



Anglican Catholic Church



Diocese of the United Kingdom

Catholic Faith † Orthodox Worship † Apostolic Order

December 2023

Dear friends and colleagues,

This Christmas, as every Christmas, we will be celebrating the human birthday of God. This birthday isn't like our own. On our birthdays we celebrate – or lament – all the years that have passed since we were born.

But at Christmas we do not celebrate that Jesus is 2000 plus years old. We rejoice in the birth of God as a baby. Every Christmas is a celebration that God came among us as a newborn child.

This is because God is always among us as one who is young. G. K. Chesterton wrote that *our Father is younger than we*.

This means that God always retains that fresh vigour of youth, the vitality and joyfulness of one who is always ready to start anew. Therefore, in a strange sense we can be said to have become older than our God. Let me explain what I mean.

We believe that God is eternal, and so God is often represented as immensely old. But if no time passes for God, then he is also always newly beginning – eternally young.

Hope and youthfulness frequently walk hand in hand, because to hope is to be ready for a future which is always open and long.

So celebrate Christmas by letting God *renew your youth like the eagle*. (Ps. 103, v5)

And it is the evangelist whose symbol is the eagle, St John, whose day we keep two days after Christmas, who writes that to all who accept the Word of God, *gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*.

Being a child of God means more than having God as one's Father. It means sharing in the eternal youthfulness of the child whose birth we celebrate.

That doesn't mean pretending to look young, hiding the wrinkles, dying one's hair, or concealing the signs of age. We do age and it is completely natural.

It does mean that we can avoid the temptations of those who grow older, of thinking that nothing new can be experienced, that taking a leap of faith is a bad idea, of fatalism and resignation. At Christmas we have the opportunity once again to let God renew hope in our hearts.

Happy Christmas.

Fr. Raymond Thompson

Archdeacon



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Christmas at your church

A few years ago the Sunday Times had an article by the author Christopher Hart, in which he spoke about why readers might want to make their way to the nearest proper church for some Advent and Christmas worship. Much of what he said was aimed at agnostics and those who don't go to church, but he made some interesting points which should resonate with all of us who desire dignity and beauty in our liturgy.



“A number of vicars still think they are stand-up comedians. Some of you might rejoice and be glad at the prospect of going to church on Christmas morning, as I have done, to find the ceremony led by a hyperactive man in a shiny suit and Frosty the Snowman tie, eschewing traditional clerical vestments for the same reason Bournemouth council eschews Latin: that is, it might alienate us, the great, gormless, unwashed masses. Perhaps a vicar leaping around at the front of the church with a cordless microphone, like a gameshow host, is what you want. But you may find that enduring a service conducted by such a grinning, attention-seeking goon can make it hard to lift your thoughts to higher things. Some of us want something less like fast food for the soul.

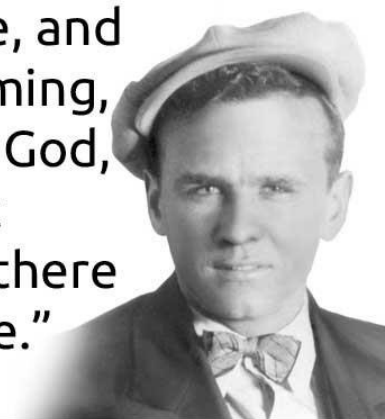
“Then again, there's the risk of turning up at a church to find its Christmas service is entirely aimed at six-year-olds: trite little talks featuring the unwrapping of 'presents', always ending with the reminder that 'Jesus is the greatest Christmas present of all, isn't he, children?' A lot of children might find this grossly condescending anyway, and be much more fascinated by the solemnity and mystery of an uncompromising adult ceremony.

“Perhaps all you really want from a church service is some simple dignity and beauty, just like the average mosque or synagogue, or Sikh or Hindu temple still offer, with no apparent sense that they should update their style to resemble the world of 21st-century television.”

There is nothing I can add to that, except to say that I think we have got it right!

“My desire in this life, and for this new year coming, is more faith in God. God, take away any doubt that's in my mind, if there should ever arise one.”

Rev. William Branham



(My “desk picture” on the front page shows an Isle of Sheppey scene viewed from my desk, or from the garden, or within a few minutes of it.)