



## ST CHRISTOPHER'S 'SUSPENDED CHURCH' NEWSLETTER

Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> February 2021



### NEWS UPDATE

#### Vaccinations for the over 60s



The UK vaccination programme is continuing at a good pace. Samantha Ferguson has informed me that the Ribble House vaccination centre in Bamber Bridge is now offering the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine to anyone who is over sixty, who has not already been jabbed. Sam is currently working at the site, and will book anyone in who would like to receive the vaccine.

To take advantage of this you can contact Samantha directly by emailing [sam.ferguson@lscft.nhs.uk](mailto:sam.ferguson@lscft.nhs.uk), or phone 07951 571113. You will need your NHS number, and be aged over sixty in order to qualify.

### BIBLE READING – Philippians 2: 12-18

*Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose.*

*Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labour in vain. But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So, you too should be glad and rejoice with me.*

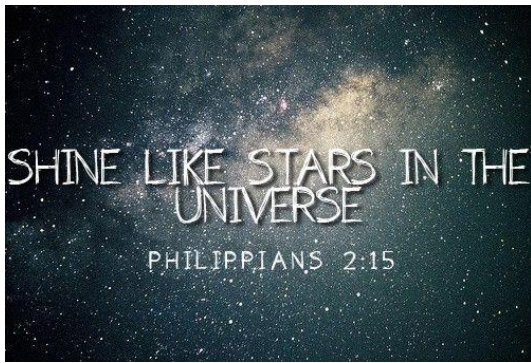
### THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE – written by Peter

#### The Perfect Christian?

Today's theme is called 'Shining like Stars.' It makes me think of the school motto at Lea Endowed School: "Let Everyone Shine." It only took me five years to realise that this motto uses the same three letters as the school's name!



When we talk about Christians being shining lights, I wonder what this makes you think of? You probably picture in your mind the model Christian, someone who is always showing kindness and love, someone who is always peaceful and caring, the sort of person who never has a bad word to say about anyone or anything. Like St Paul asks of the Philippians, a truly Christian person will surely “*do everything without complaining or arguing. They are blameless and pure, children of God without fault.*”



Does this perfect, brightly shining Christian, really exist? I can think of a few people I know who come pretty close, but in most cases us ‘normal’ folk are muddling through, doing our best whilst in reality struggling to be perfect examples of Christian character and conduct due to the strain and stresses of real life. Did Paul understand this when he asked the Philippians to *shine like stars in the universe* in a *crooked and depraved generation*?

And so we find that we are happy with the idea that there may be others who *shine like stars*, but when we start projecting this image of the ‘textbook Christian’ onto ourselves, we feel uncomfortable, because we recognise the gap between the ideal and the reality. We find ourselves asking – can us ordinary Christians *really* shine like stars in the universe?

### Having High Expectations

A couple of weeks ago I sent a somewhat critical email to Isaac’s form tutor at his secondary school, which I tried to word as carefully and sensitively as possible! Louisa and I were upset because during his form time that morning (via video link) the teacher had suggested that the reason Isaac had not completed all of his maths tasks was because he was ‘getting distracted’ at home, instead of knuckling down to his school work. As parents involved with his home-schooling we knew that this was certainly not the case. Isaac had been working hard every day in an effort to meet the relentless workload coming through from the school.

The teacher made a misjudgement in her comment towards Isaac, which I can accept. What bothered me most was the sense that this teacher seemed to expect the worst of him, along with some other members of his class. I know from my own experience of being a teacher that what you expect of a child is likely to be what you get. If you expect a child to behave badly, then the chances are they will, but if you expect them to give you their best, then they might just rise to it. This makes me think of another local school, Eldon Primary, whose motto is “*Eldon expects the best.*” As you may know, this school has won awards in recent years both locally and nationally. It is an approach that seems to work.



Paul expected the very best of the Philippians. They were his “joy and crown” (4:1). His words convey a genuine expectation that they will ‘*shine like stars in the universe,*’ as they ‘*hold out the word of life.*’ How was this going to happen? And how could Paul feel so confident about it?

### Focusing our lives on God

Firstly, Paul teaches them to show self-responsibility in their Christian lives by “*working out their salvation in fear and trembling.*” If we have a mature attitude towards our faith, we won’t be constantly comparing ourselves to others. Whether other people are shining more brightly than us won’t be our main concern, because our focus is to live out our own relationship with God. We know that God loves us, being confident

that God welcomes us through faith in His Son Jesus Christ who died for us on the cross. Nevertheless, he is a holy and awesome God, so a bit of ‘fear and trembling’ is appropriate.

