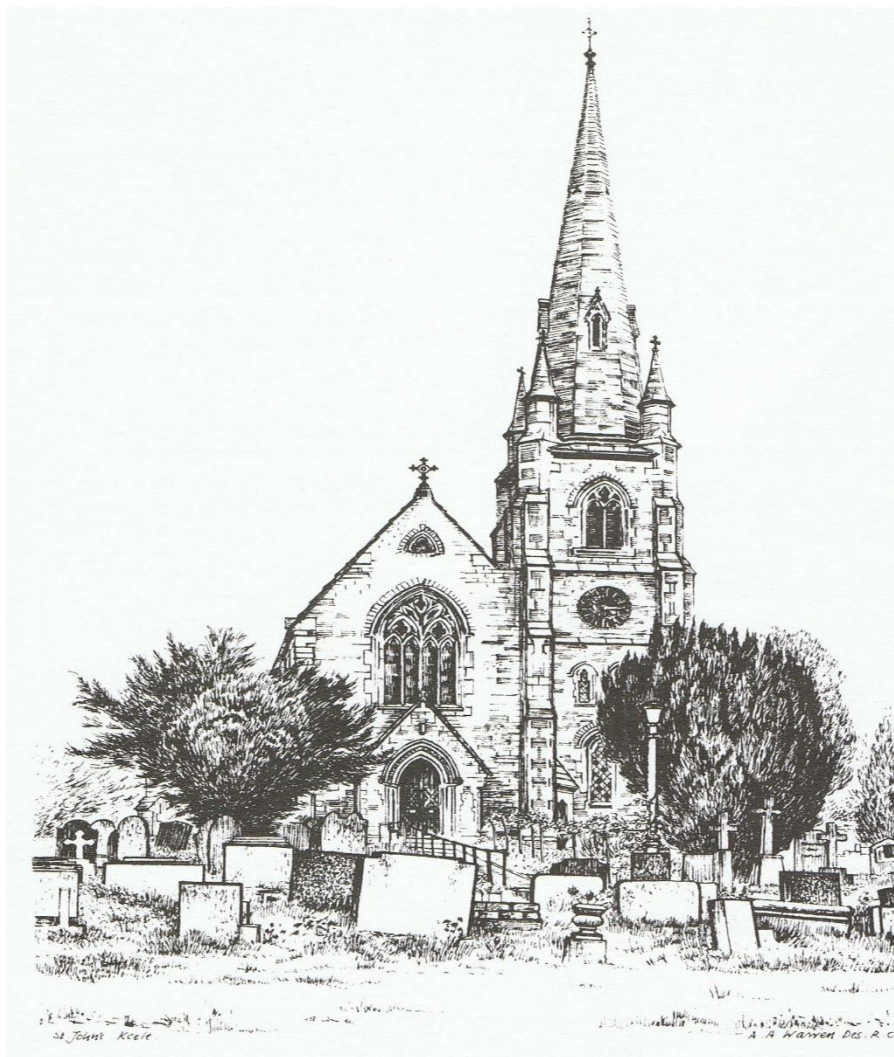


PARISH MAGAZINE



St. John the Baptist Church Keele

December 2020

50p

Worship at St John's

An important note on the resumption of public worship

St John's is now open for public worship on alternate Sundays only and with certain restrictions as listed below.

- The church can only accommodate 28 people at any service. People who share a household/social bubble may sit together but otherwise a distance of two metres between seats must be adhered to.
- Hand sanitizer will be available near the entry for your use or you may bring your own.
- Please bring your own pen/pencil in order to leave your contact details as required by NHS England in case of a local outbreak occurring.
- You will be required to wear a mask that covers your nose and mouth at all times with the exception of when receiving Holy Communion.
- Holy Communion will be administered in one kind only (Host). Instead of kneeling/standing at the sanctuary rail, please queue one behind the other, observing social distancing. When in front of the priest, offer your outstretched hand (palm up) to receive the sacrament. Move to one side, lift your mask and place the host in your mouth. Replace your mask and return to your seat, again observing social distancing.
- Unfortunately, singing will not be permitted so hymn books will not be available. You will be given a service sheet. Please take these home with you at the end of the service. Also, no physical sharing of the peace.

