



Building our home together

Bishop Nick Baines

Every Christmas we hear afresh those defiant words from John's Gospel: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." This last year, with the pandemic and its consequences, has put us all on the spot: is that text simply a bit of religious comfort stuff, or does it stand the test of reality?



Well, there has certainly been plenty of darkness. Last Christmas we were beginning to hear of a strange disease in China; within a couple of months we were facing a complete lockdown of 'normal' life across Europe and much of the world. Hundreds of thousands of people have died across the globe, and in this country we have seen people dying alone or in isolation, the NHS almost overwhelmed, and no element of society left unscathed. Businesses have suffered, the economy is stricken, and the end is still far off.

So, where is the light that cannot be overcome by the darkness?

This question pushes us back to that first Christmas. Jesus was born into a world in which life was cheap and power everything. Mortality was less an inconvenient fact and more a daily confrontation. The darkness of military occupation and imperial oppression coloured the whole of life for everyone. Light was a distant hope.

But, this is the point. The radical challenge to this world (and world view) was precisely this: God is present

(Continued on page 2)

Where everyone knows your name

Revd Canon Rachel Firth

I've always thought parish communities are like the signature tune to the old sitcom Cheers. "You want to go where people know people are all the same. You want to go where everybody knows your name." Moving jobs at the start of this pandemic my name was one of the few things my new parish knew about me. Despite the pandemic we have been able to get to know one another better – both in online events and worship, and just picking up the phone too. We found ourselves free from many preconceived ideas about what was 'normal' – because nothing was – and we have felt our way together as community through the strangeness.

I'd say we're cautiously hopeful right now. We've got better at moving things on a little – not being defeated by 3 steps

(Continued on page 2)

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(Continued from page 1)

in the midst of this darkness, and not simply waiting for better times before intruding. People looked for God in the resolution of their plight; Jesus speaks of being the light even where the darkness and suffering persist.

Despite the restrictions imposed on us in the last year, the prayer and worship life of the Christian Church has continued. It has looked different for many people, but it has been creatively pursued. Christians have prayed for their communities; clergy have conducted funerals and weddings, holding open space for celebration and rites of passage; pastoral care has gone beyond our congregations and across parishes; chaplaincies have witnessed sacrificial commitment; teachers and schools, NHS frontline work, and those who have stepped in to support business, retail and other essential areas of our common life; food banks and wider service of people faced by unprecedented need; engagement of churches in local authority strategic and reactive responses to immense challenge. This is not an exhaustive list, but merely illustrative. In the name of Christ there is much light being shed in the darkness.

I believe that it is the same light of Jesus Christ that will illuminate our path as we move towards a new year like no other we have experienced since the Second World War. Uncertain? Yes. Fearful? Maybe. Demanding? Definitely. And most people across our globe live like this every day. We have an opportunity to discover afresh the radical, light-shedding, shocking surprise that Christmas represents, and to live it out in the year to come.

When Jesus grew up and began his public ministry he set out his manifesto in the words of Isaiah - it had to do with turning the world's values upside down and opting into the uncertainties. We might not be in control of events, but we can serve Christ and his people whatever the world throws our way.

So, Christmas is coming whether or not the goose is getting fat. The world and our circumstances - including the resources at our disposal - will keep changing. God will not. And the Jesus who brought his light into this world will be walking with us every step.

Bishop Nick Baines
Bishop of Leeds

Where everyone knows your name

(Continued from page 1)

forward, 2 steps back. To offer a Yorkshire-sounding Beatles reference - "Got to admit it's getting better, a little better all the time (it couldn't get much worse.)"



Revd Canon Rachel Firth

It's been tough not being able to label the mid-point – the place and time after which the only way is up. Despite this as we've hung on in together amazing things have happened. People have joined our worshipping community, relationships have changed and grown with key organisations in our town as we have been able to say "We're praying for you.... and we can help with that."

