

THE FRIENDS OF ARUNDEL CATHEDRAL

ADVENT VESPERS December 2021

Marking the beginning of the new ecclesiastical year, Advent, is always a special time. On what was indubitably the coldest night of the year with an arctic blast taking ruthless advantage of the magnificent but exposed position of the Cathedral located high above the Arun Valley, The Friends held their traditional celebration of Pontifical Vespers. Civic leaders from across the Diocese were invited to join members and friends at what is always a splendid occasion of choral music and worship. This year, notwithstanding the ravages of the pandemic with significantly reduced numbers of choristers, the service was celebrated with just as much joy and enthusiasm. One would never have known as their wonderfully pure voices soared high into the great stone vaults warming hearts and lifting spirits. It was truly joyful. Attendance was excellent and included Their Graces The Duchess of Norfolk and Duchess of Richmond, the High Sheriffs of East and West Sussex and Surrey, and civic leaders from across the Diocese. New years are about looking forward to better times. Advent is no different. And the weather did not put people off!



In his opening remarks Bishop Richard commented that this, of all new years, was one for hope for the future. Thinking of the events of the last couple of years we could be forgiven for thinking that across the world there was very little cause for optimism with spiralling infection rates, political unrest, families separated, violence in many parts of the world, and an uncertain political and economic future. And yet this is exactly what new beginnings should be about, and it was so encouraging that so many of our civic dignitaries, who worked so tirelessly in public and voluntary service, were present signalling their commitment to leading the effort for a better future.



It was also a particularly special day for one of the choral scholars, Kristian Thorkildsen, a cellist studying performance at the University of Chichester. It was his 21st birthday, and rather than being with his friends and family, when the congregation had arrived and were waiting for the service to begin, he chose instead to everyone's delight, to celebrate by singing two tenor arias from 'The Messiah' ['Comfort Ye', and 'Ev'ry Valley'] It was entralling.

In his homily The Bishop developed his thinking on new beginnings and the encouragement for us all in the reading from St Paul 'I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord' Speaking personally, he said, "I always have a sense that happiness is something which comes and goes....". Even when life is very difficult, and it has been tragically difficult for many people over the last 2 years, there is still joy "that comes from recognising where our destiny lies and the joy at a place so deep in our hearts that it is there regardless of what is going on around us and that means that we can bring that joy, into every situation that we encounter, even the worst ones". The congregation was encouraged, "...never ever to close your mind and heart to the presence of God". He emphasised



how those in public service, and they were present in the congregation, through their service to others are showing the way to “the kind of joy, the real happiness that St Paul writes about. Be open to it, welcome it, not just for yourselves, for ourselves, but for those whom you are called to serve. The more we can take this path the more we will enable others to live a life of fulfilment”



At the end of the Service as we walked down the Nave, we could see through the Great West Door the first snow of winter falling on the pavement outside. One brave youngster delightfully rushed outside to make snow balls, while their parents and friends were invited to share a glass of wine and canapes, to meet each other and to sing ‘Happy Birthday’ to Kristian. A truly spiritual and lovely evening.



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