

Sunday Services across the Team

All events in our Team are currently cancelled in line with the national guidelines for all churches across the country issued by the Church of England.

St. Bartholomew's Church will be open for a service each Sunday at 11:00am / St. George's at 9:15am from 6th December. Guidelines about face coverings / distancing / signing in etc. will all still apply.

OFFICE HOUR HAS BEEN SUSPENDED IN LINE WITH SOCIAL DISTANCING MEASURES. For all enquiries relating to baptism and weddings, and for other routine matters, please contact the Rector, details below.

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St Thomas	vacancy	

www.westhoughtonchurches.org.uk

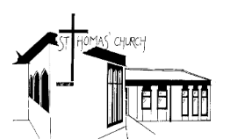
Follow us on Twitter @Wparishchurch and on Facebook

Items for inclusion in future newsletters should be sent to the parish office:
westhoughtonparish@outlook.com
or given to Edward McHale, churchwarden and Director of Music

www.westhoughtonchurches.org.uk



Parish of St Bartholomew
Westhoughton
St Bartholomew St Thomas
St George



NEWSLETTER - DECEMBER 2020

*"Hark, the herald angels sing,
Don't forget your face cov'ring"*

In those days, a decree went out from the Emperor that all the world should be registered as part of a "track and trace" system. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph and Mary went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to the city of David called Bethlehem as both were in tier 2 moderate risk areas where non-essential travel was allowed. Having quarantined on their arrival for 14 days, Mary came to deliver her son. She wrapped him in the bands of cloth which she'd been stockpiling, as baby clothes had been classed as "non-essential items" so couldn't be sold and laid him in a manger as the inn had been closed under lockdown rules.

*"While Shepherds watched their flocks by night,
All distanced on the ground,
An angel in a mask appeared
And passed the hand gel round."*

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields [as exercise outdoors was permitted] keeping a socially distanced watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them and said, "If there are over six of you here from more than two separate households not in a bubble, you'll have to disperse." And suddenly there was with the angel an appropriately size group of the heavenly host, saying [as singing was strictly forbidden]

*"Glory to God in the Highest
And hands, face, space to all people on earth."*

The shepherds said to one another, let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place. So they went with haste, formed a socially distanced queue outside the stable, signed in, sanitised their hands, put on their face covering and saw the child lying in the manger from a 2 metre distance before leaving via a different door.

*“We three Kings of Orient are
Quarantined, we can’t travel far,
What we’ve done –
Sent gifts via Amazon
Rating it good, one star.”*

In the time of Herod, wise men from the east arrived asking, “Where is this child that has been born? For we have seen the press conference and have come to pay him homage.” When King Herod heard this, he was frightened and called together all the chief scientists and special advisers and inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They showed him the latest projections and told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea as the prophets wrote in table 7, appendix 2 under graph 6; next slide, please.”

Then Herod sent the wise men to search for the child as it was deemed essential travel. Not entering the house, to prevent separate households mixing, they saw the child through a perspex screen and offered their gifts of hand sanitiser, face coverings and personal protective equipment.

And having been warned in a dream, they left for their own country by another road to maintain the one-way systems in place.

★
For
unto
you is
born this
day in the
city of David
a saviour, which
is Christ the Lord.
Luke
2:11

Update:

From Sunday 6th December, we'll re- open St. George's and St. Bartholomew's churches for our weekly services at 9:15am and 11:00am each Sunday. The guidelines we were used to before the recent lockdown will all still apply.

There will be a number of special services over the Christmas / New Year period, so do look out for when and where those are going to be.

The online services continue each week and we'll keep sending out the weekly Pewsheets Plus with readings, prayers and other information for the week ahead.

As you'd expect there's the usual Daft Questions Answered which this month looks at what the Advent candles are all about.

Hymn of the Month also looks at one of the great Advent hymns. If you're an organist, you'll appreciate Advent and Epiphany which have a really great set of cracking hymns associated with the seasons. Pentecost, where we have the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is surprisingly disappointing hymn-wise.

Plus there are a pile of Christmas cartoons to keep us amused.

We hope to see everyone again each Sunday and many thanks to all those who are putting in the time and effort to make these services happen despite all the restrictions.

