

Faith Comment published in the Petersfield Post

4 January 2012: Linda Clist, St Mary Magdalen, Sheet

Twelfth Night's Upside Down World

This Friday, I'll be following the old Twelfth Night tradition and taking down the decorations. Twelfth Night used to be the last day of the midwinter celebrations, with a great feast - and a complete reversal of the usual order of things. The King and the nobles became peasants and the least important member of any household was 'king for a day'. (That's why Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night" is subtitled, "What you will" - that is, 'anything goes!'). As we put away the crib figures and stable scenes for another year, it's worth remembering that the first Christmas was itself a striking reversal of the usual order - and not one that would be abandoned next day. As the pregnant Mary exclaimed in her famous outpouring of excitement:

"God has brought down rulers from their thrones - but has lifted up the humble!"

She was nobody special - but she'd been singled out by the Almighty! God seems to take a particular delight in taking notice of all sorts of people who don't have any of the usual claims to fame. Middle Eastern shepherds, for instance, were often the butt of jokes, as folk on the fringes of civilised society. Yet it was the local shepherds who were let in on the Big Secret.

So perhaps this Twelfth Night, we should take heart if we're more inclined to feel overlooked than distinguished, or inadequate rather than gifted. If it's possible for the accepted order to be turned upside down, then we don't have to be at the bottom of the heap! After all, isn't it God's opinion that counts?