I'm happy to have come to serve a community who may not know your name yet – but they are certainly always glad you came. It's getting so much better all the time.

Adapting to change by the grace of God

Revd Canon
Angela Dick

“What a year we’ve had!” That’s an expression we often hear but this year, so much more than most, everyone will be able to use that expression because we’ve all been on a roller coaster of a journey together in our country and throughout the world. A pandemic; political uncertainty; mental health decline on the rise; the death of George Floyd and Black Lives – do they Matter or not?

We have seen tremendous loss of life, traditions, togetherness and yet, for those of us who choose to follow Jesus there is hope. The Church has had to adapt to so much change - how we worship, how we care for one another and how we can continue to serve our communities in the midst of a pandemic. And many in our Diocese have found ways to be church, by the Grace of God, though we are a scattered community.

We can’t pretend that life has been great this year but maybe we can recognise the moments of time when it has been good because God is present no matter what we have faced and will face and God is good.

I am always encouraged by God’s Word and I particularly love Paul’s words here in 2 *Corinthians* 4:8-9:

“We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed.”

These words have rung true for me time after time when I have faced difficulties in my life.

When God walks with us
We are not crushed.
We are not driven to despair.
We are never abandoned by God and...
We are not destroyed.

I love that! During this Advent season of hope though it might not seem so at time, Emmanuel, ‘God with us’ is present.

As a new year approaches with all its unknowns and uncertainties, as Children of God we can be certain that God’s promises to you and me are:



- I will not allow you to be crushed.
- I will never abandon you.
- I will give you the strength and the courage to keep going.

May the Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, everlasting Father and Prince of Peace meet with each and every one of us through Advent and the Christmas season and bring us his joy to carry us into a new year with hope.



Bishop Jonathan appointed CofE safeguarding lead

HUDDERSFIELD The Bishop of Huddersfield, Jonathan Gibbs has been announced as the Church of England's new lead safeguarding bishop, taking over from Bishop Peter Hancock, the Bishop of Bath and Wells, who leaves the role at the end of February.

Bishop Jonathan, a member of the House of Bishops, will be supported by the Bishop of Southampton, Debbie Sellin,



as deputy lead safeguarding bishop.

Within our diocese, he has chaired the Board of Education which oversees our 242 schools – a role which now passes to the Rt Revd Bishop of Ripon, Dr Helen-Ann Hartley.

Bishop Jonathan and Bishop Debbie will work closely with the national director of safeguarding Melissa Caslake, who took up the role six months ago, along with the all members of the National Safeguarding Team as they continue to develop the Church's safeguarding practice.

Bishop Jonathan will chair the National Safeguarding Steering Group, the delegated House of Bishops body responsible for making national safeguarding decisions.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby said: "We are truly grateful to Bishop Peter who as lead safeguarding bishop, represented the Church at its three IICSA hearings over the past two years as well as leading on the response both to the recommendations and the important calls for change from survivors.

"His commitment to safeguarding and the mission of the Church is exemplary and the House of Bishops has learnt a lot from him.

"We welcome Bishop Jonathan and Bishop Debbie and commend their willingness to take up this role which is a vital part of the work of the Church."

Leeds Minster receives £327k for vital roof repairs

LEEDS Leeds Minster has received a much-needed grant of £326,237 from the Government's £1.57billion Culture Recovery Fund to pay for vital roof restoration.

The Minster is one of 445 heritage organisations across the country set to receive a welcome financial boost from the emergency fund help



them through the coronavirus pandemic.

A grant of £326,237 has been made to re-lay roofs to the north and east of the building. This work will address long-term repair issues for the church and make a significant contribution to conserving the historic fabric of this Grade 1 Listed Building.

(Continued on page 5)

Embracing our New Year with kindness

Bishop Helen-Ann Hartley

(Continued from page 4)

Reverend Canon Sam Corley, Rector of Leeds, said:

“We are so pleased to have secured this grant which will help us solve a problem we have been burdened by for years. The essential works to various roofs around the Minster will help make the building watertight and so ensure that the City’s heritage is preserved for generations to come.”

