

Letter from the Vicar

Friday 27 November

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I'm sure by now you will be aware of the Government's plans to help us safely celebrate Christmas. The relaxation of the regulations over the Christmas period has been met with mixed opinions from those saying they have gone too far to those saying they have not been relaxed enough. As ever, we still need to be extremely careful as the virus has not gone away nor does it know that we intend to celebrate Christmas. As a Parish and worshipping community we will do everything we can to ensure that those who join us for worship do so in a safe and reasonable manner whilst hopefully experiencing the joyous news of the angels that the Christ-child, God incarnate, now dwells among us. Obviously not everyone will be in a position to join us physically for worship, nor will we be able to accommodate everyone at our services despite laying-on extra services and requiring people to register and obtain a free ticket for admission, so we will be making these services available online for you to join virtually. Free Tickets will be available from 1 December via the Parish website.

The Government also announced this week that Hertfordshire will be in Tier 2 of restrictions from 2 December. This next step up from before lockdown 2.0 brings with it tighter regulations on how we will need to behave in Public Worship but that Public Worship can resume from 2 December. The new restrictions placed upon us are that 'socialisation, indoors, by people not in the same household/bubble is not permitted'. This therefore means that when we come to church we will be greeted by a sidesperson to take our contact details and then shown to our seats where we are to remain until we are invited to leave in an orderly manner and go up to receive Communion. This is going to feel very weird as inter-personal relations are a key construct of our faith and worshipping community but alas it is necessary to curb the spread of this disease. As a result of this St Stephen's Church is going to remain suspended until we return to Tier 1 as there is not enough space to enable people to arrive/leave without socialising. St John's and St Francis' will resume on Wednesday 2 December with 10.00am Holy Communion and 5.00pm Evening Prayer respectively.

Over the coming weeks it is hoped that we will welcome many people to our services offering the hope and light that Christ brings. To date, 4 of the 8 schools we are connected with will come to one of our churches to hear afresh the Christmas story. Our Christmas Tree Festival is gaining momentum and the latest guidance allows for congregational Carol Singing outside (provided social distancing is observed) so our Outside Carols round the Trees on Saturday 19 December looks set to go ahead – here's hoping for good weather! Our aim with the Tree Festival is shed some light, hope, and positivity in our community. Many I know have already put their own decorations up (much earlier than normal) for precisely that reason. The Festival will be open to all, with no charge, but we hope a donation might be possible. We are now furnished with a Card Reader for contactless Card giving and have a donate page on our website. It is also possible to donate via text-giving and in the age-old, tried and tested method of cash!

This past week I have once again acquainted myself with parts of the Parish I don't habitually enter and with children I have not seen since the beginning of lockdown 1.0 as I delivered donated Advent Calendars to said children. It was lovely to see them again and to make a connection, reassuring them of our love and prayers, and our hope to see them again when the vaccine is fully rolled-out. The yearning to return is strong. In total 90 Calendars – each telling the Christmas Story with chocolate – were delivered which is great to be reminded that we actually have a strong Junior Church even if we can't meet together at present.

This Sunday is Advent Sunday – the start of a new Church year and the start of a season of preparation for Christmas. I hope this season will enable you to prepare your hearts to welcome Christ once again into our midst. To help our preparations, and as we think about Christ's coming light, a special Evening Service will be available on our website from 6.30pm on Sunday evening. The service was recorded at the start of lockdown 2.0 involving our choir. I hope you will find it helpful.

Now, in a break from the norm I must get back to looking after Sophie who has had an inset day for Black Friday! and help her make a Chinese Dragon for International Week and Chinese New Year... it's all go in the Vicarage!

As always I trust you are all well and keeping safe. I hope to see many of you physically over the coming weeks. But for now I leave you with my prayers for each of you; keep safe; and remain secure in the knowledge of our God who loves us, cares for us, and enfolds us in his arms.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

The Reverend Michael Macey

Vicar

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