

# Chester Diocesan News



THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND  
Diocese of Chester

#EverydayFaith across the Diocese of Chester | December 2020

## Comfort and Joy



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## The Archdeacon of Macclesfield, Ian Bishop, finds there is comfort and joy to be found this Christmas, if we put our faith in God.

**F**or so many families Christmas 2020 will feel very empty. Many will be grieving loss, others just missing family they would normally be with, but for all there seems likely to be an empty space in the normal Christmas joy. You can't wrap it up and disguise it as anything other than a rather disappointing end to the saddest of years. It really does feel like we're in the bleakest of midwinters.

We now know that the Government is planning to relax the rules over Christmas, but for some the risk remains too great and there will be no return to normality for any of us. However you spend Christmas, I hope you will know 'Comfort and Joy' – the title of the rather nicely phrased Church of England Christmas campaign this year.

Maybe we can, this year more than any other, unwrap the story of Christmas in a different way. No one is pretending everything is OK, so no need to pretend this is a wonderful story. Scandal at the pregnancy brought shame on all, what did the families make of it all? We know Joseph nearly divorced Mary. Those nine months of awkward explanations, humiliating whispers and embarrassing gossip. I was raised in a small village and villages don't always treat those under scrutiny with kindness. That this pain-

ful nine months ended in an unhygienic birth isolated from all that was familiar just adds to the ignominy. It can never be claimed that God protected himself from the harsh realities of life.

But in that epic passage in John 1, it is clear that in the darkness the light still shines, 'The true light which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.' (John 1:9 NRSV). Here we find tidings of comfort and joy.

Whatever darkness you might have experienced this year, illness, bereavement, redundancy, debt, the light still shines. Like God we are never protected from the harsh realities of life, but we are part of a story that keeps moving towards the light. Out of nowhere in the darkness of the night there was singing on the hillside, 'Glory to God in the highest.' And the story unfolded to a world desperate for a saviour. The world is desperate for a saviour, a vaccine to bring us out of this darkness, a strategy that will restore order and hope. That might deal with the presenting problem, but true comfort and joy only arrives with accepting the simple gift of love, manifested in the child of Bethlehem.

It may be different this year, but may you, and those whom you love, still know true comfort and joy.

**Archdeacon Ian Bishop**

## Preparing for Advent & Christmas 2020

# Comfort and Joy



Created by the National Church, this year's Christmas campaign, called 'Comfort and Joy', aims to bring some festive cheer to parishioners and churches everywhere, whilst also acknowledging that we are still in difficult times and that people may have recently lost loved ones and livelihoods.

The Church of England has been preparing for Christmas for months and has made available to parishes a wealth of digital and print content for you to use and enjoy.

Comfort and Joy is a fantastic way to experience and celebrate the story of Jesus from home, or indeed from any location if you have internet access.

## Ways to get involved in Comfort and Joy

### National online services

In collaboration with a range of Christian charities and organisations, the Church of England will produce nine online services throughout Advent and Christmas. This will include an online service for each Sunday of Advent, a Christingle with the Children's Society, nine lessons and carols, and midnight services. They will all be broadcast on the Church's YouTube and Facebook pages.

### Advent Activity Calendar

The Church of England has produced a free Advent Activity Calendar that you can [download here](#). It encourages us to remember the joy of Christmas whilst reminding us to offer comfort to others.

### Daily reflections

Taking inspiration from a traditional carol service, you can [sign up to receive daily reflections](#) for the Christmas season from Kate Bottley, Jonathan Bryan, Bob Chilcot, Martha Collison, Stephen Cottrell, Guli Francis-Dehqani, Chine McDonald, Sally Phillips and Justin Welby. A booklet is also available to purchase.

### Daily Hope

Daily Hope is a dedicated telephone line offering music, prayers and reflections as well as full length services of worship over the telephone. Calls are totally free by dialling this number 0800 804 8044. The service has been a huge success since coming into operation shortly before the first national lockdown came into effect.

For more information about the Comfort and Joy campaign, and for details about how your parish church can order resources and benefit from a range of free digital resources via A Church Near You, visit the [Comfort and Joy webpage](#).

## Around the Diocese of Chester this Christmas

### Bishop and wife read story

Watch the video of [Bishop Mark and his wife Lindsay reading a children's book](#) in support of "Your Christmas", the Christmas campaign from adoption agency Adoption Matters.



