

Dear Friends,

I wonder how many of you look forward to taking a stroll some time around Christmas - to walk off the big meal, perhaps, or give a vigorous aspect to Boxing Day.

I often notice, when out and about at that time of the year, how complete strangers greet each other, and smiles appear where there is normally a careful avoidance of the other's eye.

Christmas is a time for friendliness, as well as for friendship. We allow ourselves to be a bit more spontaneous as we celebrate. This is appropriate - because Christmas is about God reaching out to make friends with us. If we reflect that, in however pale a way with our jovial greetings, we are being touched by the spirit of the season.

And Christmas is about a baby. In everyday life, babies have that same power to make us smile and enter into spontaneous and friendly conversation. Just think how many people will peer into the pram, and offer congratulations, and ask questions of a parent who is a near-stranger when he or she appears at the school gate with a 'new arrival'.

But Jesus and all that he means are 'not just for Christmas'. A sign of those who are touched by his Spirit, (and not just the spirit of a season) is that they make openness, smiling, spontaneous friendliness, part of their year-long attitude.

Perhaps this is why Christ, in the Gospels, puts children who know so well how to be friendly very near to the centre of the Kingdom of Heaven.. For if it is anything, it is a kingdom of inclusive friendship.

I wish you a very happy Christmas, and may the Lord smile upon you in his friendship throughout the new year.

Your friend and vicar,

Maggie Guite