



27 November 2020

Vicar's Letter December 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Comfort and Joy

2020 has been a uniquely challenging and difficult year, and we know that Christmas this year will be different to normal. In a year where so many people have experienced loss, we are reminded that it was into the mess and brokenness of the world, that Jesus came, to bring healing, comfort and joy. That the one through whom 'all things were created' (Colossians 1:16) became one of us. Born not in a palace surrounded by the trappings of wealth and power, but into poverty, and that Jesus came to rescue us from sin, and death. The one who saves us this Christmas is not a Covid vaccine (as welcome as that is), but Jesus!

As the Graham Kendrick song puts it...

From heaven you came helpless babe
Entered our world, your glory veiled
Not to be served but to serve
And give Your life that we might live

When we remove the trappings of Christmas, we discover the greatest gift of all, the God who loves us, and stands alongside us.

The theme of this year's Church of England 2020 Christmas campaign is 'Comfort and Joy', which is taken from the Christmas carol, 'God rest ye merry gentlemen':

God rest ye merry gentlemen
Let nothing you dismay
Remember Christ our Saviour
Was born on Christmas Day
To save us all from Satan's pow'r
When we were gone astray
Oh tidings of comfort and joy
Comfort and joy
Oh tidings of comfort and joy

I hope that a simpler, quieter Christmas, although maybe not what we had wished for, may give us the opportunity to connect afresh with the true heart of Christmas, and that we might discover the comfort and joy that only Jesus can bring, and that we may respond afresh to his call to come and follow Him....

To bring our lives as a daily offering
Of worship to The Servant King.

Services in Denton Holme

There will be a service of Holy Communion in the Parish Church on Sunday 6th December at 10.30am, which will also be streamed live via our Facebook page, and which we hope to also make available on our YouTube channel at a later stage. The recording of the morning service will be made available for people to listen to via our telephone service (dial 585724) from Monday each week.

A special gathering for families has been arranged for Sunday 6th and 13th December at Stocks Wood Outdoor Centre (see Kate for details), so children's groups will not be resuming on a Sunday morning until the end of December, beginning of January.

Looking further forward, I feel we have an opportunity as we move into the New Year, to explore our patterns of worship, and explore new ways of worshipping together. Please pray about this.

Christmas Services

Due to Covid and a constantly changing situation, planning Christmas services this year has not been easy.

The provisional plan (which may well change) is for the following services over the Christmas period:

Sunday 13th December

10.30am Morning Service in St James, Denton Holme

3.00pm A Blue Christmas Service in St James, Denton Holme (*a service for those who find the run up to Christmas a difficult time of the year*)

Sunday 20th December

10.30am Online Service on YouTube

4.00 Carols by Candlelight Carol Concert in St James, Denton Holme (by ticket)

5.00pm Online Christingle Service on YouTube

6.00pm The Big Carol Sing (in conjunction with BBC Radio Cumbria)

6.30pm Online Pre-recorded carol service on YouTube

Christmas Day

9.30am Service of Holy Communion in St James

10.30am Short All Age Worship on Zoom

Further details and information will be published in our weekly e-bulletin and on our website.

The Big Carol Sing

On Sunday 20th December at 6pm, you are invited to step out in front of our individual homes and collectively sing some carols by tuning into BBC Radio Cumbria. Please encourage your neighbours to join in, and wear your favourite Christmas jumper! For more information please go to www.bigcarolsing.co.uk where the words to the carols will be published prior to the event.

Cummersdale Church Update

Last month I received an email from the owner of Cummersdale Church, informing me that due to the deteriorating condition of the ceiling we had to remove all our property from the building, and were asked to transfer all utility bills over to him. The PCC held an extraordinary meeting on 11th November, which was attended by the Archdeacon, in which after careful and prayerful consideration of all our options, including taking legal advice from the Diocesan Solicitors, the PCC agreed unanimously to the request.

This has not been an easy decision to make, but I feel we had little choice in the matter. We no longer have access to the building, and it is not clear if we will be able to go back into Cummersdale Church.

I plan to hold a meeting with members of Cummersdale Church in the Parish Church on **Sunday 6th December** at 3pm (Covid rules permitting), where we can discuss and pray about where we go from here.

Whatever the future holds, it is important for us to remember that the church is not a building, but the people of God, and it may be that this present situation gives us a fresh opportunity to consider how we can better reach and serve the people of Cummersdale.

One member of the Cummersdale congregation sent me the following:

The building has seen a glorious 93 years of history through which many people have passed through those doors. We may never know what influence it has had on their lives - but thanks to people like Alan Mate, Ian Mainey..... and many unknown heroes.... the seed was sown.

Sad though it is that we have had to leave a building that has been our home and place of worship to the glory of God - but like the phoenix we will arise from the ashes.

In God things don't just happen.... everything by him is planned.....

At the end of the vacating of the premises Rev Simon Bickersteth said a beautiful prayer thanking God for all those that have worshipped there - and a special thanks to our Bob Deans for all the hard work he has done over the years - often unnoticed - to keep the building so wonderful and fit for worship. He also blessed the building for the further worship of God - in whatever form it takes.

