

The Parish of Christchurch

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



Associate Priest: The Reverend Richard Partridge, The Paddocks, Holly Lane, Walkford, Dorset, BH23 5QQ
T 07903 252230 E richardpartridge310@btinternet.com

Sunday 13th December 2020

Dear Friends

As the song title suggests, "It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas." As we walk or drive around Christchurch, once again we get the opportunity to witness the care and attention that many people have given to making their homes light up with beautiful displays of Christmas lights and decorations, (Some more beautiful than others!) Our local shop keepers have done likewise and even within the Priory itself, our traditional Christmas tree has been delivered and decorated and stands resplendent just inside the west door for all to admire. Yes it is indeed beginning to look a lot like Christmas. Yet somehow we all know that in reality, looks aside, things are going to be very different this year and with the impact of the corona virus still very real, and yes very deadly, that is quite right as we continue to try to keep all those we know and love both safe and well and to protect all people, especially the most vulnerable and at risk.

Well we all are aware of the national and local restrictions that we face in our daily lives this Christmas time, families will not be able to meet in large numbers as in previous years, traditions will have to be set aside and of course this will cause considerable pain and sadness to many within our community. Perhaps in this remaining two week period before Christmas we could think and reflect upon this and then work out just what we might be able to do to help and support those living close to us who might this year be alone, separated from those they love the most. As Charles, Jonathan and I have all said in these weekly pastoral letters over the last nine months, it is often the smallest and seemingly insignificant of gestures, a phone call, a letter or a card, even merely a smile to a neighbour who we have never really spoken to before, that often have the greatest of meaning to the recipient and the sender alike.

If things are different in family life and circles this year, it is equally true, and equally sad that the same will be true in our Church life together. As you read this letter in the middle of December, I can tell you that I have yet to sing the words of "O come all ye faithful" or any other of our favourite carols which in previous years had been a staple part of my December diet in School Carol Services and other social and festive engagements. No such School Services will take place within the Priory this year, our Christingle and Crib Services have been changed in style and content, the Darkness to Light Advent Service could not take place at all and the upcoming highlight of the year to many at least, the Nine Lessons and Carols has had to be changed to a different style Carol Service this year. And then on Christmas Day itself, to use a phrase usually associated with the train timetable at this time of year, we will be operating a much reduced service, or more accurately put, number of Christmas Services. For full details of these please refer to the pastoral letter that the Vicar wrote last week and available on the website under the pastoral letters button.

Well if all of that is adding to your sense of doom and gloom let me tell you about something that is not changing this year, something that is free and something you do not need a pre booked ticket for, and that of course is the gift of the Christ Child freely given for both you and for me. All we need to do is to be ready to receive Him and to welcome Him with open and pure hearts into our lives, in a way that Christians have done so for over 2000 years now and then to experience afresh the true peace, the inner

peace and joy that flows from this gift in the form of hope and love, the light that shining in the darkness which will always do so. A former priest in this parish said in his Christmas sermon that each time he allowed himself to look afresh on the manger scene, he noticed a new aspect of the nativity and likewise a new sense of the true love of God displayed in this most humble of settings. Perhaps we can do the same this year as our eyes, hearts and minds fall still in awe and wonder this Christmas as we look upon the manger with fresh eyes and look for the peace this baby boy brings to the world as we continue to live through and struggle with the pandemic. If you find it helpful to view our Priory manger face to face, I can let you know that it will be put in position by the font this year from Friday 18th December, a most suitable and poignant location I believe as the point of welcome into the Priory Church for all who enter our doors this Christmastime.

This is my final letter this year, next week Jonathan will write and then Charles will write a joint Christmas and New Year. With that in mind let me leave you with this prayer. May the joy of the Angels. The humility of the Shepherds, the perseverance of the Wise Men, the obedience of Mary and Joseph, and the peace of the Christ Child be with us all this Christmas.

With my love and my prayers.

Richard.

Evening Prayer on Sunday 13th December.

As a result of holding two separate Christingle Services and the associated cleaning that has to take place after this, it will not be possible to hold Evening Prayer in the Priory on Sunday 13th December. This Service will now take place on Zoom. If you would like to join the clergy for this, please do let me know and I will arrange for you to receive the login codes.

Christmas Eve.

There will be two extra Services this year on Christmas Eve both at 11.00am. The Service at the Priory will be a Common Worship Eucharist with Christmas music but no singing. At the same time a BCP Service at St George's will take place, (Said.) You are welcome to attend either of these Services and booking is not required.

Carols in the Car Park. Wednesday 23rd December.

All of us in the parish will miss being able to sing Christmas carols in the Priory and at St George's this year. To help get over this disappointment we are offering everyone the opportunity to come to the Priory House car park on Wednesday 23rd December where we are permitted to sing together outside! We anticipate that this will be very popular so we are having three sittings, or rather standings! At 3pm 5pm and 7pm. Each will last about half an hour. You are welcome to bring a chair to sit on if you wish and of course a blanket or an umbrella depending on the weather forecast. Seasonal refreshments will be available and there will be a collection for charity which will be shared between the Crisis at Christmas, Salvation Army and the Christchurch Food Bank so please do bring lots of cash with you, as our card readers will not work outside! Extra lighting will be in place for this event. I am sure that if further information from the planning team is made available, it will appear on our website or in next week's pastoral letter. Please do come and join us at one of these times, no singing experience is needed, just a desire to sing your heart out. The really good news is that you do not need to pre book, just turn up on the day! Obviously nobody will be permitted to park in the Priory House car park for this event.

Finally may I draw your attention once again to Canon Charles' letter of last week concerning the collection being made for Jonathan Evans as he leaves us in January. Jonathan's last Sunday with us will be on 24th January and the Vicar will make a presentation to Jonathan and Alice at the end of the 10.00am Parish Sung Eucharist. Details of how to contribute towards this gift appear in last week's letter.