Leeds Minster stands on a site used for Christian worship for over a thousand years and is the birthplace of the City of Leeds.

The current church building was opened in 1841, a Victorian Gothic masterpiece designed by architect R D Chantrell and built through the untiring efforts of the Reverend Dr Walter Farquhar Hook, then Vicar of Leeds.

An architectural innovation in its day, the church combined Hook’s revolutionary thinking on parish church design with the latest developments in building construction.

Recently, a friend posted an image on social media: “We are not all in the same boat, but we are all in the same storm: support each other, don’t judge, be kind”.

When I have a Zoom-free moment to reflect on the past months, I’ve seen all those elements in play: support, judgement, and kindness. A lot of that has been online, but some of it has been in my own experience: things I have observed, conversations I have had, feelings that have bubbled up inside me as I’ve faced my own personal challenges. Plenty of folk have said how much they are looking forward to seeing the back of 2020; roll on New Year’s Day 2021!

Advent Sunday is a pivot point in the Christian calendar, and it’s significant that this year it begins while England is still in lockdown. Advent marks the start of the new liturgical year, as we look ahead to Christmas and all that lies beyond. We’ve been there before of course, plenty times, but each year we are invited to face the Gospel full-on with all that has gone before knowing that transformation is still possible.

Speaking of liturgical years, this new year ahead we will be reading through Mark. Here’s



a Gospel that dives straight in to the story of Jesus, and ends as abruptly as it begins. But that’s Mark’s genius. It’s not a full stop at the end, it’s a ‘...’. Finish the Gospel, but then read it again and again in the light of the resurrection, then see what fresh insight that brings to our reading?

A card that sits on my bookshelf echoes the words I began this reflection with: “We cannot control the wind, but we can direct the sails”.

In other words, attitude matters, and there’s the challenge: to use this Advent to nourish kindness towards those in need but also to be kind to ourselves, and through that to be bearers of the hope brought by Jesus’ birth in our communities.

God is light, and in him there is no darkness

Bishop Tony Robinson

In 2020 humanity has been attacked by the invisible enemy called Corona virus which is deadly. The invisible enemy has changed our day to day order of living. We are unable to do the same things in the same ways. We can't plan long term; we can't really stay close to people the way we or they might want. We must stay indoors more than usual and wash our hands with soap and sanitiser as regularly as possible. That is how the invisible enemy is dictating our lives.

Despite the gloom and darkness that the world is facing because of the Covid-19 pandemic we are all reminded that darkness does not have any power over light. "This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). Darkness may try to prevent the light from shining, but it never holds back the light enduringly. Ultimately the light will shine though. God as the creator of the universe is bigger than the Covid-19 health crisis. He can surmount all.

Human beings are very vulnerable because we are powerless. We must bear in mind that we affect each other negatively and positively. A lot



of things in life are beyond our control. Humanity is gaining scientific and technological mastery over the physical world. As much as we are faced with COVID-19 we are working hard to come up with a lot of inventions to try to defeat the invisible enemy. It is good to help ourselves and that is what we should do. But we should at the same time guard against the fallacy of thinking that if we know about something, we can also control it.

Sometimes people get sick and all we can do is sit there, watch helplessly, while as yet we have no cure for Covid-19.

All of this will pass. All trials do. But until then let us trust in God daily inviting Jesus into our lives. Let us hand over our fears to him so that he can conquer them.

1,000 fresh hot meals provided by Harrogate church

RIPON A Harrogate church has kept people fed during the lockdown, with 1,000 hot meals served in April alone. St Peter's Harrogate has been serving food from the West Door of the church, making sure folk can have a hot breakfast and, since lockdown began, an evening meal.

The Vicar of St Peter's, Revd Alan Garrow, said: "St Peter's



food ministry is a small sign of God's open-armed generosity - thanks to the tireless efforts of an incredibly hard-working team of volunteers who have been shopping for, collecting and delivering produce, cooking, packing, serving and keeping the place clean and tidy.

