

## Letter from the Vicar

Friday 1 January 2021

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Happy New Year! At the dawn of a new day and a new year we bid farewell to what has been an unforgettable year and, for most of us, a year we would not wish to repeat. The juxtaposition of last year's unfolding drama as the pandemic swept across the world with the idleness of staying at home during lockdown will probably cause future generations to question what really went on in 2020 when they look back 50 or 100 years from now. But, for most of us, that has been the reality: idle waiting around – either on furlough, sheltering, or working from home – punctuated by dramatic announcements by the Government about measures it believes are necessary to keep us all safe in the desperate attempt to limit the spread of the virus. Just 2 weeks ago, when plans were in full-flow for Christmas, we were confronted with another dramatic announcement as we went from Tier 2 to Tier 3 and then to Tier 4 all in the space of 24 hours and 2 seconds! This put a halt to much of the planned celebrations for all of us.

As a Church, however, due to the precautions and measures we had put in place to make attending Worship as safe as it can possibly be, we were able to continue to offer our rich variety of services over the Christmas period. From Sunday 20 – Sunday 27 December I counted I conducted 19 services – most of which were ticketed. Although the take-up rate for tickets was high and justified our holding extra services to ensure all who wanted to celebrate Christmas could do so, the reality (owing to Tier 4 restrictions) saw a 60% reduction of people attending services compared to those who booked. Nonetheless, our celebrations went very well and all the 'sung' services were serviced by members of our choir and other local choirs. I should very much like to thank all our musicians and sidespeople for enabling all these services to take place and to Keith, our Director of Music, for also recording and putting online a number of services for you to join at home.

This past week I have been enjoying some down-time with the family: pyjama days, walks, lots of eating, films, bicycling, the odd beverage! and completing two 1000 piece jigsaws. It has been lovely to be at home and relax and prepare for the coming year. Despite living in Hemel for nearly 7 years last night was out first New Year's Eve at home and was spent on Zoom with some of my closest friends. The days of waking-up to a New Year hangover have mercifully passed. Instead I was met by the cries of "Daddy, it's snowing!"

I hope, whatever you got up to over Christmas and New Year enabled you to rest, relax, and celebrate (albeit in new and different ways). Something tells me that although 2021 holds great promise to be better than 2020, and there is a lot to be hopeful for – vaccines, new President of the USA, a Brexit deal, there will still be days of pain and sadness, idleness and drama to come. At present St John's and St Francis' remain open for Public Worship and will continue to do so for as long as is practicable. Priestly cover for St Francis is proving more difficult to find as the restrictions vary but my desire is to ensure safe Public Worship for all who wish to attend.

As always I trust you are all well and keeping safe. 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,



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