

By the time you read this we will be coming out of lockdown and starting to think about what Christmas might be like this year and how we will celebrate it together and with family. Over the last month or so I have been trying to re-imagine how we are going to conduct services under the Covid restrictions. The planned schedule is shown on the opposite page, but may, of course, be subject to change.

Advent Sunday (29 November) occurs during lockdown. Our Advent 'Service of Light' will happen, just delayed by one week to Sunday 6 December, and will be adapted. The church (we who gather) will be surrounded by candlelight rather than holding individual candles; we will have a service of readings, prayers and the choir singing five Advent carols. At the end of the service, everyone will be invited to take an Advent candle and a prayer card home for use each day through Advent.

The parish carol service usually gathers far more than can safely come together in St George's under Covid restrictions. This year, therefore, the service will be recorded in advance and then streamed on YouTube at 7.30pm on Monday 21 December. From Friday 18 December the link will be made available on the church website www.benendenchurch.org, Parish Council website and distributed to those on St George's church-family email list. The centre pages of this magazine contain the carol service sheet - if you wish to print off more copies it will be available to download on the church website. Please consider a neighbour who may be alone that evening and, if we are allowed, and you and they feel safe, then why not invite them to join you, socially distanced, to sing the carols from your home.

The crib service is another that would swamp the safe capacity of St George's: last year there were 480 in attendance! This year we are doing something very different: a Nativity service, using life-size Nativity figures, at the lychgate (which will be transformed, by Charlotte, into the stable). Please gather at the top of The Green, with chairs, warm clothes, and keeping socially distanced, for a short service starting at 3pm (and pray for a dry afternoon!).

The midnight service will go ahead in St George's as normal, but socially distanced, hand sanitising and wearing face coverings. Christmas morning, though, will be different. There will be one Communion service, starting at 8am. This will be followed by two short family morning worship services, the first one starting at 9.30am, and the second one at 10.45am, each of these will be ticketed. Please sign up (by emailing Cathy: benendenchurch@gmail.com) for the service you wish to attend, as numbers will be restricted to 100 for each of the services; and collect your tickets (for each adult and child) from Revd David after the 10am services on Sunday 6 and Sunday 20 December - or by coming to The Rectory. If no ticket, entry will not be possible to these two services. Sorry.

It is a shame that we have the necessity for these changes but, providing the rules on gatherings do not change after lockdown, we can still worship together, praise God, and give thanks for the birth of His Son on earth. Doing it differently may just make us appreciate this great gift even more. God bless you and your families this Christmas time.

Revd David Commander, Rector