### Christmas at Chester Cathedral

The Christmas Tree Festival, Sunday brunch with Father Christmas, a Christmas Carol concert, and much more are all [happening at the Cathedral this year](#).



### Ultimate online Advent Calendar

The dioceses of Chester, Manchester and Sheffield have teamed up to launch the [Ultimate Online Advent Calendar](#), to bring some Christmas cheer to youth groups and schools.



# Planning for Christmas



*The Revd Graham Cousins of Christ Church, Moreton, with his video team.*

**Christmas will be different this year, but nevertheless churches in the Diocese of Chester are adapting to the challenges we face and doing their utmost to connect people with Jesus, God and each other.**

**M**aking plans for Christmas is never straight forward: who goes to who's for Christmas dinner, what time does the turkey go in, when is it OK to start drinking?

If only it were that simple. This year, it's difficult for any of us to make any concrete plans.

Typically, Christmas is the busiest time of year for our churches; a time when families come together to enjoy the magic of Christmas and the story of Christ's birth. For our clergy and church leaders, the rhythm of advent preparation and the planning of carol services and nativity plays is a regular feature of parish ministry.

But how are our parishes adapting to the uncertainty that coronavirus brings this year? The great thing is that parishes in the Diocese of Chester have great resolve. Here three Vicars share how they are continuing to make things happen this Christmas in ways that still connect people with Jesus, God and each other.

The Revd Graham Shaw is the Vicar of Christ Church, Chester which caters mainly to young adults aged 18 - 35. People in this age range, which includes students from the nearby University of Chester, are more likely to go home to their parents for Christmas. For this reason, the church usually holds its Christmas celebrations early. Graham hopes to open the church for communion



*The Revd Graham Shaw*

on Christmas Eve, if permitted, but due to the possibility of pubs closing early, he is considering holding this at an earlier hour than normal. Graham says: "This has received some positive feedback with comments such as, 'Oh good, midnight is far too late for me normally anyway'. The key thing is we've got to be flexible and willing to make decisions with relatively little notice based on whatever the current situation is at that time."

The Revd Graham Cousins is the Vicar of Christ Church, Moreton. He says: "What we are trying to do is replicate our usual Christmas services in the best way that we can, given the current restrictions." The church benefits from having expertise in video streaming and they will put this to good use by broadcasting services across social media. Unfortunately, their live performance of the nativity play can't happen, but youth leader Kat Taylor came up with the idea of filming each character separately and then editing them together to create a video. Graham is keen to emphasise that using modern technology doesn't

work for everyone and so they also distribute DVDs and paper copies of services, liturgy, prayers, songs and sermons to those that want them.

The Reverend Canon Diane Cookson is the Vicar of St Saviour's, Stockport. Diane has a weekly system of phoning vulnerable members of her congregation every week. It's something she feels is especially important to continue over the Christmas period. Diane says: "St Saviour's has a tradition of organising church events, something which we have had to forego this year, but instead we decided to run a Christmas fayre on Facebook." Many of the items for sale are handmade by two members of the core team. Over 150 items have been produced so far and there are more to be added. The items can be viewed on St Saviour's Facebook page.

The items can be viewed on [St Saviour's Facebook page](#).



*One of the items for sale from St Saviour's*

# Events



## Archdeacons' Visitation service

08 December 2020 - Online

There is a legal requirement for all Churchwardens to be sworn into post every year. This service (for Churchwardens only) is to swear them in. [More...](#)



## Making the most of Zoom

15 December 2020 - Online

Learn how to get the most out of the platform, whether you are hosting a prayer meeting, interactive family session, or sharing a reflection. [More...](#)



## Fruitfulness on the Frontline

05 January 2021 (multiple dates) - Online

An invitation to discover how you can make a difference for Christ in the everyday. Join with others for an interactive eight-session course. [More...](#)



## Fundraising for building projects

19 January 2021 - Online

An informal space to begin thinking about how to fundraise for essential repairs or improvements to church buildings or halls. [More...](#)



## Called to Serve

23 January 2021 - Online

Called to Serve is an invitation to explore God's call on your life. Whoever and wherever you are, we each have a unique calling to serve God in our everyday lives. [More...](#)