

Party Tractors

A few weeks ago, just before Christmas, at around 6pm on a dark wintery evening I was leaving the house with my wife Zoe to go to Tesco. We live in North Lane, Buriton. Just as we were getting in the car, we heard strange sounds. Tooting, horns, CHRISTMAS TUNES THROUGH LOUDSPEAKERS. The noise got bigger and bigger. We have recently moved to the peace and quiet of rural life from the constant hubbub of London and it seemed that somehow the Notting Hill carnival had sought us out. We went to the street side of our house and joined other onlookers as a cavalcade of over forty tractors bedecked in tinsel, fairy lights and waving drivers trundled up the lane. It reminded me of Close Encounters of the Third Kind with strange lights emerging from the darkness. According to our neighbours, this is a local tradition. It was unexpected, exuberant, joyous and slightly quirky. And we loved it!

As a newly arrived parish priest at St Mary's Buriton I have been immersed in the usual Christmas traditions of carols, Christmas drinks, parties and church services. However, for us, as new arrivals, these familiar traditions have been interwoven with surprises and new experiences.

These unexpected moments have reminded me that God can break into our normal routines, rituals and roles and disrupt them with something new, enlightening and even disruptive. Just as those shepherds sleeping rough in the fields were awoken by angels announcing the arrival of the King of Kings. New messages in unlikely places. Are we ready to receive a new perspective from God at the start of 2024, even if it comes trundling out of the dark like a line of party tractors lit up like a Christmas Tree?

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