

December 2017 - January 2018

The Rector writes:

'GREAT LIVES'

It began in November 2001 when, at the invitation of Joan Bakewell, Tim Waterstone chose Clement Attlee as the subject of a new radio series. Some choices are quite interesting: Bernard Manning chose Mother Theresa, Fiona Bruce selected Mata Hari, David Soul (remember Starsky & Hutch) opted for Dietrich Bonhoeffer, John Major suggested Rudyard Kipling, Nicholas Stern (economist) chose Muhammed Ali. Since 2006 Matthew Paris has been in charge of proceedings and the current series (No 21) can be heard on Tuesday afternoons on Radio 4. There are currently 421 episodes of 'Great Lives' available on the BBC i-player – and I often tune in on my car radio when travelling back from meetings. The simple idea is that someone chooses a hero of theirs to be the 'great life' and with the help of researchers explores their biographical history and explore why they might be deserving of the epithet – 'great'.



As we begin a new church year I am mindful of two such 'great lives' which might qualify, but have not yet been selected by the BBC! They are our own St Martin of Tours, and of course our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

The name Sulpitius Severus sounds as if it might be that of a character in Harry Potter or Game of Thrones. Some of you will know him as the 'biographer' of St Martin. Almost all that we know of Severus' life comes from a few allusions in his own writings, Born of noble parents in Aquitaine, Severus enjoyed excellent educational advantages.

He studied jurisprudence and was renowned as an eloquent lawyer; his knowledge of law is reflected in parts of his writings. He married the daughter of a wealthy family, who died young, leaving him no children. At this time Severus came under the powerful influence of Saint Martin, by whom he was led to devote his wealth to the Christian poor, and his own powers to a life of good works and the contemplative vision of God. In many respects no two men could be more unlike than Severus, the scholar and orator, well versed in the ways of the world, and Martin, the rough bishop, champion of the monastic life, seer and worker of miracles. Yet the spirit of the rugged saint subdued that of the polished scholar, and the works of Severus are important because they reflect the ideas, influence and aspirations of Martin.

Over the summer I was fortunate to come across a book about St Martin, by Christopher Donaldson which draws heavily on Severus' writing. As St Martin is our patron saint, who unfortunately has his feast day on 11th November, and so always seems to be pushed out by Remembrance, I thought I might share something of his 'great life' over the coming year.

Year by year we also celebrate an even greater life, that of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. A life that we trace, from humble birth at Christmas to reigning in glory as 'Christ the King', as we journey through the cycle of the Christian Year.

Jesus also had some good biographers, the gospel writers, and this year we shall be exploring Mark's version. This is the earliest biblical account of the life of Jesus, written around 30 years after Jesus' death and resurrection. No one is certain of the authorship, though tradition ascribes it to John Mark (mentioned in Acts). It is thought that he wrote down St Peter's reflections of the life of Jesus.

As I write this, the sound and light-bursts of the fireworks from the switching on of Christmas lights in Orpington remind folk that the great secular festival is underway. At church we are not yet quite in Advent, our time of preparation for the light of Christ at Christmas. The great event will be launched with the light and music of the Heavenly host as always at Christmas.

Do come and join us – as we celebrate the beginning of the greatest life of all!

Wishing you all a holy and blessed Christmas

Yours in Christ,

Reverend John, your Rector.