Continued

- The collection plates will not be brought round but please leave your donations of money on the plate provided at the entrance.
- We are unable to offer refreshments for the time being and neither can we provide toilet facilities.
- Please remember the need for social distancing at the end of worship and as you leave the church.

Our Fortnightly Services Continue as Follows

December

Sunday 6 th	Second Sunday of Advent	11.00am Eucharist
Sunday 20 th	Fourth Sunday of Advent	11.00am Eucharist
Thursday 24 th	First Mass of Christmas	7.00pm Eucharist

January

Sunday 3 rd	Second Sunday of Christmas	11.00am Eucharist
Sunday 17 th	Second Sunday after Epiphany	11.00am Eucharist
Sunday 31 st	Fourth Sunday after Epiphany	11.00am Eucharist

We look forward to the time when we will all be able to worship together as before. Meanwhile, we hold you in our prayers always.

Stay safe

The Bishop's Pastoral Letter

The Coming

'Christmas this year will not be like any other we have known': we will all have heard that many times of late. At the time of my writing this, it is not clear what restrictions we will be subject to in December; but it does seem very likely that much of what we are accustomed to will not be possible in the usual way. There are likely to be constraints on family gatherings. Eating and drinking together will be very complicated. Opportunities to sing carols will be much reduced. Many people will be experiencing challenging levels of anxiety, isolation, poverty and mental health issues. Does all this mean that Christmas will be cancelled this year, or at least dramatically diminished? We only have to reflect for a minute on the meaning of the word 'Christmas' to realise this cannot be true: it is the celebration of Jesus Christ, the 'Great Little One' in whom our God comes to us. As so much of what we have taken for granted is absent or muted this Christmas, perhaps the very heart of our celebration can stand with more clarity in a new light; perhaps we can focus more attentively on the truth which gives meaning to this great story. That is the truth of God's boundless mercy for us, which brings him to share our life as one of us: Sacred infant, all divine, / What a tender love was thine: / Thus to come from highest bliss / Down to such a world as this. The baby born at Bethlehem is not introduced to a comfortable, easy or settled life. From the outset the Holy Family knows the meaning of anxiety, displacement and suffering; remembering that should itself give us hope.

So the heart of Christmas this year will be the same as every year, and indeed it may be easier for us to see what that heart is. The numbers with whom we can meet as family and friends may be few, but Christ will surely make his home among us if we welcome him in. We may not sit down to so many or so exuberant meals, or indulge in so many cheerful social drinks together; but he still gives us his body and blood as food and drink to strengthen us. We may not be able to belt out our favourite Christmas carols in church as usual, but the song of the angels is not silenced, telling the good news of salvation, and urging us, like they urged the shepherds: 'Do not be afraid'.

Knowing that there is so much sadness, darkness and anger around us and within us, perhaps we can recapture this year the meaning of Advent: that our God loves this fallen world, and us his hurting children, so much, that he decides to come as Emmanuel, God with us. The poet and priest R S Thomas imagines that momentous decision like this in his poem ‘The Coming’:

And God held in his hand
A small globe. Look he said.
The son looked. Far off,
As through water, he saw
A scorched land of fierce
Colour. The light burned
There; crusted buildings
Cast their shadows: a bright
Serpent, A river
Uncoiled itself, radiant
With slime.

On a bare
Hill a bare tree saddened
The sky. many People
Held out their thin arms
To it, as though waiting
For a vanished April
To return to its crossed
Boughs. The son watched
Them. Let me go there, he said.

*+Michael
Bishop of Lichfield*

From the Church Warden

Friends,

Not unsurprisingly little has happened since I last wrote. I am grateful to the Village Council who organised an appropriate and socially distanced Remembrance Service. I did feel it was important regardless of constraints that this event is always remembered. This year was especially poignantly as it marked the 75th anniversary of the end of hostilities in both Europe and the Far East at the end of World War Two and the 100th anniversary of the burial of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey.