"In this and many other ways St Peter's ministry doesn't stop."

The food is provided in partnership with local businesses in the Harrogate area.

God's good news is always the source of our joy and hope

Bishop Jonathan Gibbs

I guess many of us find the short, dark days difficult at this time of year. There is a name for it – S.A.D. or Seasonal Affective Disorder – and it's probably more common than we realise.

On the other hand, as we enter the season of Advent, then Christmas really is just around the corner – and shortly afterwards the days begin to lengthen, and before we know it, spring is in the air.

The important thing for us to do when we feel "S.A.D." or down for whatever reason, is that we should keep our eyes fixed on something on the other side of what we are facing here and now. Right now, it seems hard to imagine that life will ever return to some kind of

normality, once COVID-19 has been brought under control and an effective vaccine has been distributed across the world. Many people have found the lockdowns hard to cope with, and anxiety levels seem to be increasing even though there has been the news that a successful vaccine will be on its way soon.

The difference for us as Christians is that our sense of hope is not ultimately dependent on what is going on in the world around us. We may have to celebrate Christmas in a rather different way this year, but at the heart of it will still be the good news of the birth of our Saviour, while Advent speaks of the return of the King and the final coming of his kingdom of justice and peace.

That good news is the real source of our joy and hope even in the dark days of winter and of the COVID-19 pandemic.

May the love of Christ fill our hearts and his joy and hope sustain us throughout this Advent and Christmas.

Fountains Church opens for private prayer

BRADFORD Fountains Church Bradford has taken the next step in their church journey by gaining access to their building as work continues to go well inside.

The church is based in Bradford's Glydegate Square complex, a building that was once home to several nightclubs, but had stood empty for some time and become dilapidated and vandalised before taken on by the church.



Fountains Church, supported by the Church of England's Strategic Development Fund, aims to be a highly visible city centre church with a strong Bradford identity: young, entrepreneurial, ethnically and culturally diverse, and confident about holding out a clear faith offering and call in the public space.

The joyful Fountains team have now gained access to the building, with the interior transformed by months of extensive work.



Life is full of hidden jewels

Bishop Toby Howarth

With the skies turning darker grey and the evenings drawing in, I've felt tempted to allow my own outlook on life to reflect the gathering gloom. I'm not the only one; I've had a few conversations recently with people who are feeling the pressure of months of a COVID dominated life, and are a bit fed up.

What's been interesting is that occasionally in these conversations, either myself or my conversation partner has mentioned something quite positive, but then we've quickly moved on to more negative things without noticing.

But these positive stories, these bits of good news are like rubies scattered in a muddy field. They're worth digging around for, pulling out and polishing up. And then it's worth taking a few minutes to set them on the window sill, appreciate them and give thanks for them. Looking for positives in this way is not about putting a brave face on things and pretending. Of course, the mud is still there. But the mud is not the only reality.



We've just celebrated Inter Faith Week, and the team at Wellsprings Together have visited some of our partners in churches, mosques, gurdwaras, temples and synagogues who have been doing some extraordinary work. They've been running food banks, telephoning vulnerable people, supporting schools and making sure people don't fall through the cracks of a creaking system. Inter Faith Week felt like a good time to dig up some rubies and to draw strength and hope from them as we move into what may be a difficult winter for many. The Wellsprings team put together a series of little films to recognise and give thanks for the work these people and organisations are doing, often quietly and unnoticed. You can find the films via the diocesan website.

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." So writes the Apostle Paul to the Thessalonians. He was someone who knew a thing or two about lockdowns and restrictions, hope and joy.

480 miles walk to raise money for Christ Church

WAKEFIELD A member of one of our Leeds churches has taken the scenic route to raise money this July, by walking some 480 miles.

