**‘The Bishop of Waterloo’**

***Revd Sue Lucas explains the background to the installation of a child Bishop at St Faith’s on Sunday, 7th December, 2015.***

Nicholas was a fourth-century bishop of Myra in Asia Minor (southern Turkey) There are a number of well-known stories about him. Most of these came from a 9th century hagiography (biography of a Saint) and many of them concern his love and care for children, how he fed the hungry, healed the sick and cared for the oppressed. He saved three girls from a life of slavery by providing them with dowries and this led to the tradition of bearing gifts to children on his feast day, a custom that of course eventually moved in many places to the Christmas celebrations themselves. Nicholas is Patron Saint of, among other things, children, the sea, pawnbrokers, and Russia!

Selecting Nicholas or ‘Boy Bishops’ was a popular Medieval tradition throughout Western Europe. The young age at which Nicholas became a bishop,and his care for the ‘least’ once he did is the basis for the custom. It is partly a bit of fun but it has a serious point as well - a lesson in humility and recognition of the wisdom of the young and the ‘least.’ Cathedral choristers would choose one of their number to be the Boy or Nicholas Bishop. The boys’ regular roles, such as acolyte or server, were filled by the cathedral canons. During his period in office, the "bishop" could declare holidays and treats as well as distribute sweets and gifts. The custom spread the length and breadth of England - at first in cathedrals, collegiate churches and schools, later in many parish churches as well. The practice became more raucous and disorderly, until, by the time of the Reformation, there were calls to put a stop to the high jinks.

The custom of selecting a youthful Nicholas Bishop has been revived and updated in some English cathedrals and parishes – as we are doing this year at St Faith’s. Now, as before, the lad, and of course, often now the lass, is fully outfitted as a bishop, with cope and mitre and crozier. The words of the Magnificat, "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly," form part of the ceremony, as the Child Bishop takes the Bishop's seat; the adults then takes a lower place. In Salisbury and Hereford cathedrals, the installed Boy Bishop preaches a sermon, leads the prayers, and asks for God's blessing on the people. The ceremony we used is adapted from the one used in Hereford.

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