

Faith Comment published in the Petersfield Post

20 December 2013: Tom Cooper, St Mary's Church, Buriton

The Timing of Christmas

Many of us must have felt at some point that Christmas comes at the worst possible time of year. Just when we are so busy with shopping, buying presents, queues, visitors and relatives, we have to have a bit of Christmas spirit as well.

Wouldn't it be better if Christmas was at another time, when we weren't so frantic?

In fact, Christmas was only first recorded as being held on 25 December in 336 CE, around three hundred years after Jesus' crucifixion. A hundred years or so before that, there were suggestions that the date should be 20 May. What a different festival it would be if that date had been chosen!

In many countries Christmas is celebrated on 6 January, at the Feast of the Epiphany when Jesus was revealed to the 'wise men' of Matthew's Gospel. As the first Gentiles to witness Jesus' incarnation, the wise men stand for the world that Christians believe Jesus came to save.

During the 1650s, in this country, the Puritans had a good go at banning Christmas altogether, in that strange period of constitutional history when we somehow muddled along without a monarch. How different December would be without any Christmas at all!

Perhaps we need to seek throughout the year the spirit of love and goodwill that Christmas can and should bring. However and whenever you celebrate Christmas, may it be a happy and peaceful one.