

# Glastonbury Together in prayer

A news sheet for members of Glastonbury churches during the crisis caused by Covid 19



## The Journey

Life is full of journeys and this year is no exception. We journey physically between places, although less so this year, but we also have other life journeys. Coping with covid has been a learning journey we might have preferred not to have. Faith itself is a journey with Christian faith being an calling to follow Jesus. An opportunity for praise and thanksgiving for the abundant love we receive when we find hard times which have been in abundance this year. Two thousand years ago there was another journey that had been unexpected. Caesar called for a census and as a result Joseph took the pregnant Mary to Bethlehem a journey that would have taken several days. The distance is about 70 miles as the crow flies passing by Jerusalem but it is hilly country. Modern man takes a round about route that takes several hours and is over ninety miles. We know little about the Journey which merits a brief reference in Luke's Gospel. Whilst Luke says that the Journey was due to the census, some historians question this based on dates in other texts and the suggestion that the Romans would not have authority to order a census whilst Herod was king. In Mathew's Gospel we read that Jesus was born in Bethlehem but not how his mother came to be there at the time. The birth is not mentioned in the other two recognised Gospels as it was Jesus preaching life that was considered important. As humans however we like to have a human connection and the story of the birth that we celebrate each year gives us a connection we can understand. The Christmas story gives us an opportunity to celebrate and form a human bond with Jesus.

## God's gift to us

In our time many tend to think of Christmas as being a time of giving, presents for our friends and gifts to charity are a feature of this time of year. Children find joy as they receive gifts but for adults the act of giving often has more significance than the receipt of gifts. Finding just the right gift may sometimes be stressful but when found gives joy. But this time is not about our gifts to each other it is about God's greatest gift to us, his Son. Long expected but not full recognised at the time Jesus was a gift for all time at the right time. The world at the time was ready with a relatively stable widespread Roman empire being a good time to arrive. Other periods of history before and since have not had the right conditions which led to the early dissemination of the message. Indeed today the message seems to be lost, make room for Christ at Christmas - tell the world.

## Christmas services

Due to the covid crisis space at Christmas services will be limited. Please check with the church concerned to ask if there is a need to book a place.

The services that have been notified are:

Anglican - Drive in carol service Silver Street car park 16:00  
Midnight Mass 23:30 **St John's** on *Christmas eve*; Family Communion 10:00 **St Johns**, Christmas morning worship 10:30 **St Benedict's** on *Christmas day*. **Methodist** - Carol Service 18:30 on *Christmas eve*. **United Reformed Church** 10:45 joint service with Methodists, on *Christmas day*. **Our Lady St Mary of Glastonbury** Catholic Church Mass at 20:00 on *Christmas Eve*; Masses at Midnight and 11:00 on *Christmas day* in English and at 12:30 on *Christmas day* in Latin.

This year Midnight Mass from Clifton Cathedral will be broadcast on BBC1 television. The service will be led by Bishop Declan Lang and the tv coverage starts at 23:45.



# Light of the world

## Coming to us at Christmas

The description of Jesus as the light of the world comes from the Gospel of John. The reference starts at the beginning of the Gospel when it talks about John the Baptist who was not the light, but came as a witness to the light. Later, in John 8:12, Jesus refers to himself as the light of the world, continuing that any who follow him will not live in darkness but will have the light of life. Just as the light of the rising sun signals a new day the birth of Jesus signals a new way. Jesus teaches us that to be really alive is about what we can do for others. Not receiving but giving, not from conflict but from reconciliation, it is in our relationship with others through faith that we become truly alive. Being alive in this way does not come from the outward signs of religion, rules, rituals and traditions. Rather the life we get comes from within us like a spring of living water more intoxicating than the best wine ever as at the marriage feast of Cana. Life from being a disappointment becomes a banquet. Christmas is a time to rediscover life with a child like wonder as we see in a new light, the light of Christ. We remember the Christmas story, the journey to Bethlehem and the birth in humble surroundings. In a humble place, on a dark night, through a tiny, vulnerable, homeless, helpless baby - God's light came to brighten the world. We celebrate Jesus with light and on Christmas day in many churches the last white candle on the advent ring will be lit signifying the birth of the Lord of light. Whilst it may seem an old tradition the advent ring actually dates from the 19th century and did not become widespread until the 20th century. We do not, however, need the

candles in church to celebrate the light of Christ, let the Christmas message bring a new light into your heart. A light that will glow from within and take the message Jesus brings out into the world to those with whom we interact both in person and by modern communication methods. Christ our light is still with us and still relevant today - tell the world.



## Advent candles tell their story

As we come to the end of Advent it is perhaps appropriate to look at a modern hymn covering the whole of the Advent season. It is very new and has only started to appear in hymn books in the 21st century. "Advent candles tell their story" has five verses one each for the four Sundays of Advent and a final one for Christmas day itself. For the first Sunday of advent the hymn starts "*Advent candles tell their story as we watch and pray*" - we are longing for the Lord's coming when pain and sadness change to joy. Verse two for the second Sunday talks about the prophets, their challenging messages offering glimpses of what is to come. For the third verse, like last weeks lectionary, the hymn turns to John the Baptist whose teachings brought renewed hope - be prepared for the Lord. In verse four just as with this week's lectionary the hymn turns to Mary. She gave God a human dwelling but with a hint of Easter the hymn asks "*who could guess the final story? - cross and glory, empty tomb!*" For Christmas day the hymn turns back to the candles telling the story of those who waited - a wait fulfilled that day. The hymn was written by Mark Earey who was born in 1965. It is the only hymn credited to Mark on [hymnary.org](http://hymnary.org).

## A look at the lectionary - Advent four

The Israelites had for a long time been a travelling race taking the Ark of the Covenant with them housed in a tent. When King David settles to a wooden home he questions this in our old testament reading from second book of Samuel. The Lord comes to the prophet Nathan in the night and tells him to tell David that it will be from him that there will be built a house for the Lord. After David's days are over and he rests with his ancestors God will raise up offspring to succeed him, He will be the Son of God and the kingdom shall be established forever. This was the prophecy that Jesus would come from the house of David. The Epistle reading comes from the end of the letter to the Romans. The letter starts saying it is addressed to all then in the last chapter Paul lists a number of his friends in Rome before ending with a

prayer of praise. All the world can know the mystery kept secret for a long time but now revealed through the prophetic scriptures. Our praise is focussed through Jesus on the incomparably wise God. Having looked at John the Baptist in the last weeks the Gospel reading from Luke takes us back to before John was born. Three months before Elizabeth was due to give birth to John an Angel visits Mary and tells her, much to her surprise, that she is to give birth to a son who is to be called Jesus. Mary after questioning how this is to come about accepts her future saying she is the Lord's servant and that what the Angel has told her should be fulfilled. This part of the Christmas story is a reading that is well known; appropriately it is also used nine months before Christmas, for the feast of the Annunciation on 25th March.