Churches packed out for Christmas events

Thousands attended Christmas tree festivals, carol services, live Nativity events and drama performances across our diocese

THOUSANDS of worshippers packed into Christmas carol services and other events in churches around our diocese to celebrate the birth of Jesus as our Saviour.

Among the many services taking place were candlelit services indoors and rowdy carols outdoors - plus special crib services, Midnight Masses and Christmas Day celebrations.

Our cathedral held four identical carol services to cope with the demand, and many other parish churches hosted multiple carol services in the run-up to Christmas. Newport Minster held a special carol service in partnership with the Royal Foundation to celebrate selfless actions to enhance community spirit.

And there were thousands of others who enjoyed Christmas tree festivals, drama performances and live Nativity events as we shared the joy of the festive season.

The four identical carol services at **Portsmouth Cathedral** included a mix of congregational carols and seasonal anthems – all led by Portsmouth Cathedral Choir. The boy choristers led worship at two of the four services, and the girl choristers led worship at the other two.

'It's a lovely way to begin Advent and there's a real community spirit'

Each of the four services included readings from the Bible and other seasonal literature, read by local community leaders including both of Portsmouth's MPs, the headteacher of Portsmouth Grammar School, the chief executive of Portsmouth City Council, and the vice-chancellor of Portsmouth University – as well as clergy and lay leaders from across the diocese.

Bishop Jonathan read from John 1 during two of the four services, and our honorary bishops delivered the same reading in the two other services.

Meanwhile, **Newport Minster** hosted a 'Together at Christmas' community carol service. It was supported by the Royal Foundation, part of an annual initiative spearheaded by HRH the Princess of Wales to recognise and thank those who act with love in their communities. It was inspired by HRH the Princess of Wales's Westminster Abbey Service, which was televised on Christmas Eve.

It brought together emergency responders, charities and youth groups to honour those individuals and organisations who have created and shown love to foster compassion and togetherness in the community. It was broadcast live on Vectis Radio.

The Medina Marching Band played outside the church and the singing during the service was led by the Mountbatten Hospice Choir.

The service also celebrated the work of School Readers on the island over the last couple of years. Attendees were invited to bring a children's book to place under the Christmas tree for distribution to island children, youth groups and schools.

Families also kicked off Advent by flocking to Christmas tree festivals hosted by our churches. They saw hundreds of trees that were beautifully decorated and illuminated by local schools, charities, businesses and community groups. Many also included live music, festive refreshments and special services.

Among them was the Christmas tree festival at **St Cuthbert's Church, Copnor**, which saw a selection of illuminated trees scattered across the nave for the 15th year in a row.

They were decorated by local children's groups, charities and community groups, including the GP surgery and toddler group based in the church building.

Claire Cleaver brought her own children - Elsie, aged 7, and Bertie, aged 4 - to see the tree decorated by her group, Pineapple Tots Childcare, based in Kirby Road. It's the fifth year she's been involved.

"I bring the children from Pineapple Tots here, and my own children, each year," she said. "It's a lovely way to begin the whole Advent and Christmas period, and we love the chutneys, the raffles, the home-made cakes, and everything else.

Top and above left: worshippers at the cathedral carol service; middle: the Royal Foundation carol service hosted by Newport Minster *(photo: Michael Dunkason)* and bottom: the Christmas tree festival at St Cuthbert's Church, Copnor

Jesus-centred, Kingdom-seeking