Keep safe & well
Ed

To receive these pewsheets, newsletters or special events leaflets electronically, please e-mail westhoughtonparish@outlook.com



So, what are Advent candles all about and why is one of them pink?

The word “Advent” is derived from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning “coming.” Most know Advent today as a time of anticipation and expectation of the birth of Christ. Advent was first marked, however, in the 4th and 5th centuries as a time of fasting and prayer for new Christians. The first mention of Advent occurred in the 4th century at a meeting of church leaders called the Council of Sargossa. It gradually developed into a season that stretched across the month of December. The Advent season not only symbolizes the waiting for Christ's birth but also for his final return.

The Advent wreath first appeared in Germany in 1839. A Lutheran minister working at a mission for children created a wreath out of the wheel of a cart. He placed twenty small red candles and four large white candles inside the ring. The red candles were lit on weekdays and the four white candles were lit on Sundays. Another Advent candle option is a single candle with twenty-four marks on the side--the candle is lit each day and allowed to melt down to the next day's mark. Eventually, the Advent wreath was created out of evergreens, symbolizing everlasting life in the midst of winter. The circle reminds us of God's unending love and the eternal life He makes possible. Additional decorations, like holly and berries, are sometimes added. Their red colour points ahead to Jesus' sacrifice and death on the cross, shedding his blood for our sins.

The most common Advent candle tradition, however, involves four candles around the wreath, either red or three red / purple and one rose pink with a central white candle. A new candle is lit on each of the four Sundays before Christmas with the white one lit on Christmas Day.

In some traditions they represent hope, faith, joy, peace with the central one representing light and purity. They can also be known as the Prophet's candle, Bethlehem's candle, Shepherd's candle, Angel's candle and Christ's candle although this looks more at Christmas and takes away the symbolism of Advent.

In many Catholic and Protestant churches, the most popular colours for the four surrounding Advent candles are violet and rose, corresponding with the colours of the liturgical vestments for the Sundays of Advent. In the church, violet / purple is the historic liturgical colour for three of the four Sundays of Advent: violet is the traditional colour of penitential seasons. In the Roman Catholic church, rose pink is the liturgical colour for the Third Sunday of Advent, known as Gaudete Sunday from the Latin word meaning "rejoice", the first word of the traditional entrance prayer (called the introit) for the Mass of the third Sunday of Advent; it is a pause in the penitential spirit of Advent.

In The Church of England, we follow the readings set for each Sunday and light each candle focussing on

- Advent 1 The prophets telling of the coming of Christ
- Advent 2 The Patriarchs, the founders of the faith
- Advent 3 John the Baptist
- Advent 4 The Angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she will be the mother of the Son Of God

As the days got shorter in the West in December, more candles were lit during the month as a sign of the coming of Christ, the Light of the World. In larger churches this was, and still is, done in procession from the west to the east of the church [the east being where the sun rises] lighting more candles as you go until the church is blazing with light.

The lighting of the pink candle is a matter of debate. Some keep with the tradition of lighting it on the Third Sunday of Advent whereas others will light it on the Fourth Sunday to tie in with the C of E readings of Gabriel visiting Mary that day. [It's as nothing to the controversy of when to stop lighting the Easter candle].



This is the last of this series which we've run throughout 2020. Although Alpha, Emmaus and other Christian Basics courses teach the fundamentals of the faith, nothing tells you about the daft things that we're too embarrassed to ask about such as why we have robes, why they change colour, where the readings / sermons / hymns come from and why we're forever standing up and sitting down. I hope that some of the information over the year has proven useful. We may even have learnt something – perhaps we should have a test?

Hymn of the Month – December

As it's Advent, there's no surprise we're looking at an Advent hymn

1 Lo! he comes with clouds descending,
once for favoured sinners slain;
thousand, thousand saints attending
swell the triumph of his train.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!
God appears on earth to reign.

2 Ev'ry eye shall now behold him,
robed in dreadful majesty;
those who set at naught and sold him,
pierced, and nailed him to the tree,
deeply wailing, deeply wailing, deeply wailing,
shall the true Messiah see.

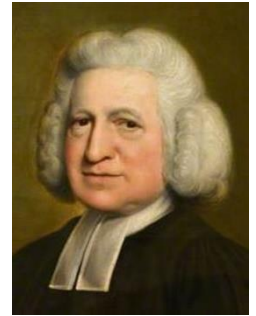
3 Those dear tokens of his passion
still his dazzling body bears,
cause of endless exultation
to his ransomed worshippers:
with what rapture, with what rapture, with what rapture,
gaze we on those glorious scars.

