



ST CHRISTOPHER'S 'CATCH-UP CHURCH' NEWSLETTER

Sunday 13th December 2020

NEWS UPDATE



Pre-Booking for Carol Services

Thank you to those who have booked a place at our Carol Services by contacting Hilary. As of Sunday 13th December, we have the followed number of places remaining.

- Sunday 20th December 6.30pm Carol Service – 14 left
- Thursday 24th December 4.00pm Crib Service – 10 left
- Thursday 24th December 6.00pm Crib Service – Plenty of spaces



To reserve a place email admin@stchristopherslea.org, or phone 01772 724384.



The spacing and safety at these services has been carefully considered, because we do not want anyone catching the coronavirus over Christmas (or at any time for that matter).

Please follow the guidance of the stewards at these services so that everyone can stay safe.

Other Services over the Christmas Period (expected to be quieter)

- Sunday 20th December 9.30am – Holy Communion service with Junior Church. No pre-booking needed, but if a child is attending Junior Church it is helpful to let Dawn or Louise know.

youngpeople@stchristopherslea.org.



- Thursday 24th December 10.30am Holy Communion – will run as usual. No need to pre-book.
- Thursday 24th December – 11.30pm Midnight Communion AT EMMANUEL. All are welcome.
- Friday 25th December 10.00am Christmas Day Communion. No need to pre-book.
- Sunday 27th December 9.30am – First Sunday of Christmas, service of the word. No Junior Church.

- Thursday 31st December 10.30am – NO MIDWEEK SERVICE ON NEW YEAR'S EVE.

From Sunday 3rd January things will be back to 'normal' (whatever that is).

Newsletters 20th & 27th December

Next week (20th Dec) the weekly newsletter will be a bit different. We are sending out a little Christmas magazine for a bit of fun, that will include a quiz from Beryl, an acrostic poem from George Gover, and an article from George Knowles. We hope you enjoy it.

Then on 27th December there will be no church newsletter, after 40 weeks in a row without a break!

Luv Preston Food Bank – An Update from Debra Foster

Hello everyone,

I would like to say a huge thank you to everyone from the team at Luv Preston Foodbank for your continued support and donations throughout this year.

I would just like to ask that if possible, we can all reach out again and donate to those families who will have no food in the house during this festive period. If you are able to bring a donation to church when you come or drop one off before the service on Thursday (church is open from 9.30) we can bring a smile and a full tummy to those that have nothing. If anyone would like a donation collecting please let me know via Peter or by emailing me direct at d.foste2880@hotmail.co.uk

For those of you that ask what is needed, at the moment we are particularly in need of cereal, tinned fruit, rice pudding / custard and cartons of milk, however whatever you have in your cupboard that you won't use (as long as it is in date) will be more than welcome.

Luv Preston are currently distributing at least 40 packs a week which we are expecting to increase as the schools break up for Christmas.

Thank you again, Debra

Christmas Day Dinners

Ashton Methodist Church have teamed up with 'Here for Humanity' to provide 100 home-delivered Christmas Dinners, for anyone over the age of 65 who is on their own on Christmas Day. There are expected to be more people in this position this year given that some are shielding due to the pandemic.

If you would like to benefit from this generous scheme, then don't be shy! They have plenty of meals going spare. If you get in touch with me I will pass your request onto the organiser [Peter].



Christmas Day Dinner

On Christmas day Community Owned will be teaming up with Millers Taxis, Ashton Methodist Church & Ashton & Riversway PACT to Provide 100 Meals for people who are Elderly & Shielding Over the Festive Period

Included

- Full Hot Christmas Dinner
- Christmas Pudding
- Festive Treats
- Festive Gift Basket/Bag
- Childs Handmade Xmas Card
- Information Leaflet Thanking Donors & Offering Services

Do You Know Someone Who Will Require A hot meal On Christmas Day?
Email PrestonHereForHumanity@gmail.com

Can You Donate Items That is Commonly Used On Christmas Day or Monetary Donations to Buy these Things?

Criteria

- *Over 65
- *Shielding
- *Alone Christmas
- *Want a Hot Meal
- *Able to Collect From Door Step

Community Teams Working Together to Achieve Greater Results
Preston "Here For Humanity"

Brought To You By...
Community Owned,
Millers Taxis,
Ashton Methodist Church,
Ashton & Riversway PACT

Cleaner Living Tip – Recyclable Wrapping Paper!

