

CLERGY LETTER

Dear Friends

As I write this letter memories of our recent big services of remembrance are still very fresh in my mind. Once again, the Benefice All Souls service on 3 November was very well attended and I for one, found the sight of well over 100 people silently queuing up to light candles in memory of loved ones a very moving experience. While the Remembrance Sunday Services at all four of our villages is always equally moving. The fact that so many people of all ages make a point of coming out, regardless of the weather shows that I am not alone in feeling this way. We all appreciate, of course, that the pivotal time is when we hear the names of the fallen being read out and the Last Post sounding, this is a moment when the entire assembly falls absolutely silent and each person is wrapped in their own thoughts about the sacrifices made on their behalf by so many others and, no doubt, about the sacrifices that are still being made for us all by those in the armed forces today. It's no wonder that there is often a rather subdued atmosphere as the crowds make their way home.

This atmosphere doesn't usually last long though – within a few hours we have turned on the T.V. to watch the news or some other programme that takes our interest and then come the adverts. “Rush out now and buy your new sofa in



time for Christmas from DFS”, “half price Christmas puddings available this week at Tesco”, “Christmas Party Clothing sale at Asda”, “everything you could ever want for the perfect Christmas available now at Marks and Spencer’s”. The list goes on and on and by the time you read this letter you will no doubt be able to

add a great many other Christmas adverts to my list. I wonder if there will be one for Humbugs?

Now please don't get me wrong, I enjoy Christmas as much as the next person – however, anyone who knows me even reasonably well will also know that I have a bit of a bee in my bonnet about it. Christmas doesn't arrive until 25 December and as you read this letter we should still be well and truly in the season of Advent.

Advent is an extremely important season and I believe that we do ourselves and those around us a great disservice by forgetting it. Yes, it is a time of expectation and preparation for Christmas – but not necessarily the type of preparation that many might automatically think. Rather, it should be a time of thinking about the great gift that God made to all humankind that first Christmas – and why he made it. It should be a time of thinking about the enormous sacrifice that it took for God to be parted from his only son, it should be a time to

think about the intensity of the love that prompted him to do so and a time for us to look deeply and honestly into our own lives and ask ourselves the question – do we really appreciate and deserve it? and are we willing to be changed so that we can truly accept it as the great gift that it is?

Now I'm a realist, I know that there are a great many things that we all need to do in preparation for Christmas. We have food to prepare, presents to buy decorations to put up, the list goes on and on. But I believe that just as we all recognise the importance of remembering those who have given so much for us all in conflicts throughout the world and wouldn't dream of missing Remembrance

Day so we should all respect and make good use of this time of emotional and spiritual preparation for the coming of Christ. We should be waiting and thinking about God and his relationship with his people through the ages, their response to him and the rest of humankind and the great gift that he made to us all through his son Jesus Christ. It is only then that we can really recognise the true meaning of Christmas and fully celebrate it when it does come.

In the meantime, may I wish you all a Blessed and peaceful Advent and Christmas.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Irene". It consists of a simple, elegant cursive script with a long horizontal stroke above the name.