

The Parish of Christchurch

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



For 24th January 2021

Dear Friends,

'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life' (John 8: 12)

In this season of Epiphany, we think of various ways in which Jesus was made known in the world and to the world; ways in which he was revealed. The Feast of the Epiphany itself, of course, celebrates his revelation to the Magi and through them to the whole world – Jesus is King for all God's people. Then on the following Sunday, we celebrated Jesus' baptism, when he was publicly revealed to be the Son of God. Last Sunday, we heard the story of the calling of first Philip, and then, through Philip, of Nathaniel, who found himself to be already known by Jesus and in that 'being known' recognised Jesus to be the Son of God. This Sunday, we will hear the story of Jesus' first public miracle at the wedding in Cana, when he changed water into wine and thereby 'revealed his glory' with the result that his disciples believed in him (John 2: 11). And at the end of this Epiphany season, on 2 February, we will come again to Candlemas, when we remember Jesus' presentation in the Temple and his recognition by the elderly Simeon and Anna as the Messiah, the Saviour and, in the words of Simeon's song, 'a light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel' (Luke 2: 22-38).

It's that phrase from Simeon's song (which we know in our liturgy as the *Nunc Dimittis*) about Christ being a 'light for revelation' that caught my attention this week and made me think of the verse quoted above, where Jesus says, 'I am the light of the world'.

Perhaps I was just in a slightly gloomy mood after reading too much news, with reports of fighting and unimaginable suffering in Ethiopia and the rich world's apparent lack of concern. Or maybe I spent too long thinking about the risks of disunity and continued in-fighting within God's Church over issues as precious and delightful and life-giving as human identity and sexuality. Or maybe it was learning of a friend's serious illness, or the weather, or rising numbers of cases of coronavirus and the effects of lockdown on people young and old. Whatever the cause, I thought about Jesus' statement that whoever follows him will never walk in darkness, and I thought, 'So how is that going?' As we speak to our friends and family and neighbours, and as we look around at wider society, it does seem that quite a few are walking in darkness just at the moment, and for many, it is a very long and a very lonely sort of darkness.

I do know, deeply and surely, that Jesus is the light of the world and the one who brings life in abundance (John 10: 10), but I wonder whether sometimes I get confused and think of 'Jesus as light' in a wrong way. Sometimes, I think of Jesus as a bit like a torch – a device that sheds light and something that I can take and use to shine into places that for me are dark; places where I cannot see; places that cause me to fear. It is as if I think of Jesus as a powerful tool that I can use in my life to make things better for me. But that's not right: Jesus is not a tool that I can possess, control and use according to my own desires. Being a Christian is not about finding a special source of light which I then use as if it were my own and for my own benefit. No – what Jesus said was not that he gives us a light to take away and use as we think best, but that he is our light. He calls us to come to him and live in the light: 'come and see', 'follow me' (John 1: 39, 43).

The right way to think of Jesus as light, it seems to me, is that he is the light that illuminates all things, the light that gives existence itself its light and its life: 'What has come into being in him was life and the life was the light of all people' (John 1: 3-4). If we wish to see, to walk not in darkness but in the light, and if we wish to have life, then we need to allow ourselves to be drawn to the person of Jesus – to follow him, just as he said.

So when we experience darkness, we should not think that the battery in the torch has run out, or that the torch is broken, or that we are not using it correctly, but rather that we must draw closer to the light. That might be by making a journey, like the Magi. Or it might be by staying still and waiting, like Simeon and Anna. Or following a call, like Phillip and Nathanael. This Epiphany and always, allow God's light to fall on you; seek God's light; remain in God's light.

Thank you for all your kindness to me and to Alice and our family while we have been with you. We will miss you. We will pray for you. Come and visit us (there will be cake). God bless you all.



Reverend Jonathan Evans

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With characteristic modesty and lightness of touch, in that final paragraph Jonathan takes his leave of us in Christchurch. He will preside and preach at Sunday's 10.00am live-streamed Eucharist, before moving with Alice and the family to Bruton next week. I hope you will be able to join us for that service, during which the presentation of our gift to Jonathan and Alice will be made.

No two curacies are alike, for the simple reason that no two curates are alike. It has often been said that training a curate is a parish's gift to the Church of England: in this instance, it feels as if training this particular curate has been the Church of England's (and, indeed, God's) gift to the parish of Christchurch and to its people, including many who never cross the threshold of a church.

Each of us will have our reasons to be thankful, no doubt because the range of Jonathan's engagement with so many different areas of our ministry and mission has been remarkable. On a personal note, being his training incumbent has been one of the great privileges of my ministry, for which I am profoundly grateful. Now, as the Benefice of Bruton, Brewham, Pitcombe and Shepton Montague prepares to receive them, please hold Jonathan and Alice in your prayers, for this leave-taking and for their new beginnings, confident that the Good Shepherd goes before them and will lead and sustain them in the coming years. CS

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Brenda Marshall, a long-standing member of the congregation, also moves away this week. Over the past 20 years, Brenda has served as a member of the PCC, money counter, organiser of Sunday coffee, Friends' trustee, volunteer in the Cloisters Café, welcomer, sidesman and, for many years, lead concert steward. In thanking Brenda for her significant and multifaceted contribution to the life of this parish, I know you will join me in wishing her 'God speed' and every blessing as she moves to Derbyshire. CS

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Heidi Haagensen will also be leaving us on February 14, to go on to her new post. We want to give Heidi a tangible token of our thanks for the outstanding job she has done in the parish since her arrival in May 2018. To make a contribution to her leaving gift, please follow the following guidance:

- **by bank transfer**, please use: Account Name - P.C.C. of Christchurch No.2 Account; Sort Code 52-21-34; Account Number 52428001.
- Please use "Heidi" as the reference and email Ian Penny on prioryhouse@christchurchpriory.org,
- **by cheque**: please make cheques payable to P.C.C of Christchurch No.2. Account and mark for Ian's attention. If posted, to Priory House, Quay Road, BH23 1BU. Whether by post or by hand, please clearly mark "Heidi" on or in the envelope.
- **by cash**: please put in an envelope for Ian and bring to the Priory, clearly marked as above.

Thank you. CS