Karen McLean, who worships at Christ Church, Lofthouse, was set to walk the Camino de Santiago, the 480.9 mile pilgrimage that leads to the shrine of St James the Great in



the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, in north-western Spain.

Unfortunately this was cancelled but Karen decided to walk the miles in Yorkshire, completing the challenge virtually.

She set out on July 1 and each day walked an average of 17.5 miles, returning home each evening to nurse her feet and recover before the next day. This continued every day until on July 28 she walked to Lofthouse and was greeted by a small group of friends at the church gates.

Responding to the real world with prayer and action

Bishop Paul Slater

I remember one Christmas Eve, after our Midnight Communion Service, greeting people at the door as they went out into the cold: "Happy Christmas" etc. It was about ten minutes to one o'clock and as I neared the end of a long line of people, one congregation member said to me: "Can I have a quick word with you about our Flower Festival next May?"

Well, that was thinking ahead, trying to get well-prepared, getting one step ahead. We often think that Advent is about good preparation, but actually it's more about alertness and readiness to respond to whatever God puts in front of us. And the Bible shows us that the first Christmas depended on men and women responding to God's gracious invitation to be part of his coming into the world in the baby Jesus.

We have certainly had to respond to what has been put in front of us in this last eight months or so. And, it has been exciting to see how many churches in the Leeds Episcopal Area have responded creatively to the situation, not just in terms of worship but also in terms of serving their local community, in evangelism and growing people's discipleship.



We have seen a new partnership between inner city and outer suburban parishes which has supported food banks; innovative ways of doing family and children's worship which have touched families beyond the church; new Rhythm of Life groups, making use of the new Diocese of Leeds material; churches working together with other organisations under the Leeds

Citizens banner to highlight the need to pay care workers at least the Real Living Wage; Alpha courses groups set up on line across Leeds;and so much more.

And one of the keys to responsiveness to new situations is prayer. Ann Morisy, in her book *Journeying Out*, written nearly twenty years ago now, wrote about how she felt that her own lack of responsiveness was due to her own failure in prayer. She says: "One of the things which prayerfulness brings is timing, timing which enables grace to flow unimpeded."

Let's pray that we will know how to respond creatively and know what we should leave for another time.

Take Advent action with our free resources!

Have you felt inspired by the stories in *Advent News*? If so, then good news! There are dozens of free resources to help you and your family celebrate Advent and look forward to Christmas, and they are all on the Diocese of Leeds website.

Simply visit www.leeds.anglican.org/advent-2020 and browse resources for children, young people and adults. Listen to some samples of Christmas church music, and get crafting ideas with our gallery of home made nativity scenes.



Hope is Advent's key ingredient

Rev'd Canon Vaughan Pollard

As a church our plans would normally be put in place for Advent well before the first window of the Advent Calendar is opened. I have to say however that trying to put any plans in place at the moment is so frustrating, we are constantly having to reimagine things. "So why bother," you might say, "let's just skip Advent and get the Christmas tree and sparkling lights out!"

The danger is we'll miss out on a really important ingredient that Advent brings into our lives, because Advent is a season of hope, of expectation. So, let's not skip it.

As a church here in Bradford we are planning to whisper hope even in the midst of the gloom (real gloom) of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Each day, like opening the windows of that calendar, were planning to share a Thought for the Day on an Advent Theme, hoping to catch a glimpse of Advent hope in the everyday things of life. We aim to encourage people to just take a moment to stop and ponder and pray, each day wherever they are.



We know it's not going to be easy and they'll be days when I don't find it easy, but nevertheless we're gonna give it a go.

Maybe you might find a way.

May the God of Hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with Hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15 v 13.

Nativity Treasure Hunt keeps Keighley connected

It won't be a 'silent night' in Keighley this Advent season, thanks to nativity storyboards set up by the church.



The Rev'd Graham Potter, part of the Team Ministry in Keighley, has set up eight boards across the town to form a treasure hunt for people to follow. Each board helps tell the Christmas story, starting with the angel Gabriel coming to Mary and ending with praise at the birth of Jesus.

