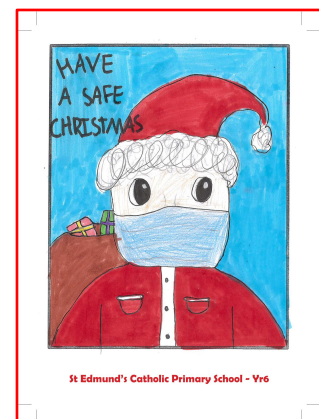
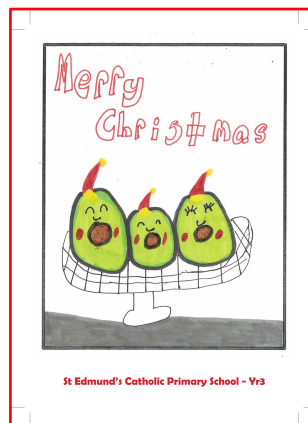
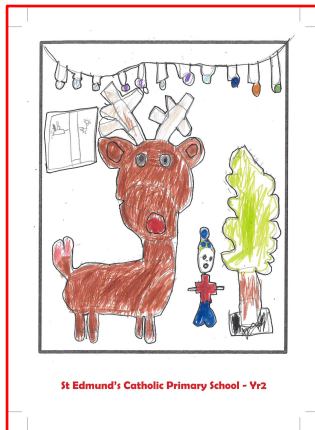


## IN CONVERSATION WITH THE CHAPLAINCY



### EDITORIAL

Our Christmas Card this year has been designed by children from St Edmunds Catholic Primary School on the Isle of Dogs.

The chaplains thought this month we would each offer some thoughts about our faith observance in December. Christians celebrate Christmas, and while Muslims and Christians view Jesus differently, we thought we would give you some insights. Meanwhile the Jewish community celebrate Chanukah.

The Chaplaincy team wish you all a Happy Christmas or Chanukah and we all hope for a very different kind of New Year in 2021!

### JESUS SON OF GOD

Until the 3rd Century CE, Easter was the main Christian festival, central to the Christian faith is Jesus' death and resurrection. Celebrating the birth of Jesus grew in prominence as a festival partly because of discussion within the early church trying to make sense of how the bible described Jesus and his identity, was he human or divine or both. At the beginning of John's gospel is a bible passage many of us are familiar with, it is read every Christmas Eve or Christmas Day and talks about Jesus as being the Son of God.

So, Christians began to celebrate the birth of Jesus which we now call Christmas, as a reminder, that Jesus is both human and divine. From the beginning we are told Jesus was God and was with God (Christians believe in one God, the Trinity is really complicated to explain that is for another time). In God's great act of love, God enabled Jesus to come among us being born as a tiny helpless baby, born of Mary (who was a virgin). Jesus the Christ child entered a world of violence, brokenness, exploitation and isolation. Living among us sharing our humanity, our sorrows and joys, our hardships and fears, our pain and disappointments. And yet too he made the glory of God visible, with Jesus' coming the Kingdom of God began on earth.

Yet in the very challenging times in our world faces today, the Christmas story offers real hope. Christians believe it reminds us that in Jesus heaven and earth meet, that light can't be overwhelmed by darkness and fear, in the end good will overcome evil, not just in this life but for eternity. But for today, we are reminded that we have a God who loves us and who understands what it is like to be human and still draws alongside us.

## JESUS SON OF MARY

We are all familiar with the Christian importance of Christmas which celebrates the birth of Jesus. For me, as a Muslim, it is also a very significant event. Muslims believe that Jesus (peace be upon him), whom we call 'Isā, was born to the virgin Mary (Maryam). Chapter Mary in the Qur'ān tells the story of this miraculous birth. It is different from the Christian narrative. There is no inn, no shepherds and no wise men. Instead, it is young Mary, a woman of good reputation and from a respectable family who is visited by an angel in the guise of a man. He reassures her that he has no bad intentions and that he was sent by God to blow into her a soul that she would carry and give birth to. She gave birth to Jesus all alone by a date palm and God provided her with dates to eat and fresh water. She returned to her community afraid of what people would say. When they asked her how she gave birth to a baby without being married and condemned her for bringing disrepute to her family, baby Jesus spoke in her defence saying he was the servant of God who will be given scripture and would be a Prophet and would be blessed wherever he went. The Qur'ān refers to him as the spirit from God. Though I will not be celebrating Christmas as a religious festival, I will certainly be celebrating the gift of Jesus who brought love and good neighbourliness to this world. Happy Christmas to all who will be celebrating it and a happy new year.

## HOPE IN THE LIGHT OF CHANUKAH

The festival of Chanukah recalls the triumph of the Maccabees, a small band of Jewish fighters around the year 200 BC, against the mighty Seleucid army of King Antiochus IV who ruled over Judea at that time. Antiochus imposed laws on the Jewish population to undermine their faith and defiled the Temple in Jerusalem by smashing the holy vessels and sacrificing a pig to Zeus on the Temple altar.

A battle ensued and against all odds, the plucky Maccabees were victorious, rededicated the Temple, and relit the menorah – the holy candelabra. Its lights were lit with holy oil which the Seleucid army had defiled. Only one small cruse remained which contained enough oil to last one day. Yet miraculously it lasted for eight days, giving time to produce more holy oil. We celebrate these miracles by lighting our own candelabras on each of the eight nights of Chanukah, increasing the number of candles each time. Life for Jews in Judea seemed impossible as the cruel laws aimed to undermine their religious integrity. Yet this was the ultimate story of faith over fate, and of hope over despair.

While we work hard to build a life for ourselves and our loved ones filled with blessings of success, serenity and happiness, our life experiences can often be painful and disappointing. Hope and faith in a better future do not imply that we should force a smile when we are suffering, or feign joy when times are hard. Hope is not merely a dream. Hope demands of us to never despair, never give in to fate, and never look back at what might have been. While emotional honesty dictates that we must genuinely feel our pain, we must also accept the responsibility that we are the authors of our own future. As the story of Chanukah teaches, a small candle of hope pushes away the darkness of despair.



### CANARY WHARF CAROLS AND CANDLES SERVICE

If you missed the streaming of the Carols & Carols Service, it is still available On Demand until 31st December. To register and view the service on demand please follow the [link](#)