Let's be sure to use wrapping paper that can be recycled this Christmas. Some wrapping paper is plastic backed, and cannot be added to your paper recycling. There are two ways of testing to see if your paper is recyclable:

1. **SCRUNCH IT.** If the paper bounces back open, then it is plastic coated and cannot be recycled.
2. **TEAR IT IN BOTH DIRECTIONS** – Paper that is plastic backed will only tear in one direction. If you can tear the paper both vertically and horizontally, then it is recyclable.

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE – by Jim Cam

Bible Reading – John 1:6 -8, 19-28

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.



This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, 'I am not the Messiah.' And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No.' Then they said to him, 'Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' He said,
'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,
"Make straight the way of the Lord" ',
as the prophet Isaiah said.

Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, 'Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?' John answered them, 'I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.' This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

The Power of a Voice

A few weeks ago we had the TV final of The Voice where the competition got down to the last 4 finalists. In their different ways they were all very good. What came across though was just how important a part their families had played, and continued to play, in their lives. They clearly had loved, supported and encouraged them, and at least two of the contestants had a church background where their gift for singing had found opportunity for expression.



Well after being narrowed down to just two contenders – after singing a duet with a song called “Hold back the river” and finally singing, “Angels” – the name of the winner was a young woman, just 18 years old, calledBlessing! She was a very good singer who put her heart and soul into her singing, and as such was a “blessing” to all who heard her.

Now the voice has great power. It can convey wisdom, knowledge, truth, compassion, love, emotion, that can speak to others, to their hearts and very being. It might be through a folk song, a protest song, a romantic ballad, a rock song, a classical chorus, a sacred

hymn or song. Hearing something sung can take us to somewhere else. I guess that's why singing and songs are so popular.

But for lesser mortals not possessing a good singing voice, we nevertheless do have a voice that, when used in the right spirit, has the potential to be a real positive influence and encouragement to those who would listen to us. Our voice can make a tremendous difference.

The Bible records within its pages various individuals who down the ages used their voices, not so much to sing, but to speak of God and the message He wanted people to hear. The prophets of old were called to speak to the people of their time. Often the message involved a call to change direction in their lives, in order to head off catastrophe and to have a secure hope for the future.



“The voice of one crying in the Wilderness”

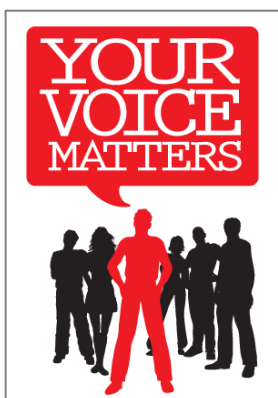
In our gospel reading today John the Baptist was questioned about who he was. After going out of his way to state who he wasn't, he then went on to say that he was simply *“the voice of one crying in the wilderness. Make straight the way of the Lord,”* in accordance with the prophet Isaiah. He humbly spoke of another who was coming after him, of whom he was *“not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.”*

John used his voice to speak of, and testify to, the light. As John the gospel writer declared:

‘John the Baptist came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.’ (John 1:6–8)

And JESUS is THE LIGHT. That's what John the Baptist wanted everyone to know. It really didn't matter who *he* was, John just saw himself as “a voice” announcing this important message.

Your Voice Matters



Well what of us today? We all have people in our lives whom we can influence, whether at home or at work. Some of us may be parents, or grandparents. What I want to say to you is –“Your voice matters.” What you say to your children or grandchildren, or whoever else, can make all the difference to those lives!

Goodness knows the COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions this year have had a disruptive impact on families and friends. Yet in these challenging times we have perhaps, like no other time, come to appreciate and value just how precious our relationships are, particularly in our families. When I think back to when my own children were young, one of the most precious times was reading them a bedtime story, followed by a prayer. Reading stories was really enjoyable, even though they might have been half asleep by the time we got to the prayer bit. Using my voice in this way, I was able to convey love, warmth, and security to them each night through the bedtime routine.

The Light still shines in the Darkness



As we approach the end of 2020, a year in which there has been much darkness with the pandemic, let's also think about those things that have lightened our hearts. The sacrificial work of hospital and care home staff, of neighbours looking out for neighbours. An increased appreciation of the beauty of God's creation through the seasons. In all these ways, and more, the light of love has shone through the darkness. This is the message of the Christmas story, that light has shone in the darkness with the birth of God's Son – Emmanuel, God with us.

Christingles are a great symbol of this, with the candle symbolising Jesus as the Light of the World. All of our Christmas traditions should help us remember and celebrate that God has entered our world and shone His light into the darkness; and most importantly, this was not a one-off event! The light of Christ still shines in the darkness, and the darkness shall never overcome it.

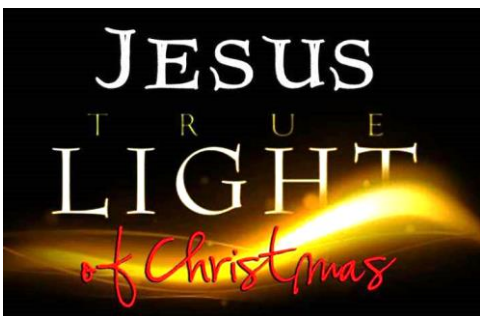
In our house we have a nativity crib set with fixed figures, and this year we have bought our little grandson a wooden crib set with wooden figures so that he'll be able to play with of all the animals and people associated with the Christmas story. He's still very young, just 2 ¼ years old, but I think this will be right up his street. It'll be a fun way to introduce him to the Christmas story and its characters, with Jesus right at the centre, God's gift to us.



Receiving the Light, and sharing the Light

John the Baptist was a witness to the light, and that light is Jesus Christ. He was a voice crying out in the wilderness. He pointed others to Jesus. As Christians we have a message, a gospel story to share, which includes the birth of Jesus as Saviour and goes on to tell of God's gracious love supremely shown to us on the cross. There God's love shines out – calling to each of us, meeting us in our deepest need, where our sins are dealt with, where forgiveness, reconciliation and new life are graciously offered to us and all who turn to him.

Here new life can begin with God. His light can shine into the darkest places and begin to straighten out distorted lives, as we repent of our sins and turn to Him.



We may not be great singers – with the exception perhaps of St. Christopher's own Samantha Ferguson who'll be singing for us at our carol service – yet with God's help may we seek to use our voices well, to tell afresh the story of God's love in the light of Christ, that our words may be a blessing to our families and to all who hear them.

So may the story of Christ and the light of God's love shine ever brighter through our lives to others, now as we approach this Christmas festivity, and beyond, to His praise and glory. **AMEN.**



Prayers – Written by Hilary Holderness

Heavenly Father this year we have had to contend with a lot of firsts –
social distancing, wearing masks, hand sanitiser, not meeting up
with friends and family for long periods of time.

We give thanks that we have found ways of sharing your light

in this dark time, because your light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it.

Lord in your mercy;

Hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father today is the third Sunday of Advent where the pink candle has been lit on our advent crown. Some churches refer to this as ‘Gaudete Sunday’, a Sunday where we are nearly at Christmas and we can rejoice that it won’t be long before we celebrate Christ’s birth. Let us take inspiration from John the Baptist, and continue to prepare for your birth. Let us be a voice of hope that others can hear.

Lord in your mercy;

Hear our prayer.

This week we have all shared the wonderful news that the coronavirus vaccine has started to be administered to people throughout our country. Now we have moved into the next phase in our common fight against this virus, let us all remember that we are not out of the woods yet, as it will take many months to vaccinate everyone. The vaccine has given us hope that we can at some point in the future meet up with our families – hug our grandchildren, and our friends.

Lord in your mercy;

Hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father, as the Brexit talks seem to be reaching stalemate, we pray that for all those involved in importing, exporting, food supply chains, and the travel industry, that they can work their way through the minefield of new rules which will follow, and are able to continue in their livelihoods.

Lord in your mercy;

Hear our prayer.

Today let us pray for all those we know who are ill, whether with Covid or some other health problem.

Let us all think of one person today who needs our prayers...

We also pray for those who have recently lost a family member or friend and may not have been able to grieve at a funeral. We pray that they can feel surrounded by your love in the rawness of their grief.

May my heart be at peace,
and my mind be at rest.

May I be confident in who you are,
and share God’s gifts of light, hope and grace,
with those whom I meet and those I pray for.



Merciful Father; **accept these prayers for the sake of you Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**