Also on the boards are QR codes that take people to different Christmas carols to sing along to safely, socially distanced and with the wearing of masks recommended.

Rev'd Graham said: "We've all really missed singing. The treasure hunt was created to allow people to sing carols in a Covid-safe way."

For more details on taking part, contact revgraham@keighleyparish.org.

Comfort and joy at Bradford

BRADFORD Bradford Cathedral is helping to bring comfort and joy to those living in the city, and further afield, with its Advent and Christmas programme including services, events, and a daily video every day in December, as part of its online #BradventCalendar.

The season of Advent began on Sunday, November 29, with the switch-on of the cathedral's 'Star



in the Tower', which made its first appearance in 2019, alongside two services, the Advent Sunday Eucharist, and an Advent Carol Service.

The Revd Canon Mandy Coutts, Canon for Mission and Pastoral Development said: "This season, Bradford Cathedral is going to celebrate the twin themes of comfort and joy. Christmas is always a time of joy and celebration."

The Dean of Bradford, the Very Revd Jerry Lepine said: "Advent encourages a new song to emerge from the sense of being overwhelmed by darkness."

Angels carrying prayers take flight

RIPON Ripon Cathedral hosted a unique origami art installation during the summer with some 10,000 paper angels flying high above the nave.

The installation was part of their 'A Wing and a Prayer' project launched in May to support the vital work of the Yorkshire Air Ambulance and Ripon Cathedral.

Each angel was made by a host of volunteers and reflects the prayers offered for those who have lost their lives to the coronavirus and those in the NHS and other front line services risking their own lives for the sake of others. So far the project has raised over £130,000,



which will be split between the Yorkshire Air Ambulance and the cathedral.

The Dean of Ripon, the Very Revd John Dobson said: "This project is doing several positive things and responding to a real desire on the part of many people to make their prayers in or through Ripon Cathedral."

Firm in Hope: a new vision

WAKEFIELD Wakefield Cathedral has launched its new Strategic Vision, which is rooted in its core values of joyfulness, generosity and inclusiveness.

Firm in Hope details the cathedral's commitment to be a place that is safe and welcoming, life-giving and inspiring.



Speaking at its launch at the Cathedral's annual meeting the Dean of Wakefield, the Very Revd Simon Cowling, said:

"We're launching our new Vision at the beginning of Advent, a season of hope as we look forward to the celebration of God coming among us.

"In these times of immense challenge we're looking forward with confidence to the next phase of ministry at Wakefield Cathedral, firm in the hope that God has given us in his Son, Jesus Christ."

What will you do in your first 100 days?

Jonathan Wood and the Church House team



What will you do in your first one hundred days? This was one of the questions I was asked when going through the interview process for the job of Chief Executive and Diocesan Secretary. I spoke about listening and learning and making the space to get out and about and meet people where they were. I didn't include any reference to a global pandemic!

It has been a unique start to a new role, but I have loved nearly every minute of it. Whilst I haven't managed to visit many places physically, I have met many of you virtually. Whether through online forums, virtual synods, the occasional drop-in to deanery meetings or through calls, emails and letters I have had the privilege of hearing about all that is going on in your parishes. I have been incredibly impressed. The resilience and the creativity which has been on display right across our diocese is inspiring.

Over the last few months the team at Church House have worked hard to adapt to providing support in new ways. Courses and training have been moved online, support events to help think through the challenges have been run and numerous toolkits and guidance documents have been produced. We were also able to gift churches across the diocese over £50,000 to help them serving their communities by providing grants for equipment and mission activities.

We don't yet know what the next few months will look like, but we do know there will be lots of challenges to navigate. We will continue to work closely with parishes and provide support and timely guidance. But above all we as a team will continue to hold to the truth expressed so beautifully by Charles Wesley

*Come, thou long expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.*

We are here to support you, so please get in touch if there is anything you need.

Jonathan and the Church House team