As I write this we are nearing the end of this second national lockdown, but even as it ends we will be a Tier 3 County. That said communal worship should be able to resume in accordance with current guidelines. This will though, as we have long feared, have an impact on worship in the Advent and Christmas period. We had already regretfully had to cancel both the Advent and Christmas Carols services along with Families Christmas Eve service, the Christingle Service. We will have to hope and pray that in 2021 we will see significant changes, for the better, in the course of this pandemic.

We will look to tidy up the grounds during the winter in preparation for spring and when things settle down into a rhythm of life that allows access to the church and for contractors to work normally I will get that roof seen to!

Given the circumstances that face us all I doubt I will see many of you on the run up to Christmas so I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a Happy Christmas and a safer and significantly better New Year.

Kindest regards

Nige B

“Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity”. 2 Timothy 2:19

Stay awake in hope

Bishop Michael's sermon for parishes, Advent Sunday: 29th November 2020

A Happy New Year to you all – yes, today, Advent Sunday, is the first day of the Church's new year, which begins on a note of expectancy, as we look for the coming of Jesus our Lord. And what does the Lord say to us at the start of this year? Mark's Gospel is very clear: he says repeatedly to his disciples: 'Keep alert ... keep awake ... what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake'.

'Keep awake'. Well, you might think, did he really need to say that to us just now. This is a time when many of us have no problem in keeping awake; it is getting to sleep that is difficult. What is keeping you awake at night? Maybe it is worry over your children, your grandchildren, your dear friend. Maybe it is concern over your own health or that of your spouse or partner. Maybe it is anxiety about your finances, or your job, or more generally the state of our society and our world. Maybe the isolation is getting to you, or you are so tired that you cannot even sleep; maybe it is some fear that seems so big in the small hours of the morning that you feel like the poet Fleur Adcock in her poem 'Things':

There are worse things than having behaved foolishly in public.
There are worse things than these miniature betrayals,
committed or endured or suspected;
There are worse things than
not being able to sleep for thinking about them.

It is 5 a.m. All the worse things come stalking in,
and stand icily about the bed,
looking worse and worse and worse.

Mental health issues have grown severely during this pandemic and the restrictions it has brought; we know that for a fact, and some of you may know it as an experience. It is not hard to stay awake at such a time.

But the wakefulness which Jesus calls for is not like this. He tells us to stay awake in expectancy, because we are looking forward in hope. This is not a hope which ignores the harshness of reality – the gospel passage describes a time of suffering, calamity and anxiety. The hope which is given to us is one which acknowledges loss, pain and sadness. But it is a real hope nonetheless.

This is the last Sunday of lockdown, and our expectation is that from next week onwards it will be possible for services to take place in our churches again. The skill and inventiveness of our clergy and laypeople in taking worship online has been amazing, and I am sure that digital church will be part of our future from now on; but what a joy it will be when we can gather together again in person, when we can see one another face to face (through our masks), when we can pray alongside one another (socially distanced), when we can receive the sacrament (maybe in one kind only). . And as we gather again, we will be hearing and telling stories of hope that should fill our hearts with joy.

In a few weeks, we will be telling again the great story of the gift of Emmanuel. His name means ‘God-is-with-us’, and that is the meaning of his life: he comes in Jesus to be born among us, to share our sorrows as well as our joys, and never ever to leave us. It will be an unusual Christmas this year, but it will certainly be Christmas. Maybe, as some of the dear familiar things we are so used to cannot happen this year, and the dear familiar people we love cannot join us, we will be able to focus a bit more clearly on what it is all about. This year we celebrated Easter when the death rate from the virus was at its highest, and we were locked down in our homes: what a time to proclaim Jesus’ new life bursting from the tomb. And at the darkest time of this dark year we will celebrate Christmas, feast of the shining light that never can be overcome. Here is hope for us and here is hope for our world.

