

Faith deepens as we follow seasons



Pauslgrove priest **Hugo Deadman** explains how the Church year helps us to inhabit Jesus' story

RECENTLY, I was lucky enough to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, travelling around Galilee and Jerusalem.

It felt extraordinary to stand in places that had always had such a pull on my imagination. On the Sunday we worshipped at the Anglican Cathedral in Jerusalem, and I felt my throat catch when I realised that the words used in the Eucharist – 'Take, eat...' and 'Drink this...' – were being said a stone's throw from where Jesus first said them.

Then I stayed by the Sea of Galilee and visited places where miracles and events in Jesus' life are likely to have happened. I even bought some wine at Cana, the place claiming to be the site of his first miracle!

What struck me was how much more real the stories I thought I knew now felt. I had a deeper, different sense of a life lived in these places. Jesus' life and what it means wasn't abstract, but local and particular. It was rooted in a community at a particular time and place.

I was also surprised by how emotional I felt. I went down some steps to a first century well associated with Mary in Nazareth, and I felt her confusion and elation as she tried to work out what had happened to her.

I felt too the pain of the broken Jesus in the deep, dark dungeon beneath what is thought to be the High Priest's House, where Jesus might have been thrown before the agony of Good Friday. Visiting these places, feeling what might have happened there, helped me inhabit and understand anew the stories we think we know so well.

'The rhythm of the Church year is integral to how I live out my faith'

For many churches, that is at the heart of how we celebrate the Church's year. Each big day tells us of a different aspect of that story, helps us to see it anew and feel its reality that much more.

How we mark the different chapters of the story helps us reflect on what they might mean to us too, by changes to the liturgy or the colours we wear or how the church is decorated. The Church's year helps us inhabit the story of Jesus, and perhaps come to a deeper understanding of God's love for us.

How we mark these events also helps us reflect on our emotions too. At Advent we use purple – the colour for Lent too. It is associated with royalty and tells us how

God comes to us as a servant king. Purple is also associated with penance and repentance, something we should have in the forefront of our minds before the joy of Easter and Christmas.

The drama of our liturgy can also help us see things differently and more deeply. On Maundy Thursday we strip the church of all its decorations, reflecting the barrenness and horror of what is to transpire.

I will never forget the first Good Friday after my ordination, when I threw myself on the ground in front of the altar as part of the service. I felt something of the helplessness, panic, and horror of a young man lying in the dirt before the cruel, capricious Pilate.

For me, the rhythm and shape of the Church's year is integral to how I live out my faith. It helps me live a little more deeply the story of God's love for us, lived out in Christ – and helps me to respond to that love.

Now I'm looking forward to my first Easter as priest-in-charge of St Michael's, Pauslgrove, and living out the excitement, the agony and the joy of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter with the lovely people there – and experiencing them as vividly on the Holy Hill of PO6 as I did in Jerusalem.