



St Mark's Church, Reigate

October 2024

Letter from the Vicar, Father Martin Colton

Dear Friends,

Celebrating the Harvest each year is both modern and ancient. The traditional British Harvest Festival emerged in Victorian times in Cornwall but in fact it has been variously marked for millennia going back to pre-Christian times. Christians have a profound sense of God the Creator engaging with his creatures and Creation in daily life and work. Our Harvest hymns capture this well and additionally remind us that our own lives are meant to become a harvest of growing faith and kindness to all. Harvest has a universal appeal and it is also marked in many different cultures.

On the final Sunday of February in Argentina, the Archbishop of Mendoza sprinkles the season's first grapes with holy water and offers the new vintage to God, setting off a month of celebrations. Crowds line the streets to watch a parade of competing beauty queens on their regional floats, and the festival culminates with a spectacular show at the amphitheatre; musicians, entertainers, and dancers take to the stage before a Harvest Queen is chosen against a backdrop of spectacular fireworks.

Sukkot celebrates Israel's bountiful harvests and recalls the time when the Israelites wandered the desert living in temporary shelters. Families build makeshift huts, or sukkah, with roofs open to the sky. Here they eat, and sometimes sleep, for the next seven days. Wands of willow, myrtle, and palm, together with a citron (a kind of lemon), are shaken every day in all directions to honour the gifts from the land.

Celebrating Harvest is somehow deeply embedded in human lives and although few of us are directly involved in agriculture in modern Britain, Harvest has an abiding importance. We remain conscious of the impact of the environment on harvesting food, not only changing farming practices but influencing what we now sow as crops because of climate change. Food miles make us aware of the need to procure foods without harming the world's environment. The joyful delights of harvest celebrations are coupled with a growing awareness of those who experience food poverty, drought and famine which have been present across the world ever since agriculture developed. Thanksgiving for what we have and generosity to those who lack life's basics is as vital today as ever it was.

It's clear that Harvest is a time for everyone to mark with reflection, thanksgiving and generosity, what it means in the 21st Century. "Come, ye thankful people, come, raise the song of harvest home!"

With every blessing,