

Letter from the Vicar

Saturday 27 March 2021

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Tomorrow we begin the busiest and most important week in the Church's year: Holy Week. We will enter Jerusalem with Christ with great joy on Palm Sunday as he is proclaimed King; we will dine with Jesus at his Last Supper on Maundy Thursday where he will give us the great commandment – to love one another – and he we will watch and pray with him before he is arrested and faces a sham trial; we will journey with Jesus, carrying his Cross, to Calvary on Good Friday and recall the sacrifice of love makes for all people in making atonement once and for all with God the Father. And in utter amazement and unparalleled joy we will celebrate Christ's resurrection and victory over sin and death on Easter Day. And in the earlier days of the week we will quietly reflect on our journey of discipleship as we witness to Christ teaching in the Temple amongst the growing political storm with the religious leaders. A lot will happen and we will experience a whole host of emotions. But I encourage you not to only join us for worship on Palm and Easter Sundays but to come to as much of the week as you are able so that the whole story can be experienced and that those moments of joy are enriched having walked with Christ in his sufferings.

It is so pleasing that we are able to be open again for Public Worship as opposed to last year. Last year, towards the start of Lockdown 1.0 we were all still finding our way. Although I had an Altar prepared in my study, and was praying with you and for you, it was not the same as when we were able to worship together. The Easter Ceremonies last year was my first foray into pre-recorded services – albeit from my garden – but it was nothing like the joy I remember when we were able to worship together to witness to the resurrection. This year we can worship together and I hope many of you will join me. Of course I know some will still be shielding and sheltering – and that's fine. Recordings of Palm Sunday, Good Friday, and Easter Day will be available on our website for you to join.

But for those who intend to join in person at one of our churches, here's some information you may wish to know:

Palm Sunday:

- 8.00am Simple service of Holy Communion with Blessing of Palms. Palms will be given out with Orders of Service.
- 10.00am At St John's we will begin outside the glass doors. All congregation will be given a special Order of Service containing a Palm Cross. We will sing a hymn outside and then come into church for the remainder of the service. Stewards will guide you to your seats. Please sanitise on your way in (observing social distancing) – you might like to bring your own bottle with you to speed things up although we have 6 dispensers at hand.
- 10.00am At St Francis' the procession will be round the inside of church and conducted by the servers and clergy only.
- 11.30am Simple service of Holy Communion with Blessing of Palms. Palms will be given out with Orders of Service.
- 6.30pm A Virtual Service on our Website of readings and music to help us enter into the Passion of Christ.

Holy Monday – Holy Wednesday:

Daily services of Holy Communion with Reflection in the main body of St John's.

On Wednesday evening there will be Stations of the Cross at St Francis' where I will walk the Stations and the congregation will remain in their places, turning to each Station.

Maundy Thursday:

8.00pm Sadly there will be no foot washing this year. But the Eucharist will be celebrated recalling Christ's Last Supper and this will be followed by a Watch at the High Altar until 10.30pm. You do not need to stay for the Watch but this recalls Jesus' words to his disciples "sit here and pray" and "could you not watch with me one hour?".

Good Friday:

10.00am All Age Stations of the Cross will take place in St John's Churchyard. We walk with Christ the Way of the Cross. Appropriate for everyone – especially children. Social Distancing to be observed.

2.00pm The Hour at the Cross. A thought provoking service of meditation, prayer and music.

Easter Eve: The Vigil

8.00pm The service will begin outside St Francis' with the lighting of the Easter Candle. A Socially Distanced procession into church follows along with hearing the story of salvation, proclaiming the Easter Acclamation, renewing Baptismal vows, and celebrating the first Mass of Easter. Once in church the congregation will remain in their seats (apart from receiving Communion).

Easter Day:

8.00am Simple service of Holy Communion

10.00am At St John's this service will also start outside. We will light the Easter Candle, sing a hymn and then process into church in a socially distanced manner. The Eucharist of Easter will continue. After receiving Communion we will return outside to sing our final hymn and be dismissed to live-out our Easter joy in the community.

10.00am At St Francis the Mass will be very similar to a normal Sunday Eucharist – although no congregational singing.

11.30am Simple service of Holy Communion with recorder hymns and blessing of the Easter Candle.

As you will see there is a lot going on. In all these services we aim to keep you as safe as possible whilst giving opportunities to sing (where possible) and enter into the drama of Holy Week. I hope this will be a better Holy Week and Easter for you all this year.

On top of all this there are resources for our Junior Church to do at home on our Website throughout Easter and the Easter Garden Competition for you all to enter – I look forward to seeing your designs. I look forward to seeing you again and being able to worship with you. But for now I leave you with my prayers and best wishes. Keep safe; keep positive; and remain steadfast in faith that God loves us, cares for us, and enfolds us in his arms.

In Christ,



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