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From the Church of England Diocese of Bath and Wells ☩ December 2020

Finding comfort and joy this Christmas

One of our oldest (16th century) English carols tells us that the story of Jesus' birth as a baby into our world, is good news, bringing "tidings of comfort and joy". And don't we just need comfort and joy at this moment!

We know that Christmas will not be the same this year. The usual gatherings of family and friends will not have the same shape and carol services and Midnight Mass may not be possible either but that doesn't mean Christmas is cancelled!

This year more than ever we need to carol the words, 'comfort and joy' - to find new ways of telling the Christmas story. The Church of England and our diocesan team have shared lots of ideas of how we can bring Christmas to our communities. I'm going to be a tax collector and a donkey in some of our video re-tellings of the story!

Perhaps more important, is how we



can be messengers of comfort and joy. Who do you know who might need some comfort this Christmas?

As for joy...? Perhaps we all need to rediscover the joy of the Christmas story. What could be more wonderful than knowing that God loves us so much that even though it was costly, He chose to come and join us in a world, dark with fear and suffering, and bring the light of His presence!

+ *Ruth Tanton*

News in brief

Bringing joy this Advent

The Quantock Foodbank, in partnership with Churches Together, is giving a nativity advent calendar and booklet to children at all their local first schools and associated nurseries. Churchgoers donated money for the purchase of the calendars instead of making their usual Harvest donations.

Marlene Mason, who helps run the foodbank said, "Donations from our churches have been so generous. With Christmas coming many families won't be able to buy the usual treats so, in order to bring a little joy and light into the children's lives, we have purchased the calendars. It also means we are helping others too. Proceeds from the Real Chocolate Company calendars go to fund clinics in Africa."



Planning a green Christmas?

If you don't want to forget your care for creation this Christmas, you may like to download the Environment team's handy Tips for a Green Christmas. It contains ideas about present buying, cards, decorations as well as tips on tree buying and food options. Download a copy at www.bathandwells.org.uk/environment. ■

Christingle on the move

They are on the move in Hayward Village, near Weston super Mare. Around 150 people are expected to take part in a 'moving' Christingle service. Taking into account Covid restrictions, family groups, individuals or friends, properly spaced, will set off at different

times from a starting point in the village. Using a specially designed map they will visit different locations for different parts of the service.

Want to celebrate Christingle? Visit childrenssociety.org.uk for a host of resources and ideas. ■

Starting the new year with prayer

For the last couple of years, Somerset's clergy and parishioners have met at Everyday Faith events (Archdeaconry Days), to think about how they live out their faith. The gatherings for 2021 will be online from 10 to 16 January and everyone is invited. The theme is 'Prayer – Everyone, Everywhere!'

The Archdeacon of Wells, Anne Gell, says, "As is so often the case with these events, the theme is simple, but key to how we live out our faith. Prayer is the foundation of our relationship with God and yet so many people lack confidence in praying if they don't have a written prayer in front of them. We will be



sharing examples of people from across Somerset who pray whilst drawing, skateboarding or just listening to the breeze in the grass."

On Sunday, 10 January a recorded service from Wells Cathedral will be available online. Focused on prayer, this will include a reflection from Bishop Ruth.

On Monday to Friday of that week, a short video will be released daily, featuring people talking about the ways they like to pray. Each day will focus on a different theme, such as 'prayer and nature' and 'prayer and the digital world'. The videos will be accompanied by a few suggestions of things for people to try in their own time.

On Saturday, 16 January there will be an opportunity to join others on Zoom to hear more about prayer and discuss what people have tried during the week.

Find out more about 'Prayer – Everyone, Everywhere!' and register to receive the materials at www.bathwells.org.uk/archdeaconry-days-2021. Alternatives will also be available to those who are not able to access materials online. Call Julia Hill on 01749 685114. ■

Through the dark times

Sir Ranulph Fiennes, who lives on one of Exmoor's highest hill farms, is the world's greatest living explorer. He explains what's kept him going in some of his toughest and darkest moments – and shares a few lockdown tips.



Sir Ranulph Fiennes on his Exmoor farm.

What kept you going through your toughest challenges?

At a time when we were making our living by trying to break world records, my late wife Ginny decided we could go round the earth vertically without flying, 52000 miles. It involved things which had not been done, like crossing Antarctica, which is bigger than America. We had an eight month period of darkness, living in a tiny hut under the snow, it was quite difficult from time to time. One of the things which was very helpful was my wife's pet Jack Russell Bothy, who was a huge help just playing ball, for example. We just had to learn to be patient. I wouldn't dare

to give lessons on being patient, but I know it's worth doing!

What advice would you give for people for coping with a Christmas in Covid times?

Some people who are accustomed to living alone have worked out a daily schedule, whether half an hour of TV, cooking, walking, going to sleep at a certain time. That sounds boring but it can help hugely against depression. Phoning someone up can make a day much more survivable. You can be ingenious, get a window box, paint inside, or outside, little things like that – try very hard to make yourself aim at something. That can make all the difference.

How will you cope this Christmas?

Christmas is going to be difficult for many, many people. I always say if I'm feeling despondent, read the Economist, it'll tell you what is happening to everyone else in the world, everything is relative! ■

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