



The Parish of Christchurch

*The Priory Church of the Holy Trinity, Christchurch
St George, Jumpers • St John at Purewell*

For Sunday 21st June 2020

Dear Friends,

As you will hopefully all know by now, not least from last week's letter, the Priory Church is now open for private prayer. We are also now permitted to hold small, socially-distanced funerals in church buildings (but not yet weddings or baptisms). At the time of writing, we have still not received any further information about when we may be permitted to use the building for services or other types of gatherings, or to re-open to general visitors.

As I'm sure you can imagine, a lot of work had to be done in order to enable us safely to open the building for prayer, and heartfelt thanks are due to all those who have made this possible, and to those who continue, day by day, to do the necessary cleaning and supervision – especially our two vergers, Paul and Greg.

When we do have any more news about holding services or other public gatherings, we will let you know by means of this letter and by announcements on the parish website.

This coming week, on Wednesday 24th June, the Church celebrates the birth of John the Baptist (his death (by a very grisly beheading, see Mark, chapter 6, vv. 6-29) is remembered separately on 29th August). John was, of course, born to Elizabeth, the cousin of Mary, Jesus' mother. We celebrate the meeting of those two women (known as the Visitation) on 31st May. So this festival on Wednesday brings to mind not only John the Baptist, but also his mother Elizabeth who bore him. Both are powerful witnesses to Christ and both offer us much to reflect about in our own lives of discipleship and witness.

Elizabeth's story is told in Luke's gospel (see chapter 1, vv. 5-25 and vv. 39—66). We may learn from her example something about the fruitfulness of faithful prayer and also something about the readiness to recognise and respond to the presence with us of Jesus, even in the most unexpected circumstances. Elizabeth is shown by Luke to be the very first person to recognise the presence of Jesus - and he had not even been born! But perhaps most of all, we can learn from her example of unbounded joy as she recognises Jesus as her Lord, within her cousin Mary.

For John the Baptist, we turn to John's Gospel. There we see John the Baptist as the one who came to point people to Jesus as the true light, the Messiah, the Lamb of God (see John, chapter 1, vv. 6-9 and

vv.19-37, and chapter 3, vv. 25-30). We may learn from the example of John the Baptist that he is (and therefore we also should be) constantly pointing people away from himself and towards Jesus – repeatedly denying that he is ‘the one’ and rejoicing greatly at the arrival and presence of Jesus. Speaking about Jesus, John the Baptist’s words, *‘he must increase, but I must decrease’* (Jn 3:30) are a good motto for anyone in a position of influence or leadership in the Church.

This week is likely to see more people out and about on our streets and in our public spaces and perhaps also in the Priory Church for prayer. My prayer for us all is that as we, as a society, increase the amount of social interaction, we do so safely and gently - in a way that is attentive to the concerns and fears of others. I also pray that this week brings you joy.

I will end with a brief reminder that we have resumed our small group bible studies, online. These take place on Wednesday afternoons at 2.30pm (looking at the bible readings for the following Sunday) and Thursday evenings at 7.30pm (looking at some of the more difficult passages in scripture). Also, on Sunday mornings at 11.00 am, we are sharing an online ‘Elevenses’. Details for how to join any or all of these can be obtained by emailing conference@christchurchpriory.org or telephoning 01202 800888.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jonathan Evans', with a horizontal line underneath.

Rev'd Jonathan Evans