

Festive events are part of our mission

Christmas is a time when we can talk to packed churches about the impact that Jesus has had on our world

JUST imagine the crowd at Fratton Park, loudly singing carols about the birth of Jesus and his mission to save humankind.

This Christmas, that dream will become a reality. Portsmouth Football Club's official carol service on December 16 is being organised by the director of **Choir Church in Milton**, Alastair Ross.

He'll bring pupils from local schools and a brass band to lead thousands of people in a Pompey carol sing-along. The turnstiles will open at 6.30pm for a 7pm start.

And nearer Christmas, members of Choir Church are also singing at half-time during a League One fixture. In the interval of Pompey's game against Ipswich on December 21, crowds will welcome 30 pupils from Meon Junior and Milton Park Primary Schools.

They'll sing a brand new piece of music, entitled *Play Up Pompey*, which has been specially written by Mark and Helen Johnson, founders of Out of the Ark music. The track will also be recorded by children from Meon Junior School in a studio in Sussex.

These are just two of the many opportunities available to us at Christmas to spread the good news about Jesus via festive events and activities. Among the most important will be the carol services, crib services, and worship on



Locals were amazed the first time that camels visited Leigh Park for Christmas

Day, to which many non-churchgoers will flock.

And our churches will be helped by the #FollowTheStar campaign, being run by the national Church of England for the second year in a row. It will include Christmas reflections available in print, email, app and audio formats, video adverts and a social media

campaign. Churches are being urged to list their Christmas events on www.achurchnearyou.com, which will be the focus of the national campaign.

In **Leigh Park**, worshippers are getting ready to parade camels around their community for the third time in four years. The festive animals will be coming on



Top: Children's Nativities are very effective at bringing in families who don't normally go to church; below: Harbour Church's carols in Gunwharf Quays

November 30, when St Francis Church will host a Starlight Festival.

It's a free community event at which local groups can share their plans for Christmas, alongside children's craft activities, refreshments, and star decorations made by local schools. It will run from 10.30am-1.30pm, after which it's hoped the camels will process to the Christmas Grotto in the Greywell Shopping Centre.

A week later, a cast of 45 local residents will stage the pantomime *Dick Whittington* in St Clare's

Church, Warren Park. It's happening on December 7 at 2pm and 6pm, and on December 8 at 2pm. Tickets, priced at £2.50/£1 are available on 023-9247 5276.

Worshippers from **Harbour Church** will repeat last year's successful open-air carol sing-along in Gunwharf Quays on December 12. They mixed festive pop songs with traditional carols for hundreds of shoppers in its central area.

Worshippers at **St Faith's Church, Lee-on-Solent**, will tell the Christmas story at their Live Nativity on December 8. Visitors will meet characters from the story, including Mary and Joseph,

angels, shepherds and wise men. Then they'll encounter some of the animals that would have been in the stable with Jesus - including donkeys, sheep and goats. It happens from 10am-2pm.

Meanwhile, worshippers on the Isle of Wight will host the annual **Brighstone Christmas Tree Festival**. It's the 23rd year in a row it's been staged and more than £130,000 has been raised over the years for local and national charities via the festival. More than 250 trees will be on show in eight venues around the village - including St Mary's Church, Brighstone, and Mottistone Church - from December 5-8. Each has been decorated by a different community group.

The festival includes concerts, carol services and craft fairs, continuing until December 20. The trees will remain on display in St Mary's Church until January 1. For more details of all events, timings and venues, see www.bxtf.org.

The annual Alverstoke Christmas Tree Festival will also be happening in **St Mary's Church, Alverstoke**, from 6.15pm on December 5 until 6pm on December 8. It opens with carols led by the Lowry Girls' Choir and the lighting of the trees by the Mayor of Gosport, and will feature more than 80 trees individually decorated by school children, local groups, businesses and statutory agencies.

And there's also a Christmas tree festival at **St Cuthbert's Church in Copnor** this year. It's an annual event with over 20 decorated trees, live musical entertainment, crafts for children and refreshments. It happens from December 6-8, and the church is open from 1pm-5pm on the Friday and Sunday and 11am-5pm on the Saturday.

For details of Advent and Christmas activities in our parishes, see: www.portsmouth.anglican.org/christmas.

