

Festive season could be life-changing

Carol services and Christmas events around our diocese will tell the story of Jesus's birth for all generations

WE'LL be inviting our friends to join us on a life-changing journey as we celebrate Christmas this year.

Churches across our diocese will host hundreds of carol services and Christmas events, giving thousands of visitors the chance to hear the story of Jesus's birth. Some churches will tell the Nativity story with real animals.

And many of our churches will join the national Church of England's **#FollowTheStar** campaign, which includes daily reflections online, printed material, specially-made videos and social media updates. Churches will be invited to hang large or illuminated stars over their entrances to tie in with the invitation for visitors to 'follow the star' to their nearest church.

For some people, this year's carol services will mark the first tentative steps towards a new-found faith or a more committed

sense of discipleship. The national Church's campaign aims to encourage those who engage with its Christmas reflections to take things further in the New Year.

The campaign aims to build on the fact that more people attend church at Christmas than any other time of the year. And in our diocese, the latest figures show that attendance last Christmas was the highest for several years.

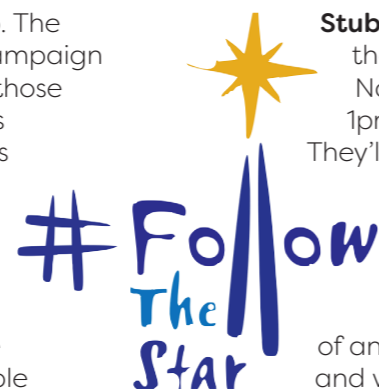
Portsmouth Cathedral will hold identical carol services at 7pm on December 21, 22 and 23 to cope with extraordinary demand. On Christmas Eve, two Crib Services, which help children to understand the Nativity story, will be held at 2.30pm and 4pm.

Worshippers at **Holy Rood Church,**

Stubbington, will repeat their annual Live Nativity from 10am to 1pm on December 8. They'll set up a stable with Mary, Joseph, a manger and real animals outside, with actors playing the parts of angels, shepherds and wise men inside the church, each telling a part of the story.

There'll be real animals too at **St John the Evangelist, West Meon,** from 3.30pm on Christmas Eve. Children and adults are encouraged to dress as their favourite Nativity characters and follow a pony around the village before heading into church for a Crib Service.

The curate, the Rev Katy Garner, said: "We're calling the event Come Follow, and we hope to convert our chancel into a stable,



Church will host festive pantomime

A CAST drawn from the local congregations and community will present the story of Aladdin this Christmas.

Actors aged between seven and 70 from across Leigh Park and Warren Park will stage the pantomime at St Clare's Church on December 1 and 2.

It's the latest production to be performed at the church, which has hosted Christmas shows for the past two years. It was written and directed by Carolyn Owens, and features her husband the Rev Jonathan Jeffery as Widow Twanky.

Mel Hepworth, who plays Aladdin, said: "I'm very excited. Rehearsals are going well. I've always loved acting and did it at college, but it's nice to perform where you live."

Stuart Holmes, who plays Abanazer, said: "It's a chance for the community to come together, and for people who might not normally come into church to do so. It's a big cast, and it's good to see



Pantomime performers (l to r) Josie Simmons, aged 13, as Catnip; Mel Hepworth, 34, as Aladdin; Amber-Destiny Jo, 20, as Princess Rosebud; Gabriel Jeffery, 11, as Panda; and Stuart Holmes, 50, as Abanazer, outside St Clare's Church

people come back from previous years and take bigger parts as their confidence grows."

The performances are on December 1 at 2pm and 6pm; and on December 2 at 2pm. Tickets are £2 for adults, £1 for children and £5 for families.

with real sheep, chickens and goats from local farms. We'd like everyone to dress up and it doesn't matter if we have 27 Marys!"

Worshippers will also be retelling the Christmas story at **St Luke's Church, Southsea,** from 10am on Sunday 16th December. Adults

and children are invited to come with tea towels and costumes to play angels and shepherds at its Scratch Nativity event. The church also hosts a toddler and child-friendly service at 4pm on Christmas Eve called 'Let It Snow'.

Thousands of visitors will also visit Christmas tree festivals in our churches, at which hundreds of trees are decorated and illuminated, often by local community groups. The **Brighstone Christmas Tree Festival** is the largest on the Isle of Wight. Seven venues in the village throw open their doors for visitors to see the stunning displays of Christmas trees and enjoy entertainment from December 5-9. The concerts continue until December 15. Full details are on www.bxtf.org



Brighstone Christmas Tree Festival

The **Alverstoke Christmas Tree Festival** offers a similar experience at St Mary's Church in Gosport, with 80 brightly-decorated trees to enjoy. It starts at 6.15pm on December 6 and continues until 6pm on December 9. There's also a diverse range of live music, involving more than

500 musicians playing different genres. Find out more on www.stmarysalverstoke.org.uk.

The **Titchfield Christmas Tree Festival** takes place in the same week – from December 7-9. Beautiful trees decorated by local firms, charities and organisations can be seen between 10am and 6pm daily, alongside live entertainment and refreshments.

Worshippers at **St Faith's Church, Lee-on-Solent,** will offer a full Christmas lunch in church for those who would have been on their own that day. The lunch happens between 11.30am and 2pm, and there's even transport available to and from the church, if needed. To book, ring the parish office on 023-9255 6445.

Harbour Church in Portsmouth will also throw open its doors to those who are hungry or lonely on Christmas Day. Their Harbour Coffee shop will offer free festive baps to those in need between 11am and 1.30pm on Christmas Day. For details of Christmas events, see www.portsmouth.anglican.org/christmas