

Christmas in

..... Lesotho

There was not much to tell us it was Christmas. Here, in Africa of the southern hemisphere where we were spending our family holiday, the days were hot with heavy thunderstorms. In the mountain camp where we were staying, there were no Christmas trees, piles of presents, carol concerts or Nativity plays. As 25th December approached, life seemed to be going on much as normal.

On Christmas Day we asked where there might be a church service, and were directed up a steep dirt track behind the camp. 9 o' clock, we were told. So we duly climbed for about twenty minutes, fording a small river on the way. But when we reached the simple building with a tin roof, there didn't seem to be anyone except two ladies, sweeping out the floor by hand. We settled ourselves under a shady tree and waited. After about half an hour, about twenty people had arrived, and we sat ourselves on the bench at the back. The altar had a cross on it, and vases of plastic flowers. A dog came in and watched curiously.

The service took place in the local language of Sesotho. Most we didn't understand, of course, but we understood all we needed. We heard the words 'Isaiah' and 'Luke', and 'Emmanuel'. It was Christmas. There were things to say sorry to God for, and a lot to say thank you for. We hummed along to familiar tunes. There was a baptism: two tiny babies, who slept oblivious through it all, and were gently kissed by the priest. We took communion. When it was time for the collection, we wanted to give something without looking like rich foreigners. We tightly folded a banknote worth about £7, and danced up to the front with everyone else. The collection plate, we saw, held a handful of copper coins. We gave it anyway and danced back to our places. The collection got taken out to a side room, and above the sound of the singing, we heard a cheer go up!

As we walked back down the hillside, in a way our 'Christmas' was over. But we were the ones who were the richer.

Mary Innes

..... Australia

Summer Clothes, surf boards, sunscreen and tinsel. Carols by Candlelight—in the park and starting at 7 30pm, an hour before sunset. Children in PJs and dressing gowns running round with torch-candles. Grown ups prepared with chairs, rugs and anti-mossie spray. The carols were lead by the band from the local evangelical church. Santa came in a one-horse open carriage and threw sweets for the children. As the sun set the cicadas added their voice to O come all you faithful.

Christmas Eve communion— a service thoughtfully brought together by our new minister Cassandra. About 30 of us filled the tin-roof church. It was hot and humid and the service cards helped as fans.

I was not sure I would find Christmas in mid-summer, but that was foolish thinking. God is everywhere.

Claire Bolton

Meanwhile back in Marcham & Garford

A familiar pattern of celebrations began with a packed church for Marcham School Carols including parents and grandparents, brothers and sisters, of the growing number of children at the school. A group of boys and girls from Marcham Singers delighted everyone by giving the lead to *Once in Royal David's City* at the carol service on Sunday 17th.

Three charities benefited from the generosity of the many who came to worship. *Abingdon Alzheimer's*, supporting their caring work for many families locally, benefited as well as two overseas links: *Vila Maninga* in Mozambique, following a disastrous fire at their homes for families, and *Agape* in Moldova and their work with children and young people.

Christmas Day in church has sometimes been an anti-climax after all the celebrations in the ten days' before but not this year. At Garford and Marcham we welcomed many new families and visitors to our very enjoyable morning services.

Eddie Shirras

All Saints' Marcham Sunday Worship 10am and 6pm

Sundays at 8am
4 February, 4 March

Wednesdays
10am Holy Communion
at Duffield Place
12 noon Café not 14 February
at Sports Scouts & Social Club

Ash Wednesday
21 February
8 15pm Holy Communion
refreshments at 7 30pm

Fridays
5 30pm Friday Club
at church not 16 February
for Primary Age children

Saturdays
8 30am Men's Breakfast
3 February, 3 March
at Sports Scouts & Social Club

**St. Luke's, Garford
Sunday Worship
10 30am
4 February, 4 March**

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