Sunday, 20 December

Dear Friends,

The weeks seem to fly by. We now have a Christmas tree, with ornaments given by friends over the years and each with a memory. The fairy doll made by Judy's Nana 75 years ago still takes pride of place. It's a little dishevelled and faded now but with original blue silk bloomers. All the parcels are posted. The cards not yet. We wait to see if it might be a white Christmas. Looking a little on the sunny side now. We are thinking lots of FaceTime with our grandchildren.

Christmas this year is set to be a little more challenging for most. We can't get together with family and friends in the ways we are used to and really enjoy. Our health, especially that of older friends and family, continues to be a worry as we navigate this second wave of coronavirus. We are not quite sure how we should respond to the lifting in restrictions over Christmas. We want to be sensible but we also want to enjoy being with family and friends.

PRAYER
Dear Lord, give us the wisdom to stay safe this Christmas.
Help us to enjoy without endangering
Amen

The first Christmas also took place when times were challenging. The Israelites had lost their sovereignty and were living under Roman occupation. The Romans were compelling everyone - old, ill and pregnant alike - to go to the town where they were born for a census. It was into this difficult time that our God came to earth to be with us. He wanted to save us and guide us through this life. He came as an ordinary person, like you and me, not as a great privileged leader, so he could learn what it was like to be us. He didn't come in a blaze of glory, but quietly, being born in a stable. Not many people knew he had arrived, but those who did were filled with joy and worshipped him, poor shepherds and rich wise men alike,

CAROL

How silently, how silently
The wondrous gift is given
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His heaven
No ear may hear His coming
But in this world of sin
Where meek souls will receive Him
Still the dear Christ enters in

Basically there were three different sorts of responses to Jesus' birth on the first Christmas and these are mirrored by three different sorts responses we can have to his birth this Christmas.

Most people didn't realise that Jesus had been born and didn't know who he really was. For them his birth was irrelevant. There were a few people, like Herod, who recognised the great threat Jesus posed to their way of life and to their power base. They tried to get rid of him. Then there were those whose eyes and ears were open to what was happening. They didn't really understand, but they knew that on that first Christmas something very special had happened - the saviour of the world had been born. They found him and worshipped him.

PRAYER
Lord Jesus Christ,
your birth at Bethlehem draws us to kneel in wonder
at heaven touching earth:
accept our heartfelt praise as we worship you,
our Saviour and our eternal God.
Amen

CAROL
All glory be to God on high
and on the earth be peace;
good will henceforth from heaven to men
begin and never cease.

Although we are living in difficult times, we are trying to offer lots of opportunities to visit Bethlehem this Christmas, to wonder at and worship the baby Jesus.

This year we have 'Christingle in a Bag' kits with a service sheet to make our own Christingles at home. If you would like one let us know and we will get a bag to you.

You are very welcome to join us tomorrow, Sunday 20th, for Advent Communion at Christ Church at 9:30 am. At 11 am we are attempting our very first virtual 'Nine Lessons and Carols' on zoom, in which we read the bible passages surrounding Jesus' birth and sing beloved carols that help us reflect on the wonders that took place. Please do let Judy know judyknott3@gmail.com. if you would like to receive an invitation.

Our first Christingle service this year was last Thursday at St Michael's School. We are really looking forward to the two, ticket only, Christingle services at St Mary's tomorrow, which are now booked out. There is still an opportunity on Christmas Eve to join our Zoom Christingle at 4 pm as well as our Zoom Crib service at 2 pm. If you would like to come to either the zoom Christingle or Crib service, let Judy know and we will send an invitation.

As always, Christmas day begins with Midnight Mass. This will be at both St Michael's, Foulridge and St Mary's this year. It starts at 11:45 pm on Christmas Eve and will last about 40 minutes. Then finally we meet at Christ Church at 10am for a short relaxed Christmas Day communion service.

This Christmas, do call by in Church or on zoom if you can. It will be lovely to see you.

THE UNENDING CHRISTMAS STORY

We've often heard the story of Jesus and His birth.
We use the phrase quite freely: "The Saviour of the earth!"
But do you know the meaning? And do you know it's true?
And do you know the birth of Jesus happened just for you?
And do you know He loves you, and that is why he came?
If there were only you on earth, He still would do the same!
For yes, He thinks you're worth it!
And yes, His love is real.
And yes, today, He knows exactly what it is you feel.
So don't just hear a story: He wants you to be part
Of this year's special chapter when you let Him in your heart.
Just open up and listen to what God has to say.
Then be a part of the unending story, ….from today.

Take good care and keep safe. Please do phone, text or mail if you need anything, even if just for a chat. It is always good to hear how folk are doing. You are always in my prayers.

Have a wonderful Christmas and a very happy, healthy and safe New Year.

With love and blessings, Rev John