

# The Parish of Christchurch



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

*for Pentecost, Sunday 23 May, 2021*

Dear Friends,

“Come, Holy Spirit ... come, Holy Spirit ... come, Holy Spirit” – the threefold invocation to the Spirit that I shared with you a fortnight ago, with gratitude to Bishop Jonathan Frost for his example. On Pentecost we celebrate God’s answer to that prayer by sending the Holy Spirit on the first Christians.

They had been told the Spirit was coming: Jesus had promised as much only ten days earlier, when Jesus had also given them a commission: they were to be his witnesses, starting in the place where they were – for them Jerusalem, for us wherever we live – and from there to the ends of the earth. That we are members of the Christian family here is testimony to their faithfulness. But first they were to wait: only when the Spirit came from heaven would they have the power, the capacity and the guidance they needed to fulfil what Jesus had called them to be and to do. Without the Spirit, there would be no mission.

I am old enough to remember when it was very rare to hear any significant mention of the Holy Spirit, whether in sermons or in Church life generally. That this is no longer the case is in itself a cause for rejoicing. For we need the Spirit every bit as much today as they did in the beginning.

Inspired by the ‘third reading’ at Morning Prayer a few days ago, which featured an excerpt from Bishop John V. Taylor’s book, “The Go-Between God”, I was reminded that it has much more to teach us than could be contained in a single passage. (John V. Taylor was Bishop of Winchester from 1975-1985, to this diocese’s great and lasting benefit.)

“The Go-Between God” was first published in 1972; by the time it reached my bookshelves, it was already well-established as one of the most significant explorations on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. One of its key themes comes early on, where +Taylor introduces the concept of ‘beyond-ness’. He writes:

“The whole of our uneasy debate about the meaning of the word ‘God’ for modern man cries out, I believe, for a recovery of a significant doctrine of the Holy Spirit. That is where we must now begin our talk about God – God working anonymously and on the inside: the beyond in the midst.”

“The beyond in the midst” – what a striking image! It encapsulates the essence of Pentecost: the Holy Spirit, utterly ‘other’ and ‘beyond’, for the Spirit is God; and yet, also utterly ‘in the midst’, making his home in every Christian, in fulfilment of Jesus’ promise and, as we let him, uniting, inspiring, empowering, guiding and sustaining the community of Jesus’ followers.

It might be possible to assume this book on the Holy Spirit might be a purely spiritual or devotional guide, we soon learn that this “beyond in the midst” is more crucial than we could have imagined:

“I am writing this book out of a conviction that nothing is more needed by humanity today, and by the church in particular, than the recovery of a sense of ‘beyond-ness’ in the whole of life to revive the springs of wonder and adoration.”

He could hardly make the point more strongly. The reason he writes with such passion is evident from the first lines of the opening chapter:

“The chief actor in the historic mission of the Christian church is the Holy Spirit. He is the director of the whole enterprise. The mission consists of the things that he is doing in the world. In a special way it consists of the light that he is focussing upon Jesus Christ.

“This fact, so patent to Christians in the first century, is largely forgotten in our own. So we have lost our nerve and our sense of direction and have turned the divine initiative into a human enterprise.

'It all depends on me' is an attitude that is bedevilling both the practice and the theology of our mission in these days.

"That is precisely what Jesus forbade at the start of it all. They must *not* go it alone. They must *not* think that the mission is their responsibility."

There it is. This matters just because thinking rightly about and praying to the Holy Spirit is important: it's because everything to do with the Holy Spirit concerns our **mission** – or, rather, **Jesus'** mission, which he has entrusted to us, to each one of us. I cannot emphasise too strongly how important this is. We may be tempted to think that 'it's up to us'. Bishop John V. Taylor reminds us that this is not so.

It is the Holy Spirit who empowers God's people for ministry, mission, service and worship. It is the Spirit who gives to each one of us a range of different gifts to equip and build up the life of the church. And it is when the Spirit is poured out that "your sons and your daughters shall prophesy [i.e. tell out God's truth], your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions" (Joel 2.20).

These are promises we need to go on claiming and living by. There is no better day to renew our commitment to this than at Pentecost.

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We had hoped that this would be the Sunday when we might be able to welcome back the full choir to the Priory 10.00am Sung Eucharist. Sadly, that was blocked by a statement rushed out by the government a few days ago, that limited the number of amateur singers who could perform to six; this has provoked uproar among amateur choirs across the country. For now, many thanks to our musicians at the Priory and at St George's for the music which they are able to share with us.

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A reminder of the invitation to morning coffee or afternoon tea in the marquee on Priory House lawn, from Monday 24 May to Saturday 6 June (except Sunday 30). Please join us on one occasion for either: morning coffee and cake, between 10.30am and 12.00pm; or afternoon tea and cake, between 2.30pm and 4pm. This invitation is to everyone who is connected to the life, worship and mission of the parish.

There will be a maximum of 25 places at each sitting. There is no charge for attending; there will be an opportunity to make a donation towards the costs involved, but this is voluntary. To book your place, please either email Maureen Whiles on parishoffice@christchurchpriory.org or phone her between 9am and 1pm Monday to Friday on 01202 485804 (option 3). If you are coming with others, you can give Maureen all the names on the one email or phone call. As this will be on a first come/first booked basis, please consider a back-up time and day in case your first choice is already full.

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This week a statement was issued by Bishop Debbie that began: "Bishop Tim has today informed me that he will be stepping back from his role as Bishop of Winchester for the next six weeks, so that he can focus on discussions about future leadership and governance reform in the Diocese. I fully support his decision. Bishop Tim and Lambeth Palace have requested that, over this period, I temporarily take responsibility for the Diocese and I shall be working with the team at Wolvesey to ensure full continuity." It has since been announced that Bishop David is taking some leave in the coming weeks. Please keep the Diocese, Bishop Tim, Bishop David and Bishop Debbie in your prayers.

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Everything Bishop Taylor writes confirms that any attempt to 'manufacture' mission or impose it from above is bound to fail, or at the very least fall short. True mission and ministry – Jesus' mission and ministry – can only be discerned at ground level. So this Pentecost, and in the coming weeks and months, please join with me in asking the Holy Spirit to lead us into God's truth, and teach us to discern and follow God's plans and purposes for us here in Christchurch. "Come, Holy Spirit ... come, Holy Spirit ... come, Holy Spirit" Amen.

With every blessing,

