

Dear friends

The rota has picked me to write this letter for the Sunday before Christmas. As I start to do so, my mind goes back to writing Christmas letters in my childhood. When I was very young, I can remember writing a letter to Santa and putting it up the chimney for him to find. I wonder if youngsters still write letters to Santa, or have they moved onto texts or tweets?

There were more letters, which were more of a chore, that had to be done after Christmas Day to thank someone – perhaps a distant family member – for a present that I had received. It used to take some hard work by my mother to get my brother and sister and I to sit and compose letters, but I am sure that they were appreciated. I find that it is always a good feeling when someone thanks you for a gift given.

This week we are getting ready to thank God for the gift that he has given us – Jesus Christ who lived in our world and lives on with us in our lives now. As we do so, we find that the services that we are used to and comfortable with will not happen. As a church we are having to innovate and find different ways to worship this year. There will not be the ‘traditional’ carol services in our churches. In fact, we cannot sing together at all, but will have to enjoy carols sung by our wonderful choirs in church. Children will not gather in excitement to hear the Christmas story at our crib services. We are being urged to think ahead and book seats at those services that do take place. Many of us will only meet ‘virtually’, over the internet, as we try to protect each other from being infected by the virus and we will not be able to join in rejoicing together at Christ coming into the world.

So much seems to be in a state of change and movement at this time. My family are still wondering whether we dare risk meeting together considering the increasing numbers of infections that are happening. We were going to take advantage of the government allowing families to meet together over Christmas, as we have not met with our grandson for some months. Then we have the government saying that although we can meet together perhaps it would be better if we didn’t. What a mixed message- yes you can but we would rather you didn’t! We have invested in a frozen turkey because of the uncertainty, and it may have to remain in the freezer for some time yet. I pray that if you do meet with loved ones over the holidays, that you stay safe and well.

I can see that there is a possibility that the changes that are being forced upon us this Christmas may result in continuing changes in future years. This year will be a Christmas that has shed a great deal of the socialising that has developed around our festival of rejoicing. The annual round of celebratory meals and associated partying will not take place. The circumstances mean that we will be spending more time alone or with our nuclear families, and that as there is no social whirl there will be time and the opportunity to really take in the Christmas story. We could come back to realising the central reason for our holidays, for our feasting and for our family get togethers is the birth of our saviour Jesus - is the gift of God’s Son to the world.

Let us pray that the Spirit works in this new quieter festive season. Let us pray that without the pressures of having to go out and enjoy themselves, people will find that pleasure from thanking God and letting him into their lives. Let us pray that the Spirit works through us and that we facilitate our friends and families in rejoicing with God at His gift. Let us be the happiest people in the world so that those around us want to find out what makes us so happy.

Janine and I wish all of you a peaceful and safe Christmas, and we pray that we can meet together again very soon in the New Year.

May God's blessings be with you and those who you love.

Stuart Vince, Lay Reader

Services this week, 20th December

Eucharists at St Michael's at 9.30am, and Holy Trinity at 11.00am.

Services over Christmas needing to be booked (phone 01432 273086)

Lessons and Carols by Candlelight:

Friday 18th December, 7.00pm at Holy Trinity

Sunday 20th December at 6.30pm at St Nicholas'

Midnight Mass:

Christmas Eve at 11.00pm at either St Nicholas' or Holy Trinity

Christmas Day:

at 10.00am at either St Michael's or All Saints

Other services and events:

Outdoor Nativity Trail: 23rd December starting every 10-15 minutes between 3.30pm and 4.15pm from EITHER Holy Trinity or St Nicholas'. A trail of 4 stops where small groups will experience a part of the nativity story at each stop, sing a short carol and pray a prayer before being directed to the next stop on the trail.

There will be a Eucharist on Sunday 27th December at St Nicholas' at 11.00am

And at All Saints on 3rd January at 9.30am

Thank you to everyone who contributed so generously on our Team Gift Day. Your donation really does make all the difference.