

Article written by Dedham and Ardleigh Benefice after attending the Life of Christ 2023

We will never know for sure whether Those feet walked upon England's mountains green and whether Jesus was seen in England's pleasant pastures but for a dozen Dedham churchgoers and nearly a thousand other fortunate people, it certainly seemed so at Wintershall on the last day of June.

England's answer to Oberammergau, Wintershall has hosted The Life of Christ for five days each year since 1999. The estate boasts at least three perfect grassy 'theatres' where the audience sits on chairs in the 'gallery' or their picnic rugs in the 'stalls', and gazes rapt at the action below as His life moves from the Christmas story, complete with the perfect little grey donkey (no Gabbie you can't take him home); the slaughter of innocents and the move to Egypt, onto Act 2, Jesus' baptism and temptation; His calling of the disciples as they neared the shore of lake Galilee. We watched the wedding in Cana; the first miracles and the Sermon on the Lake and Parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son.

Act 2 concluded with the feeding of the Five Thousand and, believe it or not, the nearly one thousand present were fed! Bread was distributed throughout by the disciples and followers of Jesus and we all had a share. We moved to Theatre 3 for our picnic lunches in the drizzle – some of the sandwiches were dampened – but none of our enthusiasm! At this point a few members of the cast answered questions from the various school children present which served to tell us all how the event was staged; the rehearsals involved, the cast of volunteers, many of whom play each year, and even where the bread with which we had all been fed came from!

We watched as Jesus entered into Jerusalem on aforesaid little grey donkey, accompanied by waving palms and hosannas. Events proceeded towards the Last Supper, through the Garden of Gethsemene; Christ's trial and the agony of the Crucifixion. The final Act saw us moving to the hill from which we could see the tomb on the further hill and witness the marvel of the Resurrection and Ascension of our Lord.

In all, a most wonderful day; the story we know so well brought to life in more than 3D. The sense of being there; experiencing the play; feeling the emotions of each disciple and follower; being each disciple and follower and understanding the fear, the hope, the love, of them all, including the priests who felt so threatened by this Christ who wanted nothing but the best for them and for all.

Thank you, Sue, for arranging this visit. Thank you, fellow Dedham disciples for your good company and thank you, Wintershall, for an unforgettable experience.