4 Yea, amen! let all adore thee,
high on thine eternal throne;
Saviour, take the pow'r and glory,
claim the kingdom for thine own.
O come quickly, O come quickly, O come quickly;
Thou shalt reign and thou alone.

This hymn is a bit of an odd one as it's one of the very few popular hymns which deals with the doctrine of Christ's second coming, particularly Revelation, chapter 1, verse 7. Those of us who have been struggling with the Book of Revelation in the Pewsheets at the end of November will know how complex it all is. The hymn's origins aren't straightforward either.

John Cennick [1718-55] was an Anglican whose parents were Quakers before he moved to the Methodist church and became its first lay preacher before ending up in the Moravian Church. In 1752 he wrote a hymn:

1 Lo! he cometh, countless trumpets
Blow before his bloody sign!
Mid ten thousand saints and angels
See the Crucified shine.
Alleluia!
Welcome, welcome, bleeding Lamb.



In 1758, Charles Wesley [1707-88] wrote a hymn in the same style beginning, "Lo, He comes with clouds descending." Two years later, Martin Madan [1726-90] who'd worked previously with Wesley and turned "Hark, how all the welkin rings" into "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing" produced a third composite hymn with six verses using both original versions and words of his own. It is Madan's slightly adapted version that we find in most hymnbooks today.

It should only be sung to the tune Helmsley by Thomas Olivers [1725-99]. Even Queen Victoria insisted on this. If an organist ever played it to the more anodyne tune set in the original 1875 Hymns A&M, she was not amused and the royal note duly arrived saying that that tune was never to be used again.

Olivers was Welsh by birth, orphaned at age 4 and, after a dissolute youth, became a cobbler. He was converted to Christianity by the great evangelical preacher George Whitfield and became one of John Wesley's most active preachers, first in Cornwall and then throughout England and Wales. It is claimed that he heard this tune being whistled in the street, that it is a Scottish melody and that it is a sailor's hornpipe tune but it's most likely based on a concert room song "Guardian Angels, now protect me."

Whatever the origins, it's the finest hymn with which to end an Advent service and I can only apologise for my harmonisations of the final verse but, please note, the tune is usually in there somewhere. Let's hope we can sing it next year.

**We wish everyone a very happy and
blessed Christmas and a peaceful 2021**

Toy Services:

We're collecting at St. Bartholomew's for Bolton Lions and the service will be on Sunday 6th December

The Collection will go ahead whatever happens, so please drop off any gifts [unwrappd please] at St. Bartolomew's either on

Saturday 5th December 9:30 – 11:00am

Sunday 6th December by 11:00am

Many thanks in advance for your generosity.

Pretoria Pit Commemoration:

Monday 21st December 2020 – 110th Anniversary

Due to the restrictions on meetings, the 7:45am Act of Remembrance in Ditchfield Gardens has been cancelled this year.

We are planning to mark the event in church but this will depend upon the restrictions on church services in place at the time. Please keep an eye on the Pewsheets / Websites for the latest details.

Christmas Cracker Collection:

Many thanks to all who dropped off the edible sort of Christmas crackers for our collection for the Christmas Dinner on Jesus campaign.

Christmas Services:

When we've sorted out what's allowed under the current restrictions, we'll let everyone know. We're sorry for the delay in planning these this year but I'm sure you'll understand why.

Bishop David's Advent message

May our Christian hope, rooted firmly in Jesus Christ, dwell richly within you and your community this Advent season.

I hope that you share my delight that the reduction in infection during the recent lockdown, combined with promising news from several vaccine trials, means that many of us will be able to return to gathering in our churches and other meeting places for public worship through the Christmas period and into next year.

The long journey to Bethlehem that Mary and Joseph undertook that winter 2000 and more years ago, was not of their choosing. It was required, St Luke tells us, by government edict. Arriving in a town where Joseph would have hoped to be put up by relatives, led to a demoralising search for accommodation. Finally, they found their resting place in an outbuilding, at which point Mary went straight into labour.

