stall ?
The Maker of the stars and sea
Become a Child on earth for me ?

And is it true ? For if it is,
No loving fingers tying strings
Around those tissue fripperies,
The sweet and silly Christmas things,
Bath salts and inexpensive scent
And hideous tie so kindly meant,

No love that in a family dwells,
No carolling in frosty air,
Nor all the steeple-shaking bells
Can with this single Truth compare -
That God was man in Palestine
And lives today in Bread and Wine.