



The Parish of Christchurch

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

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For 20th December 2020

Dear Friends,

'A beam in the darkness: let it grow' (Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, Prologue)

And so we enter the final straight – the last few days of Advent, leading us up to Christmas Day. Even this year, in all its strangeness and with all its disruption of our familiar patterns of life, there are preparations to be made. Even if our routines and practices have to be altered this year, we will still discuss, plan, make ready. Will we be with the people we usually see at Christmas, or not? Will we be attending the same carol services, concerts, nativity services and Christmas Eucharist services that usually form part of our run-up to Christmas? Probably not – even if we are able to attend one of these events, it won't be quite the same this year. Will we be eating the same food and shopping for presents in the same places? Maybe not, depending on our ability to get to the shops and what stock the shops have this year. Even such a central part of our tradition as the service of Nine Lessons and Carols from King's College Cambridge on Christmas Eve (when my mother always has a special time to herself in the kitchen doing the final baking and preparing for Christmas Day's meals – no talking allowed!) will this year take place without a congregation present in the chapel.

There is, of course, some loss and some sadness in all this – we are right to feel the pain of being deprived of things that we love and cherish, especially where we are prevented from being with people we love. This is hard, coming as it does after such a long period of restrictions on our daily lives. We are right to mind about this and to care deeply about things that bring us joy and solace.

Yet I believe there is benefit to be gained as well. The unwelcome and unexpected changes that are forced on us might give us a different perspective on the timeless story of Christmas. We might listen to the story of the holy family's journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem and hear it differently. After all, this was surely not what either Mary or Joseph would have planned for the time of the birth of their child: forced to make a long journey, unable to stay where they wanted to stay, far from home and family, making do with what they found along the way, trusting to the kindness of strangers. We might also think of other Christmas celebrations taking place this year in places where people find themselves separated from family and home, where their usual Christmas food is not available, where there is no joyful singing. This year, perhaps, we may feel a little closer to the Christ child in the manger, displaced from his home by the events of the days; we may recognise something in his smallness, fragility, vulnerability and seeming powerlessness. We might feel the powerful attraction of what Malcolm Guite has called this 'tiny hope within our hopelessness'. We might feel a yearning for this small light in the darkness to grow.

And it will grow, if we give it the room to do so. If, in the busyness of all our preparations for Christmas, we make some room in our hearts for God, the light that shines in the darkness will grow bright, the mystery of the Word made flesh will gradually unfold, and then we shall know, deep within our hearts, that 'what has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of people' (John 1: 3-5). The darkness did not, and does not, overcome this light. Pray that it may be so, and make room: let it grow. *Marana tha*, come, Lord Jesus!

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ALONE FOR CHRISTMAS? – If you will be celebrating Christmas alone, or if you know of anyone else who will be, do please get in touch with one of the clergy. We are unable to offer the usual shared Christmas Day lunch, for obvious reasons, but we will be delighted to call you for a chat by phone to wish you a happy Christmas.

CHRISTMAS SERVICES – details of all the services over the Christmas period are on the parish website under 'Services and Events'. In brief:

- Carol Services on Sunday 20th and Tuesday 22nd at 6.30pm at the Priory, **tickets required** (we plan to make a recording of the Carol Service on 20th December and to put this online on the evening of 22nd)
- Carols in the Car Park on Weds 23rd at 3.00pm, 5.00pm and 7.00pm in the Priory Car Park. The entrance will open 30 mins before each session begins – please come in through the gate by the Tower, not the drive. You might like to bring a chair to sit on, and even to dress up in some (warm!) festive attire.
- Christmas Eve:
 - Said Eucharist at 11.00am at the Priory
 - BCP Holy Communion at 11.00am at St George's
 - Crib Service at 3.00pm **online only – live on Zoom** and then available via the website
 - Midnight Mass at 11.15pm at the Priory, **tickets required**
- Christmas Day:
 - BCP Holy Communion at 8.00am at the Priory
 - Eucharist at 9.30am at St George's
 - Sung Eucharist at 10.00am at the Priory, **tickets required** (this service will be live online)

Where **tickets** are required, these are free of charge and are available from the online booking office via the website or by phone: 01202 485804 (option 3) between 9.00am and 1.00pm (weekdays only).

For the Crib service on **Zoom**, please contact Heidi by email.

SUNDAY 27th DECEMBER – We will have just one service on Sunday 27th December: a Eucharist at 10.00am at the Priory. This will **not** be available online – there will be many other services available online that day if you are unable to attend the Priory.

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With my love and prayers for the week ahead,



Reverend Jonathan Evans