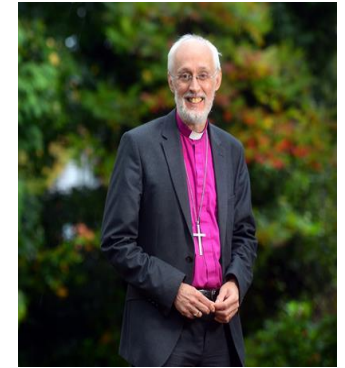
I suspect many of us, at the end of this tough year, empathise with them. We too are worn out, in our case by the constant demands of living under pandemic. We too are unable to recharge our batteries among our families and relatives in the ways we might wish. And now we face the challenge of our communities looking to us to help them encounter the comfort and joy of Christmas through the events we can put on. It may all seem too much.

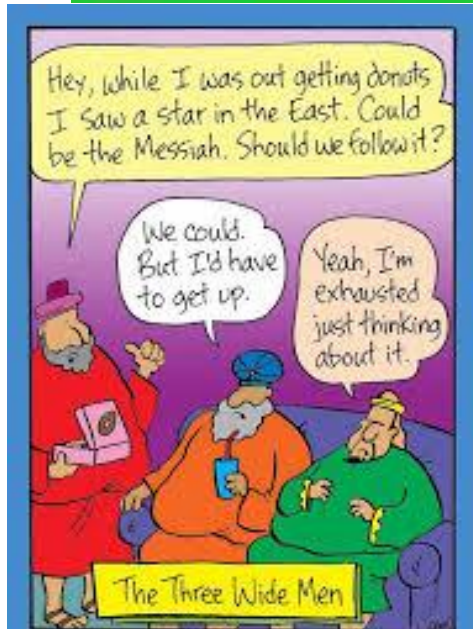
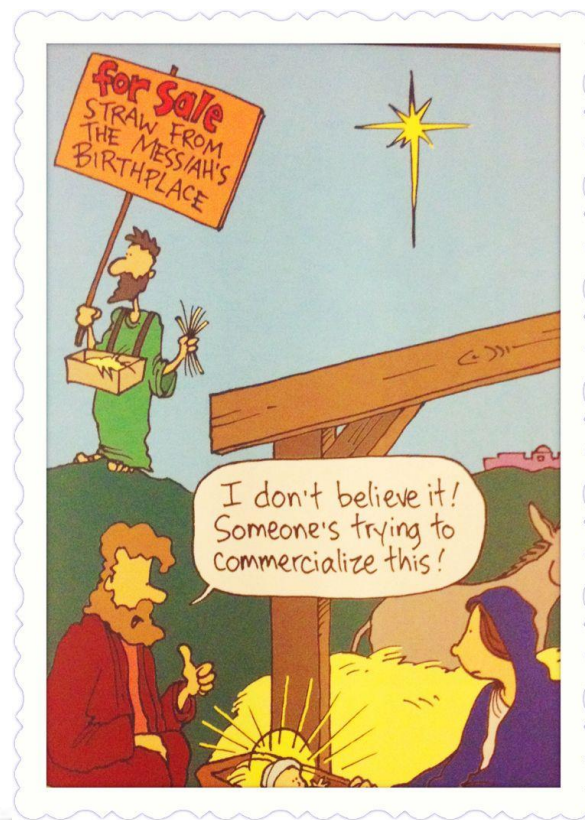
And yet the Christmas story does not end in exhaustion and demoralisation. The birth of Jesus makes all Mary and Joseph's struggle and toil worthwhile. Their joy in the birth of the Christ child overwhelms all the negative experiences they have undergone. It puts their efforts into a true perspective. In his presence they find rest and comfort, as well as joy.

My prayer for each of us, as we enter the run up to Christmas, is that this will be our story too. That we will find times of rest, and outpourings of joy, even as we prepare our Christmas celebrations. Joy and comfort that will, I pray, burst into full bloom at Christmas, and then go on to give us the strength for what we can hope will be the final phase of strict social distancing.

May God be both your companion on the journey and your destination, as together we approach the season of our saviour's birth.

For when it comes, I wish you a happy Christmas!







THE RECTOR DROPS IN ON THE PAGEANT REHEARSAL



While Mary was giving birth to the son of God, Joseph was having his own problems.





Due to a slight hearing problem, history does not remember Doug and Gary, chicken herders of Bethlehem.