And as we come back together again over the coming weeks and months in our churches and communities, we will have our own stories of hope to tell too. Stories of a people who looked out for one another and took care of the vulnerable and the isolated. Stories of workers in the health service, in supermarkets, in deliveries, in many essential jobs who carried on courageously doing their duty for us all. Stories of people who learned new skills, who adapted to new ways of living, who gave with extraordinary generosity.

Stories of people who learned to see the world in a new way, who realised that there is more to life than shopping, who started exploring what it means to pray, who found new meaning and purpose in church online. . Stories of people who came to terms with their grief and their loss and started rebuilding their lives. Stories of people who were seized with anger at the injustices of our broken world, and set about trying to change it.

We all know that there is a great deal of sadness, pain and anxiety in our world just now; but Advent reminds us that we are to look out for what is also there – the signs of hope in our churches and our communities.

Jesus calls us his people to make a conscious choice to be a people of hope. And there are two reasons why he does that. The first is, because we need hope to keep on going. The great Austrian Jewish psychotherapist Viktor Frankl, who survived the horrors of the Holocaust, grasped this when he wrote that nobody can live without hope. But if we have a hope that gives us a reason for living, it gives us a capacity to cope: ‘He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how’, Frankl said. He experienced a time immeasurably darker than what we have known, and yet he insisted that the most basic of human freedoms could never be taken away: ‘the freedom to choose one’s attitude in any given circumstances’, and in every circumstance, the attitude we should choose is hope.

But this is only half of the story. We need hope – but what if there actually is no hope available to us? Then, as St Paul said, we would be of all people the most miserable. But Jesus points his disciples to a sign, the sign of the fig tree: ‘as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near’. He points us to something beyond ourselves, to something we have not imagined, to something real. That reality is not the climatic season of summer; we are as many months from that as we can be. Rather, it is the reality of Christ our sun dawning on our world, on our lives. Our hope is built on this firmest ground: that in Jesus, God has come to us, he has shared our life and our death, and he has overcome the power of death through bursting from the grave. This is the truth; it is not something we have made up for ourselves; our hope is not in vain.

This is the message we are to share with one another, with our communities, with our world. It is a message which transforms our lives and turns us from sadness to expectant joy on this Advent Sunday. Today and every day, let us make Charles Wesley’s prayer our own:

Christ, whose glory fills the skies; Christ, the true, the only Light;
Sun of Righteousness, arise, Triumph o’er the shades of night:
dayspring from on high, be near; Daystar, in my heart appear.

Visit, then, this soul of mine; pierce the gloom of sin and grief;
fill me, Radiance divine; scatter all my unbelief;
more and more thyself display, shining to the perfect day.



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Goldcrests prefer evergreen trees, hiding in the dense foliage and rarely coming out into the open, so despite their bright crests, are difficult to see. They feed on tiny morsels like spiders, moth eggs and small insect food which they pick out from the undersides and between the needles of yew and other evergreens using their thin beaks to push into small spaces. They are constantly on the move, searching or 'gleaning' for food, so you may see the movement of a goldcrest within the tree canopy and can then take time to seek out and see them.

Alternatively, you can rely on sound to find and identify goldcrests if you have good hearing as their call is so high-pitched that many people cannot hear it. Listen for a repetitive call, slightly wheezy and described as saying 'needle-needle-needle'. They don't use nest boxes but build a tiny nest within the twigs of the tree canopy, shaped like a near spherical hammock. It is made from moss, lichen, small bits of other vegetation and lined with warming feathers. Please let us know if you see or hear goldcrests in your churchyard, We are building a picture of the wildlife to be found across the burial grounds of England and Wales, and this is a classic churchyard bird. All the best

Harriet Carty,

Diocesan Churchyard Environmental Advisor, harriet@cfga.org.uk,

www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk - individuals and groups in the diocese receive 20% members discount on all CfGA materials. Use the discount code Lich19

The Belfry Bat

On Sunday October 11th we had a farewell visit from our friends Ray and Anne Ballard, who are moving to East Anglia. Ray was one of the first local ringers I met when I came to Keele in 1961, and I have known Anne since she came to Keele as a student in 1967. I taught her to ring, and they met in Keele belfry. Ray has been a member of our Wednesday peal band since 2003. We will miss them both, but won't lose touch with them, as the village they are moving to, Thorney, is only a short detour from the route we use when visiting Suffolk. Also, Anne is going to continue as chair of governors of a group of local schools, so they will be visiting regularly and may even need a bed for the night.

