

Dear all,

The last week has been tiring but exhilarating. The **carol service** last Wednesday evening got us into the Christmas Spirit during which 1,400 RON was raised for local charities. Afterward we ate mince pies and drank mulled wine kindly donated by "Chez Marie". This was followed by **two school carol services** on Thursday (Acorns nursery school and IBSB Key stage 1) and Friday (The main school IBSB) which were obviously packed to the rafters. The **church Christmas party** was a lovely affair and in a special touch we were entertained by a choir comprised of visually impaired children and their teachers from a school in the Iasi area of Romania (Thanks Stan and Camelia). They were excellent and this same choir came and sang for us in **church on Sunday** morning and we passed on a lot of presents for them (Left for us by the children of the British school) to take home. That evening the **choir of the Domnita Balasa church** came and sang traditional Romanian music, but in a new twist added a few spirituals in English to the end of their programme. I asked them about the new additions afterwards and they said that they much preferred to sing these new songs than the Romanian stuff!! More money was raised for charity this evening. But the best thing of all on Sunday was picking up Claire from a heaving Otopeni airport at midnight!!

Today is Christmas Eve so still to come is our **midnight mass** starting at 11.30 this evening and the **Holy Communion** on Christmas day tomorrow at 10am.

PLEASE NOTE: There is **NO** service in church on **Sunday 28th December**.

Bollards (Part 2)

In a wonderfully Romanian turn of events it appears that the bollards in the front of the church are being put there by Sector 1 but the ones round the back of the church are the responsibility of sector 2. They say the dividing line cuts through the church, which means that you enter church in Sector 1 but receive communion in Sector 2. I deliver my sermon in Sector 2 but I am heard (on a good day) in sector 1 - you couldn't make it up could you?

Icons of Mary and Jesus

Thank you to everyone who commented favourably on my sermon on Sunday and the people who requested my notes. It goes to show that there is a hunger for this kind of explanation of the role of Mary and explanation of what the three main types of "Madonna and child" icons are really telling us - things that are never explained to us. There are good introductory books on icons in general such as one called "Windows into heaven" by Zelensky and Gilbert but the one book I really want to recommend is the one which really fired my own imagination and got me thinking and that is a sublime little book called "Ponder these things" by Rowan Williams. This is a little book (73 pages), beautifully illustrated, that says an awful lot more than books a hundred times bigger. In it Rowan ponders the meaning of the three main types of virgin and child icons - "the one who points the way", "the virgin of loving kindness", and "the virgin of the sign." Enjoy - it can be read over and over again and is a real motor for prayer. You don't have to be of a catholic or orthodox persuasion to enjoy what Rowan has to say about the closeness, the pattern, the intensity and the depth of

God's love for all humanity that these icons are telling us. First order theology for spiritually thirsty people.

A (short) Thought for the day

Set aside time for worship to remember why we are celebrating, and commune with the one we are celebrating, but after that.....Let go!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Celebrate. Eat a lot, drink a lot, be silly, have fun, watch TV, enjoy friends and family - because this is a feast for God's sake.....literally for *God's* sake.

The prayer for Christmas tells us why we should celebrate and reads like a contemporary prayer. I would have thought it was modern until I saw that it was actually written about 1,600 years ago by a man called Ephraim the Syrian (306 - 373).

*The feast day of your birth resembles you Lord,
because it brings joy to all humanity.
Old people and infants alike enjoy your day.
Your day is celebrated from generation to generation.
Kings and emperors may pass away,
and the festivals to commemorate them soon lapse.
But your festival will be remembered till the end of time.
Your day is a means and a pledge of peace.
At your birth, heaven and earth were reconciled.
Since you came from heaven to earth on that day
you forgave our sins and wiped away our guilt.
You gave us so many gifts on your birthday:
A treasure chest of spiritual medicines for the sick;
Spiritual light for those who are blind;
The cup of salvation for the thirsty;
The bread of life for the hungry.
In the winter when trees are bare,
you give us the most succulent spiritual fruit.
In the frost when the earth is barren,
you bring new hope to our souls.
In December when seeds are hidden in the soil,
the staff of life springs forth from the virgin womb.
Amen.*

Happy Christmas.

Love and peace

Martin