

St Mary's Ticehurst and St Augustine's Flimwell

To: Congregation members and those on our circulation list

Dear Friends

VICAR'S LETTER/UPDATE as at Thursday 7th January 2021



On the 10th December I began by saying "Lockdown #2 is over, thank goodness! That makes it easier, sort of, to wish you all Merry Christmas!" Now that Lockdown #3 is upon us, it has felt to me more difficult to wish a "Happy New Year". Maybe it makes it all the more necessary to wish you all "A Happier New Year"!

PCCs' DECISIONS TO SUSPEND PUBLIC WORSHIP IN LOCKDOWN #3

After much hurried discussion and proposal-making to our two PCCs over the last two days, the PCCs agreed that the overall risk here was at present too great to have public worship during this new Lockdown, notwithstanding our churches' COVID-19 protocols. This decision is as permitted by the Bishop of Chichester in his letter to clergy and churchwardens received at 5.45pm on the 6th. It was not arrived at lightly; it echoed loudly the angst we faced in Christmas week. **So, our Sunday worship will now move again to being online only**, as it was in the previous lockdowns ...

SUNDAY, 10th JANUARY - 11.00am ONLINE Communion (Contemporary) for the First Sunday of Epiphany (The Baptism of Christ). Pre-recorded in St Mary's (without congregation) with some hymns/songs, a sermon and prayers as well as celebration of the Eucharist, c.45 mins. It's viewable on our Facebook Page @stMarysTicehurst www.facebook.com/stMarysTicehurst (You don't need an FB account to access it.) Apologies if the uploading of the recording causes the broadcast to be late! Our previous technical standards are unlikely to be reached in Lockdown #3, especially in relation to any livestreaming.

SUNDAY 17th JANUARY – 11.00am Online Morning Worship

Service sheets & Notices/Readings sheets will be emailed to our e-circular list. They can be found several days in advance on www.ticehurstandflimwell.church but the day after a livestream go to www.achurchnearyou.com/church/5182 (Services & Events) and the sheets are available under 'View Attachment' in the service box if wanted to watch a recording of a service.

SINCE THE LAST VICAR'S LETTER. While COVID-19 was increasing locally, we were fortunate to manage what we did worship-wise – the Flimwell Christmas Service on 13th Dec (with Jaye and myself singing carols), St Mary's Carol Service livestreamed from the church without congregation on the 20th, the Christingle Service on Christmas Eve for which c.60 joined in ... on Zoom! The plan for Christmas Day had to be scaled back with the government's "5 Days of Christmas" severely curtailed. We had 20 at the one church service (the 8am in St Mary's), and we have had a record 475 views of our 11am Online Morning Worship. As before, I **attach** my sermon given on Christmas Day, especially for those without internet access.

Diocesan services online - can be watched on www.chichester.anglican.org/liveservices and those at the Cathedral at www.chichestercathedral.org.uk/worship/live-service

Especially for those of you not on the internet – DAILY HOPE provides C of E worship on 0800 804 8044.

Vale. Daisy Starnes of Newington Court died yesterday, aged 103. She will be greatly missed by many of us.

Charitable Giving. Towards Christmas Day we encouraged you to give to the Children's Society, and in the new year may I ask you to consider supporting **Family Support Work** once again for the work it seeks to do with the poorest families in our Diocese, at www.familysupportwork.org

Church Finances. Your continued giving, contactless or otherwise, is hugely appreciated as we begin a new church financial year when we face the prospect of another bleak outlook income-wise. Our BACS details - Nat West Bank 60-22-15: Ticehurst PCC 71164383 or Parochial Church Council of Flimwell 35098651. God bless you all.

Ashley Evans

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*For online worship go to - www.facebook.com/stMarysTicehurst

SHORT SERMON FOR CHRISTMAS DAY

Titus 3: 4-7 & Luke 2: 8-20

A man way up in Scotland calls his grown-up son in London the day before Christmas Eve and says, "I hate to ruin your day but I have to tell you that your mother and I are splitting up. Forty-five years of misery is enough."

'Dad, what are you talking about?' the son shouts.

"We can't stand the sight of each other any longer" the father says. "We've become sick of each other and I'm fed up talking about this, so you call your sister in Leeds and tell her."

Frantically, the son calls his sister, who explodes on the phone. "No, I've had no warning of this - it's ridiculous, they were perfectly happy the last time I saw them!" she rails. "Leave it with me, I'll call them and take care of it!"

She calls Scotland immediately, and has a right go at her father "You are NOT splitting up. Don't do a single thing until I get there. I'm calling my brother back, and we'll both be there tomorrow. Until then, don't do a thing. DO YOU HEAR ME?" and she hangs up.

Her father hangs up the phone and turns to his wife.

"Sorted!" he says, "They're coming for Christmas."

As far as this year is concerned that is of course entirely fictitious, because as well as deceitful it would be breaking the law. For a normal Christmas, those parents were willing to go to underhand lengths to have for Christmas what they really wanted deep down, to see close family.

What we really want for Christmas. It can be a problem. This year as ever, families will get into too much debt because of wanting to give their children everything *they* want for Christmas so they're not disappointed, felt to be at a disadvantage compared with friends. But for many families it will be much more difficult this year, especially those with children too young to really understand what's going on in the world in 2020, on into 2021. God bless Marcus Rashford whose efforts have ensured that most publicity about children of late has been about those who lack meals.

"All I want for Christmas" is ... a challenging thought at present. A normal Christmas, perhaps? Just *normality*? Yes, family around us (bodily not just virtually). I think that usually we all want too much out of Christmas, & that can put pressure on others to meet that expectation, who exhaust themselves in so doing. Will that be different this year? We forget how every Christmas is a challenge for some: a disappointment, a lonely time, a gift-less time, lacking a specific direct expression of love/care.

And that first Christmas wasn't all sweetness & light. Yes, the light was to come, but remember what that pre-natal journey of the holy couple must've been like. You can hear Mary grumbling & Joseph sighing "This trip to Bethlehem to register isn't my fault dear, blame the government.". (In other words, it was an essential journey.) There'd have been all the rumours about Mary's very unexpected pregnancy to cope with. Then: they've made it. Except there's no room at the Inn. *But my wife is pregnant* shouts Joseph & the Inn keeper says *Well that's not my fault*, & Joseph cries '*And it's not my fault either!*'

Then it all came good, & we can realise what is truly significant & joyful about that moment & its anniversary celebrated today & each year, the birth of a very extraordinary baby: *the Son of God born among us*. God interrupting the history of his creation. Come as foretold, heralded by angels & a wondrous star, even by poor shepherds (who weren't even relatives). Except, we're all relatives in this drama, welcome to visit, take a look, to wonder at what God has done, that he wanted to be Emmanuel, *with us*. And is with us, in these difficult times, with us always. Not bodily, but with us by the blessing of God the Holy Spirit waiting patiently to come into hearts opened to receive the love, the experience, the guidance, all of which can be known/had. These are mysteriously are encapsulated in the arrival of the baby son of God and Mary: Jesus the Saviour, God with us, God with whom nothing in the life/lives of God's Creation is impossible. Amen. A.E.

I ended the 8am service with:

"Q: Why has production been badly affected in Santa's workshop? A: They're having to elf-isolate."