And as I write, it is pouring with rain outside, and the sun is shining, and a double rainbow has appeared in the sky. I am just so grateful for the years that I have been allowed to be part of that beautiful witness to the Lord in the village of Cummersdale.

Gift and Pledge Day

A reminder that we will be holding our Gift and Pledge Day on **Sunday 6th December**. You should have received a letter or e-bulletin sent out in early November about the Gift and Pledge Day, if you have not received it please let me know, alternatively go to www.stjamescarlisle.org.uk/gift-pledge-day-2020/, where you will find a copy of the letter and some other useful resources.

As mentioned previously, I appreciate these are challenging times, but any gift you can give, no matter how small makes a difference.

Please bring your gift in a sealed envelope to church on Sunday 6th December (cash or cheque, made payable to 'St James Church PCC') or drop it off at the Parish Centre. Alternatively you may wish to give via bank transfer:

Account name: St James Church PCC

Account Number: 51301876

Sort Code: 16-52-21

If you are a tax payer, please consider gift aiding your donation, as this will enable us to reclaim 25p for every £1 donated. Gift Aid forms are available from the Parish Centre.

Mission Giving

As part of our mission giving we support a number of different organisations and individuals: Tearfund, The Langham Partnership, The Fletcher Family in Bangkok, Santa Sorlie in Montenegro, Miriam Westfall working amongst students with Agape UK in Newcastle, and Garry Ion.

In addition last year, we invited members of the church family to recommend an individual, organisation or project that we could support for one year, this year that organisation was Hamsayeh International.

We are now looking for recommendations for who we could support in 2021. The important criteria is that it must be a Christian organisation/charity/individual, and ideally have some link to St James (this might be a link with someone in the church).

Please send your recommendations (with details about the organisation) to Ruth Westfall (email ruth.westfall@fosanet.org) by **Sunday 3rd January** at the very latest. These recommendations will be considered by the Mission Support Group, and taken to the PCC for approval.

Alpha Course

The Two Rivers Mission Community will be running a joint online Alpha Course via Zoom starting on **Monday 11th January** at 7.30pm. If you, or someone you know is interested in doing the course, please let me know by emailing simon@stjamescarlisle.org.uk or calling 319830.

Cornerstone & The Op Shop

Please do support Cornerstone and the Op Shop which reopen this month. We have a wide range of clothing, bric a brac, electrical goods, books, CD's and DVD's to purchase, all at a great price, plus the Christian Resource Centre, all of which make for great Christmas gifts!

Living In Love And Faith Project

The Living in Love and Faith (LLF) project was set in motion in 2017 by the Church of England, in the context of painful divisions in the church and changing social attitudes about identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage. The first aim of the project was to create resources that will help the whole church learn how these questions fit within the bigger picture of a humanity that is liberated by Jesus Christ and infused by the Spirit to reflect the image of God in which we are created.

A group of 40 people have been involved in producing these resources. They draw together the Bible, theology, science and history with powerful real-life stories and include a 480-page book, a series of 17 films and 16 podcasts, a course for groups – which stretches over five sessions and an online library of more than 300 other publications.

Throughout 2021 we are being encouraged to use the resources to support conversations and learning around the issues, prior to discernment in 2022 by an LLF national Next Steps Group, and then going before the Church of England's General Synod.

In a press release Bishop James and Bishop Emma wrote "As both our Archbishops have recognised, the Church of England has previously struggled in addressing issues around identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage and this has created hurt and division on all sides. Our prayers are that, supported by the *Living in Love and Faith* resources, there will be a positive and mutually respectful time of engaging, listening, learning and understanding."

For those with access to the internet, you can view the LLF resources at www.churchofengland.org/LLF.

APCM Results

Our annual parochial church meeting (APCM) was held in the Parish Church on October

14th. In that meeting Julie Graham and Judith Moffat were re-elected to serve as church wardens for another year, and Paul and Chris Groves, and Kerry Roughton were elected to join the PCC. Our Deanery Synod reps who were elected for a new three year term are Paul Crooks and Paul McVittie. At the APCM we thanked John Edwards, Jane Clark and David Hamilton, who all stood down from the PCC.

The PCC members for 2020/21 are:

- Revd Simon Bickersteth (Chair)
- Andy Blake
- Caroline Browne (Secretary)
- Paul Crooks (Deanery Synod Rep)
- Kate Davidson
- Chris Dixon (Treasurer)
- Anthony Farrar
- Julie Graham (Church Warden)
- Chris Groves
- Paul Groves
- Helen Hamilton
- Mark Hurley
- Alan Johnston (Lay Chair)
- Paul McVittie (Deanery Synod Rep)
- Rachel Mitchell
- Judith Moffat (Church Warden)
- Revd Nina Orchard
- David Robinson
- Kerry Roughton
- Joan Yarker

I wish you a very happy and blessed season of Advent, and Christmas.

God bless

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Simon Bickersteth", enclosed in a faint rectangular border.