

# FOCUS ON FAITH

## TRICK OR TRICK?

Have you noticed how we Brits like celebrating? We seem to find any occasion and turn it into an event.

We've long had Mothers' Day – in honour of St. Interflora – and Fathers' Day – in honour of St. Castlemaine XXXX and St. Bournville – and now we have Grandparents Days – in honour of St. Pipe & Slippers. Perhaps in our society of equality and tolerance we'll soon have Boyfriends and Girlfriends Days or perhaps Partners Days which of course celebrate whatever relationship you want to commemorate. Christmas is already highly commercialised and there are the other religious Festival Days and Bank Holidays as well as Bonfire Night.

Now it seems Hallowe'en has become big business here in the UK. Take a walk down any High Street and you'll see the evidence of witches' broomsticks, pointed hats, grotesque masks, Dracula-like false teeth, hollowed out pumpkins and all the rest of the paraphernalia that goes with the last day of October. And Bridgnorth's High Street is no exception.

Now before I'm accused of being a killjoy or a bit on the wacky side, let me say that it's not just Christians that are concerned about the increase in the way in which Hallowe'en in particular is becoming something of a national celebration. I heard today of a school in the area where the teachers are coming back off half term and on a Sunday to lay on an alternative for the children. Police and other community based groups are increasingly concerned about issues of security and safety as well. So let's have a look at some of the issues surrounding this event.

The Church has long been accused of highjacking a pagan festival and then trying to "Christianise" it. Originally Druids held a celebration in honour of Sarnhain, lord of the Dead, on 1<sup>st</sup> November which marked the Celtic New Year and the start of winter. Druids believed that on the festival eve the dead revisited the earth so they left out meals to make them happy, fires were lit and loud noises made to frighten away evil spirits.

Rightly or wrongly, the early Church preferred to give existing ancient festivals new meaning rather than abolishing them. Emphasis was placed on All Saints' Day (1<sup>st</sup> November) and All Souls' Day (2<sup>nd</sup> November) rather than on the eve of All Saints (or All Hallows) from which we get the name Hallowe'en.

Now we might find it difficult to accept that what we do today has anything to do with pagan rituals but think about it. I find it interesting that many people, who for various reasons hold strong beliefs about the non-existence of God, find it reasonable to want to celebrate a festival that was originally conceived to frighten away evil

spirits. Why believe in evil spirits when you're not prepared to acknowledge a God who only wants good for the people on earth? And why is it that apparently perfectly sane people are prepared to believe in ghosts, goblins and ghouls and yet not acknowledge the existence of the Holy Ghost whose role it is to guide us and inform us about a loving Heavenly Father?

The Bible specifically counsels us against witchcraft, communicating with the dead, divination and the occult. Yet Hallowe'en has its past rooted in such things.

But if that's not enough just think of the social impact of what "Tricking or Treating" actually encourages. Basically we're saying, "Okay kids, if someone doesn't give you what you want (i.e. a treat) it's alright to take revenge (i.e. play a trick on them)." Whilst nowadays the treat is more likely to be sweets or biscuits, originally it was a demand for money. The idea of demanding money with a threat for non-compliance would be seen as a criminal offence at any other time of the year. So is that really how we want our children to behave? Lots of people, particularly the elderly and those more vulnerable in our communities, are frightened every year that if they don't comply they may suffer damage to themselves or to their homes.

Are we being tricked into believing that it's only harmless fun; that it's not dangerous to anyone; that our children really do know the difference between right and wrong and won't be affected as they grow up and that we're not exposing people to the more sinister aspects of spirituality? And what about the danger unsupervised children might be exposed to roaming the streets on a dark night knocking on the doors of complete strangers? Finally are we being tricked into another area of commercial exploitation as businesses cash in? As I said I don't want to be labelled a killjoy but I do think we're in danger of being tricked ourselves.

Many Churches, as well as other organisations, hold special events on Hallowe'en – good, clean, fun events – and as Hallowe'en falls on a Sunday this year, some Churches in the Bridgnorth area are having more informal evening services which are family based. If you'd like to find one offering a more wholesome event, you can log on to [www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk](http://www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk) which has details of local Christian Churches and contact details.



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**We're in danger of being tricked ourselves.**