

## HOLY TRINITY SUNNINGDALE

Bible Readings: Various

Date: 13 December 2015

Carol Service

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Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls may I add my welcome to that which Sue gave at the beginning and say how delighted we are to see you here with us this evening. Thank you for coming.

This choir is just amazing and we are so very grateful to you for coming again to help us with our programme of Carols for Christmas. Thank you for coming. Perhaps we can show our appreciation in the usual way for the music?

Christmas is a time for so many things. It's a time for carols, for presents and cards, for mulled wine and mince pies, for turkey and all the trimmings and for family and friends.

It's also a time for loneliness, heart-break and tragedy – but that's enough about Eastenders and Coronation Street!

Seriously though, the joy and the fun and good times are necessarily set in the middle of bombing and flooding and migration and starvation and difficulty for the many, many people who are not as fortunate as we are here this evening, people for whom life is fragile, precarious or desperately uncertain.

Christmas is also a season for films – not just the film of the Lord's Prayer that no one can see in the cinema – but

films about people whose lives have impacted us one way and another whether we like it or not ... I want to speak briefly this evening about two very well-known characters:

Bond, James Bond

Solo, Han Solo

### **Bond, James Bond**

The great thing about Bond apart from the opening sequences in the films (did you see the latest one in Mexico City?), the great thing about him is that many people don't know who he is. He is a secret agent.

He is licensed to kill. He seems to get to drive the most amazing cars. He seems to be able to date the most wonderful women ... but a huge number of people don't know who he is.

He is anonymous, unrecognised, unassuming in so very many ways, but also very highly effective at what he does: defend and protect and save people from themselves and from danger.

### **Solo, Han Solo**

Han Solo is a character in the Star Wars franchise. He is played by Harrison Ford. In the original film, Han and his co-pilot become involved in the Rebel Alliance which opposes the Galactic Empire.

Star Wars creator George Lucas (who has now sold the franchise on to Disney) described the character of Han

Solo as "a loner who realizes the importance of being part of a group and helping for the common good".

There is something engaging about this character. He plays a strategic part in a series of stories, where he puts others before himself and works for the benefit of all.

Now you may say: this is all very interesting. I didn't come out this evening for a lesson in movie-making or for some pithy observations from Claudia Winkleman about the latest releases. What are you on about?

There is something these two people have in common ...

Bond, James Bond, and Solo, Han Solo, both have an interest in life beyond themselves. It's not all about them. They are on a mission to make the world a better place and to a greater or lesser degree they succeed.

Let's leave them to one side just for a moment ...

Another fascinating feature of Christmas these days is the TV ad. For John Lewis or M and S or whoever it is. These adverts are works of art in their own right and the joke of it is that often the name of the company or the organisation is scarcely mentioned. We see the little story and we know what's it about.

Where am I going with all this?

In a recent survey, in the last few months, a survey of people in this country, it emerged that:

**40%** of people do not realise Jesus was a real person who actually lived

**One in four** 18 to 34-year-olds thinks Jesus was a mythical or fictional character

People have got extremely excited about these figures and have suggested that the church is going to the dogs. We might as well pack up our bags and turn out the lights, they say. If we've so not got our message out there.

But, of course, the flip side is that 60% of people do realise that Jesus was a real person who actually lived and three out of four don't think he is a mythical or fictional character.

Christmas is about Christ, Jesus Christ.

He is the baby. He is the boy. He is the man.

He is the one who is anonymous, unrecognised, unassuming in so very many ways (isn't this Joseph's son, they said, when he turned out to be quite impressive one time).

He is very highly effective at what he does: he chooses 12 people to carry on the good work after he's gone. He establishes a movement to which one third of the world's current population belong. Talk about Steve Jobs and the Apple empire – this Christian thing is a serious business.

He defends and protects and saves people from themselves and from danger. At the age of 33 it all comes crashing down, the wheels come off the carpenter's wagon and Good Friday makes Black Monday look like a walk in the park.

Easter Day comes and the tragedy is undone, the tape is rewound, the dead are raised and despair gives way to hope.

Christmas is about Christ, Jesus Christ.

So this Christmas, please, remember him, thank God for him, and pray that the world he came to save becomes a better place, a safer place, a more beautiful place, a more godly place, because of him.

The story of the one whose birth we celebrate this Christmas and every Christmas is a work of art. This one life changed the world for ever. He still can and he still does one day at a time. Even if his name is scarcely mentioned.

If you'd like to know more about him and how this happens, and how we might get to follow him for ourselves, we have a little booklet for you to read over the holiday. It is our gift to you and it comes with our love. Please just ask for one as you leave. Thank you so listening so well.