

Dear Friends

Happy, healthy new year to you all.



This morning I joined the Open the Book team in Haxby and Wigginton, by Zoom, to record new Bible Stories for the local schools. Although we miss being able to work directly with children in a live assembly, it is wonderful to know that the Stories, and reflective prayers are shared with the pupils in other ways. This morning's performances weren't quite as smooth as previous sessions! A slowly sliding backdrop; helpless laughter with Herod's over-emphasized response to the script directions: 'his voice went squeaky'; builders outside starting a machine in perfect timing with 'let us close our eyes and think quietly about...'. As a second story group gathered to build houses, news came that the first story hadn't recorded properly. Later, all was resolved, without a third take. The recording had worked, but computer settings hadn't been adjusted to take account of a new set of speakers. Relief all round.

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and the princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flocks,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among people,
To make music in the heart.

Howard Thurman (1899-1981)

New ways of working and new equipment seem to echo the 'new route' decisions the magi made for their return journey. They responded anew after listening carefully to God's promptings in a dream. The Open the Book's morning dilemma arose in not realizing the need to reset equipment to be able to listen properly in the first place.

In an Epiphany service this week, Rev Keith Albans shared a poem by Howard Thurman, (an American philosopher, theologian and civil rights leader). He also wrote: "Christmas is waiting to be born : In you, in me, in all mankind"; and "There must be always

remaining in every life, some place for the singing of angels, some place for that which in itself is breathless and beautiful" <https://quotepark.com/authors/howard-thurman/>

It is not always easy to still ourselves to find that Christmas in waiting. It feels extra hard with continued periods of 'lockdown', restricted social celebrations and limited connection with family, friends and neighbours. Isn't there enough emptiness?

Many feel a sense of isolation from God when church buildings are closed for shared worship. Heads and shoulders floating on laptop screens or voices floating through phones isn't quite the same as the shared joy of music filled fellowship. And yet!

These are new opportunities to experience a deeper awareness of God; to find renewed freedom to pray, worship and enable the work of Christmas in different places. The benefits of stilling and prayerful silence are long known. Just how, then, to reset our listening equipment to discern that 'still small voice of calm'?

John of the Cross
In the inner stillness
where meditation leads,
the Spirit secretly anoints
the soul and heals our
deepest wounds

Maybe through the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (18th – 25th January 2021)?

This year, the prayers and reflections, around the theme 'Abide in Christ', have been prepared by the sisters of the Community of Grandchamp, Switzerland. The ancient rhythms of prayers, hymns, psalms and silence, gifted to us all in this Week of Prayer, are important in this troubled, anxious time. Places of ecumenical community and blessing will be offered during that week by phone or zoom. Details nearer the time.

May we each go well with God
Alyson

January 2021

Alyson Christy 0798 5272473