It begins with recognising that God is God, and that we answer first to Him in the way that we live our life. If we want to shine brightly then we need to walk closely with our Lord, to be aware of his presence from day to day, giving time to prayer, and making time to listen to His word through the bible. I know this to be true in my own life, and I’ve seen it in the lives of some real ‘shining’ Christians that I’ve known, that the more I soak my mind in God’s word, the more I enjoy Christian songs and hymns, and the more fellowship I get with other Christians, the more likely I am to find that my thoughts and behaviours are in line with what I know deep down a ‘proper Christian’ ought to be.

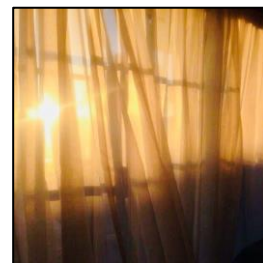
Continue to work  
out your salvation  
with fear and  
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act in order to  
fulfill his good  
purpose.

– PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13 –

No-one else can do it for us, though others may help. We have to ‘*work out our own salvation.*’ Different things may work for different people. Personally, I love playing worship music, and I love to use my ‘Alpha Bible in one Year’ app on my phone, especially at the end of the day when tiredness threatens to invade my mind with unhelpful thoughts. There is no one size fits all, it’s a case of whatever works for you. I find it encouraging how many people tell me that they read this weekly message, because it provides some refreshment for the soul (hopefully). In all these ways, and more, we can *work out our salvation* from day to day.

Secondly, Paul says that “*it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*” The real reason that Paul had confidence in the Philippians was not because he thought they were especially capable or talented, it was because he trusted in the God who was at work in them. The truth is that none of us is able to shine very brightly by ourselves, we can only shine outwardly when God shines his light within us.

We might like to picture a thin, worn-out looking curtain hanging in a window with the warm sun streaming onto it. That weary old curtain will let some light through into the room, especially if it is threadbare with a few holes in it. We too can be that curtain, which in itself is nothing impressive, yet the light finds a way through. We just need the light to shine on us.



### **Let *Everybody* Shine**

Those who shine like stars will inspire others to shine also. Paul described himself as being *poured out like a drink offering* on behalf of the Philippians. He laboured, he ran with all his might, in order to help them be the best that they could be. This was a source of joy to him, because he saw the Philippians growing in their faith and love. Seeing them *shine like stars in the universe* made all the toil and effort worthwhile.

So a truly Christian attitude is to be not only concerned about our own behaviours, but also to care about how much others are shining. To see others flourishing and *shining like stars* is the greater blessing. On this Valentine's Day, if we love someone, perhaps we will ask ourselves – how can I help them to really shine through the love that I show them?



### **Prayers – Written by Jim Berry**

Lord God, we praise you for your greatness, which gives us courage,  
and your mercy which fills us with hope.

For your truth which enlarges our understanding of you and your purpose,  
and for your glory which enriches our worship.

We praise you that when we feel lost, uncertain and afraid, your mighty presence shows us the way,  
and when we are empty you supply joy, courage and life in abundance.

Lord in your mercy:

**Hear our prayer.**

We praise you, our Creator, Sustainer, and Lord.

We praise you for the life you have given us and for your promise  
to share every moment of our journey with us.

We praise you that in Christ you have given us the assurance  
that no matter who we are or where we go you will be there.

Lord we praise you that even in the midst of our anxieties, doubts and fears,  
during this current Covid pandemic we can place our trust in you, the giver of life, hope and peace.

Lord in your mercy:

**Hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who are shining like stars during this pandemic; for doctors and nurses, for our  
National Health Service and for all involved in the vaccination programme.

For Clergy and Churches who offer pastoral care.

For those who offer care in the community, and for neighbours and friends going the extra mile  
to make life easier in lockdown. For funeral directors who have to deal with bereaved families at this  
very difficult time. And for all whose lives demonstrate the compassion of Christ.

Lord let them feel the strength of your presence at this time.

Lord in your mercy:

**Hear our prayer.**

Father, give us what it takes to respond to the good news in Christ in such a way  
that those around us can walk in his light of hope and joy, knowing he is Lord.

Jesus Christ, light of the world, shine into us and out of us,  
with your healing light, and help us to shine like stars in the midst of a dark and troubled world.

Merciful Father; **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**