EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

ISSN 2753-2771

A Matter of Faith: St. Barnabas Church

24 March 2022

The world's largest religion, Christianity, is based on the life and teachings of Jesus. The origins of Christianity dates back to AD 30-33 in Jerusalem. The belief that God is one eternal and supreme being led billions of people to follow this religion. 53% of England's population in 2018 were identified as followers of Christianity. There are thousands of churches around England that follow different principles with some of them being, Baptists, Methodists, Catholics, Church of England and the list goes on.

Epsom and Ewell alone accommodates 29 churches that observe worshippers on a regular basis. The diverse followers practice their religion wholeheartedly. St Barnabas Church in Epsom believes in one true God who lives eternally in three persons—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The hundred-year-old building welcomes people from any age, race, gender and religion for worship and in their innovative sessions such as *Alpha* and *Barneys*. Alpha course is more focused on young people with curious minds who want to explore the big questions of life, faith and meanings. This free session is open for all and helps people understand the Christian faith in a friendly, open, and relaxed environment. Barney's session targets babies, toddlers and their parents and carers. The session involves lots of toys, songs, bible stories and refreshments for all which is an innovative way to connect little ones with church and God.

According to Christians, Jesus Christ came in human form to teach people to love God and love their neighbour. Churches aim to spread this teaching through their Sunday prayers. Associating itself with Epsom primary schools, St Barnabas Church takes informal lessons either in schools or church itself where they educate young ones about the Christian faith and belief. Harry Lamaison, deacon of the church, says: "We're currently exploring the ways we can engage with the local community and its evolving process. We have links with charity organisations such as Love Me Love My Mind and Sunny Bank Trust which helps people with their mental health issues and offer solutions for the same." The church has linked itself to offer help and support from people who are dealing with mental health issues, breakdown of a relationship or a shock from death in a family.

St Barnabas follows one of the greatest messages of Jesus Christ "Don't forget to do good and to share what you have because God is pleased with these kinds of sacrifices." Church extends its hands to people in the community who are going through financial hardships by providing advice on how they can plan their expenditure and savings. Advice is offered by a financial adviser and is often done by setting up a private meeting with the person. St Paul's Howell Hill and St Barnabas are working in partnership towards making the local community better by offering support to families in need. The local community is encouraged to take part in church activities that help in bringing the neighbourhood closer and stronger.

To support each other is what God has taught us all. How do we support each other is the big question. The church helps anyone in need and is looking forward to collaborating with local artists who are often unnoticed. Combining prayers with artists is a great way to promote local talent and to draw the attention of locals towards the church. With musicians, dancers and other artists, prayers can be more fun for youngsters as well. Moreover, the church also gives out space for weddings, birth or death. A nominal fee is charged for decorations and upkeep of the church. Artists can also take part in these functions as per people's choice.

Sunday prayers are the heart of any church, where worshippers gather and worship for the betterment of their lives. Any religious establishment is incomplete without people and followers. Growing westernisation has kept many apart from the creator of the world. Remembering that god even once a day gives no harm and helping others is an act of God. Every culture or religion tells us how humans should live in harmony and respect each other's decisions. Be it Jesus *Christ*, *Allah* or *Bhagwan*, all of them are with us, teaching the way of life and how to achieve peace in life.

A Visit to Stoneleigh's Hindu Temple

24 March 2022

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd.
Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

ISSN 2753-2771

Scintillating festivals and folk songs that are sung in Hindu culture bring nothing but life to Surrey. With the houses adorned like a bride, and temples flocked by those who follow the religion, Hinduism is a way of life. Our country is a multicultural state, where people from different beliefs, cultures and backgrounds have settled. Spreading its idea amongst people, Hindu belief is now popular all over the world because of its festivals and traditions. To be more precise, there is no month without a festival.

Hindu belief has no specific founder, however, 95% of Hindus around the globe are known to live in India. Hinduism primarily has two symbols, one of which is OM and the other one is Swastika. Many recognise swastika used by the Nazis, however, in Hindu culture, it's a symbol of divinity and spirituality in varied religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism.

Established in 1994, the Sri Raja Rajeswari Amman temple lies in the heart of Stoneleigh, Epsom. The presiding goddess of the temple is Sri Raja Rajeswary Amman who is known as the mother of love and grace and showers her blessings upon all and develops the goodness within humans. The temple is hailed as an eternal place of devotion, purity and peace. Timeless statues of Hindu deities such as Sri Ganapathy, Sri Murgun, Sri Venktaeshwarar, Sri Pathmavati adorned with jewels and embroidered clothes are kept inside the temple.

The architecture of the temple comprises two rooms one of which is the area where devotees pray and perform pooja and the other one is for functions such as marriages, festivals and childbirth. Vibrant and beautiful carvings are echoed in its art and architecture. The mandir (Temple) is a lively and peaceful place for worshippers who often come in for their evening prayers. The usual opening hours for the public are from 8:30 AM- 1:PM and 5:30 PM-10:30 PM. With just two Hindu temples in Surrey, this temple attracts devotees from across the county on Tuesdays and Fridays.

The temple witnesses thousands of devotees every day forming long queues outside the temple right from the early hours. "It's very good to see people follow their culture even after coming abroad. Festivals are celebrated with full enthusiasm and exuberance. Many worshippers even offer donations to the temple for better functioning " says the temple priest, Visvnathan Sarma, who has been working at the temple for 25 years ~~now~~. He added, "I enjoy working for the god, it's always peaceful and soothing for me to spend my time here at the temple and I wish to devote my rest of the time here only".

Worship is considered an important part of daily life. The majority of Hindu families have their own shrines where offerings are made and prayers are said to the deities. Worshipping involves all five senses: touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing. Washing hands, bathing before the prayer, removing shoes before entering the shrine or temple are a few of common rules which must be followed. During the prayer, some offerings such as sweets, flowers and money are made to gods and goddesses. It is important for some men to wear a sacred thread over their left shoulder and hang it to the right hip. This thread is known as *Janeu* which means shouldering the burdens of life with patience.

There are various cultures in Hindu tradition and rules, marriage rituals, separation rituals ~~might~~ differ from each other. North Indian marriage rituals differ from what South Indian or Sri Lankan weddings perform. But you can expect that marriages traditionally involve a great number of guests, are bright, and colourful. A Hindu wedding is usually a week-long festival consisting of different functions every day which has deep philosophical and spiritual significance. During the wedding, the groom and bride take seven rounds around the fire (*Agni*) which binds both the couple to the seven promises of their married lives. *Sindoor (Vermilion Powder)* on their forehead and *Mangalsutra* worn by Hindu brides symbolises a woman's marital status.

The caste system is one of the main reasons which divides Hindus according to their *karma* (work) and *Dharma* (duty). It is believed by many scholars that this system dates back more than 3000 years. The four main castes in Hindu belief are *Brahmin*(the intellectual leaders), *Kshatriya*(the protectors of the public), *Vaishyas* (the skilful producers) and S*hudras (*the unskilled labourers).The system forces individuals to follow the rule and only marry within a specific caste. Even though there are mandatory laws that protect so-called *low caste people* from violation and discrimination, there are only a few who treat everyone as equal.

Hinduism is enriched with wonders and shocks, it is widely followed and practised by people around the globe. The beauty of festivals, the joy of celebration, the taste of sweets and the bitterness of ancient customs are what constitutes Hinduism. Every belief comes with its rules and traditions, what matters is how it is passed on from generation to generation.

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd.
Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY