



ST CHRISTOPHER'S 'SUSPENDED CHURCH' NEWSLETTER

Sunday 6th December 2020



NEWS UPDATE

Pre-Booking for Carol Services

Over Christmas the following special services are being run.



- Sunday 20th December 6.30pm Carol Service
- Thursday 24th December 4.00pm & 6.00pm Crib Services
- Friday 25th December 10.00am Christmas Day Holy Communion

The services that WILL REQUIRE PRE-BOOKING are the Carol Service on December 20th, and the two Crib Services on Christmas Eve. These are the services where we anticipate reaching high capacity. We have designed a seat numbering system whereby you and other members of your party (who are part of the same household or bubble) will be allocated a seat number. This is the best way to enable the most people to safely attend.

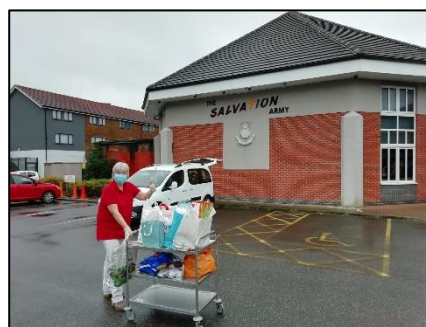
Unfortunately, congregational singing is still not permitted, even at a carol service. We are allowed to have a solo singer leading carols from the front, which Samantha Ferguson has kindly agreed to do on the evening of Sunday 20th December.

We have also considered the needs of younger children at the crib services. On one side of the hall we will create some family sized 'boxes' that will enable those with a baby or toddler to have a bit of space to play with toys, whilst keeping appropriate distance. If you think this would be useful for your family group, please let Hilary know.



*To book a place at one of these services email admin@stchristopherslea.org, or phone 01772 724384.

Salvation Army Toy Collection



What an amazing sight it was to see all of the toy hampers and food parcels being assembled

at the Salvation Army last week. Thank you to those who contributed towards this cause, it really is a wonderful work.

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE



Bible Reading – Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

*As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,
‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;
the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
“Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight” ’,*

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, ‘The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’

If Jesus came to your house

As you may know the word ‘Advent’ means ‘coming,’ based on the root latin word.

What if Jesus really was coming, in the next few days? How would we respond? Here’s a poem which ponders this question.

If Jesus came to your house
To spend some time with you,
If He came unexpected,
I wonder what you'd do.

Oh, I know you'd give your nicest room
To such an honored guest
And all the food you'd give to Him
Would be the very best.

And you would keep assuring Him
You're glad to have Him there –
That serving Him in your home
Is joy beyond compare.

But when you saw Him coming,
Would you meet Him at the door
With arms outstretched in welcome
To your heavenly visitor?



Or would you have to change your clothes

Before you let Him in

Or hide some magazines

And put the Bible where they'd been?

Would you hide your worldly music

and put some hymn books out?

Could you let Jesus walk right

in, or would you rush about?

And I wonder – if the Savior

spent a day or two with you,

Would you go right on doing, the

things you always do?

Would you go right on saying, the

things you always say?

Or would life for you continue

as it does from day to day?

Would you take Jesus with you

everywhere you go?

Or would you maybe change your

plans for just a day or so?

Would you be glad to have Him

meet your closest friends?

Or would you hope they stay away,

until His visit ends?

Would you be glad to have Him

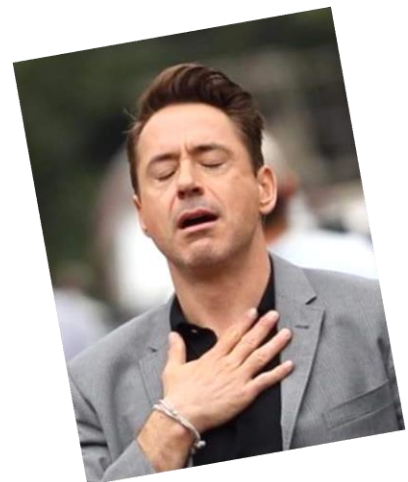
stay forever on and on?

Or would you sigh with great
relief when He at last was gone?

It might be interesting to know,

the things that you would do,

If Jesus came in person, to spend
some time with you.



Making room for new gifts



If Jesus came to my house, he would find there are a lot of toys cluttering the place. Would I be embarrassed about this?

Probably a little! We are fortunate to live in a big home, as is often the case with vicarages, and our three children love to play with toys, especially lego in Isaac's case.

Every year before Christmas we find ourselves clearing out toys which the children have grown out of, in anticipation that Santa will bring some new ones. This week we let go of Meredith's 'jumperoo,' which she has outgrown now. It always feels a little poignant departing with toys that the children have enjoyed in the past, but we do it in order to make room for something new.



This helps me think about what Advent is all about. John the Baptist told people to get ready for God's coming, to '*prepare the way of the Lord.*' How were they expected to do this? By repenting of their sins and being baptised. You see, Jesus really *is* coming to our house, but not to our physical home made of bricks and mortar – he comes to dwell in our hearts. So Advent is a time for getting ready to welcome a special guest, and we might wish to clear out a few things in order to make more room for his arrival.

Could we make more room for Jesus?

Perhaps this year, in light of our more restricted circumstances, there will be less excess in terms of people's Christmas consumerism, and a bit more focus on remembering the birth of Christ (you never know). We can all get caught up in the December madness, myself included, and then we find ourselves struggling to make space in our minds for Jesus, not just space in our schedule. If that *room for Jesus* is lacking, do we need to clear out a few of the unnecessary or redundant things?



I am always amused when I read about John the Baptist wearing camel's hair, and eating locusts and wild honey. I don't think we are expected to copy his diet, which doesn't sound the most appetising. And yet, what John's lifestyle does convey is that there was plenty of room for God because he lived simply. His life was uncluttered (unlike my home), so he could be totally devoted to God and full of the Holy Spirit.

Could we clean up a bit?

The biggest obstacle to receiving Jesus at Christmas is when our hearts and minds are full of sin and ungodliness. This is why John the Baptist preached repentance, and Jesus after him. Some of the things that fester in our home are not just wasting space, they are spreading dirtiness and decay. If we can clean up things like selfishness, greed, anger, resentment, gossip, or envy, we will create a more welcoming place for Jesus to come and stay.



The irony is that with all the pressures on us to create the perfect Christmas, including financial pressures, December can be one of the most stressful months of the year, and we can easily become self-absorbed and start losing patience with others around us. Family arguments may occur, and we are prone to envy when we see everybody else's perfect looking

Christmas displayed on their Facebook pages!

If this is how we do Advent then we are unlikely to be in the best place for receiving Jesus into our heart when he comes, so let's resolve now that we will keep a check on our spiritual health through Advent, and as soon as we recognise unhealthy feelings or attitudes creeping in we will turn to God and get them cleaned up.

A Warm welcome is more important than a pristine home

And now for the really good news. Our 'heart-home' does not have to be perfect in order for us to receive Jesus as our Saviour and friend. Christ was born into messy and dirty stable – He is not fussy. He came to comfort and help ordinary people whose lives include a bit of mess. What matters is that we welcome Him, not that we are immaculate persons.



You could walk into somebody's spotless home, and yet be made to feel unwelcome by the host.

Likewise, you can visit someone whose home is in need of some attention, yet be made to feel really welcome.

So just invite Jesus in, and if there's a bit of cleaning up to do He will help you with it – that's what Jesus does best! However well we prepare for Jesus' coming through Advent we will never be perfect this side of heaven. Thankfully JESUS REALLY LOVES US, and He takes us as we come. He is more interested in hearts that humbly recognise their need, than he is in those who think they are already squeaky clean.

As one of our Christmas carols puts it – *“Where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in.”* So let him in, even if your home is a bit cluttered, like mine.

We can always receive more of the Holy Spirit



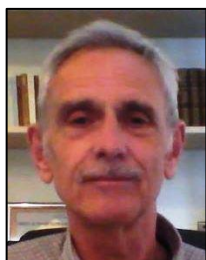
John the Baptist said that the one coming after him (Jesus) *“will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.”* This is what we really mean when we talk about receiving Jesus at Christmas. He comes to us in the person of the Holy Spirit, because they are one and the same.

As I reflect on this, I know that I was powerfully filled with the Holy Spirit as a teenager; you might say that I had a Holy Spirit 'baptism' experience. And yet, as Advent comes around each year, I know that I can always make more

room in my heart from the Holy Spirit. Ever since that experience at the age of fifteen the Lord has been removing more and more of the unwanted clutter inside, and cleaning out more and more dirty corners, so that there is ever-increasing room for Him. The biggest new spaces are freed up when I find greater healing for past sins, more ability to forgive others, and when I simply accept that *I really am deeply loved*. For some reason accepting that God really loves us, and allowing His Spirit to flood our very soul, is a challenge. We put up barriers inside that can be hard to break down (but not too hard for God).

So whether you have been a Christian for a year or for a lifetime, the annual spiritual ‘de-clutter’ and ‘tidy up’ that Advent offers is another blessed opportunity to receive more of God’s Holy Spirit, and there truly is no greater gift. So get ready – and when He comes, welcome Him wholeheartedly.

Prayers – Written by Jim Cam



Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for the gift of your Son Jesus Christ,
whose coming to this world was proclaimed by the prophets of old,
and who was born for us in lowliness and poverty at Bethlehem.

As we make ready in these challenging and necessarily restricted circumstances to
celebrate his birth, fill our hearts with your own joy and peace, and enable us to welcome
and proclaim him as Saviour.

Lord in your mercy;

Hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father, strengthen your Church in the name of Jesus,
to know the power of the Saviour, of God with us.

Hold us fast in the faith that enabled John the Baptist to perform your will in his life and ministry.

So may we be faithful to proclaim your mighty work in Christ,
in the crib, and on the cross, and in the world today.

Lord in your mercy;

Hear our prayer.

We pray for all who bear the heavy responsibility of government among the nations in these challenging times. Make straight, Lord, the crooked places of the world and lead the nations into the way of peace. Strengthen those who work for relief, healing, peace and justice. May our own government be enabled to make wise decisions and policies that protect and sustain the vulnerable, the poor, those with physical, emotional or mental illness, and those facing an uncertain future with economic hardship or unemployment.

So may your will be done for the good of all.

Lord in your mercy;

Hear our prayer.

Father, give to us and all your people,

In times of anxiety, serenity;

In times of hardship, courage;

In times of uncertainty, patience;

And at all times a quiet trust in your wisdom and love.

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