Ro's *no bending or lifting* regime meant I did the shopping on my own on October 14th. Unusually, I went to more than one supermarket, as on Saturday the *i* newspaper's wine club recommended some bargains at Tesco and Aldi as well as Sainsbury's. One of the Tesco ones was unavailable, but I came home with a good selection. At Sainsbury's I had to queue for fifteen minutes to get in, caused by it being the first day that Christmas toys were on sale.

Everyone went to St Luke's on October 18th so I did only one lot of ringing. There is a plan to change the service time at Madeley so in future I may not be able to do both. We have bought a chimenea to keep us warm when sitting on the patio, and on Monday Graham came to help me assemble it. It consists of four large cast-iron components plus several smaller ones, held together by nuts and bolts. Not a difficult job, but definitely one which required more than two hands.

On Friday I spent a very interesting couple of hours with Bill Hibbert, a ringer who does research into bell tuning. He has software which can decompose the complex wave form of the sound of a bell into its component parts, which enables the harmonics of the bell to be identified. Modern bell tuning, with all the harmonics aligned in a pleasing way, was not fully understood until the last decade of the nineteenth century, although before that a few founders managed to get close. One of these was William Dobson, who cast three bells for St Johns in 1829, having cast a complete six for Burslem the previous year. The tower at Burslem has structural problems which prevent the bells from being rung, but swinging the clapper by hand is sufficient to make recording possible. We then went to St Johns, where the bells can be sounded from the

ringing chamber, and finally to Woodlands where Bill recorded our ring of eight bells and also some additional ones which I have collected. I am looking forward to receiving the results when he has completed his analysis.

It was good to wake up to an unusually light morning on Sunday. My first task of the day was to go to church and adjust the clock, which showed 9.50 when I arrived. By arriving just before the hour, I was able to wind the hands back an hour without upsetting the striking. Walking out through the lych gate with the sun on my back, my shadow stretched all the way to the war memorial. Arriving home soon after nine I was reminded of what I call the Einstein Limerick:

*There was once was young man called Bright
whose car could go faster than light.
He set out one day in a relative way
and arrived on the previous night.*

Later I went back to church where we were able to ring four bells by virtue of having Steve and Pauline Mellor in the band to ring the second and third, with Roland Wakefield on the fifth and me on the tenor. In the following days it was almost dry enough to cut the grass on several occasions, but never quite possible. On Friday we decided that tier 2 means no ringing, but we could possibly toll a single bell on November 8th. Peter thought it was a good idea, and Steve volunteered to do it. But this was overtaken by the announcement of a national lockdown, so the bells will not be heard for at least a month. Will we be allowed to ring for Christmas?

On Tuesday I read in the paper that Boris has authorised the holding of Remembrance Day ceremonies outside, so I emailed Peter to ask what will happen at Keele. He replied that the situation was unclear, and that continued to be the case. But by Friday it was clear that we could toll for a few minutes to accompany the wreath-laying.

I have just bought a book entitled *Fifty Catholic Churches to See Before You Die*. As you would expect, many of them were built, like St John's, in the second half of the nineteenth century, but there are a small number from earlier centuries and a pleasing number from the twentieth century. In addition to the Pugin family, a surprisingly large number of prominent architects were catholics, including Sir Giles Gilbert Scott of Liverpool Cathedral and telephone box fame. As one would expect, St Giles at Cheadle is included, with a mention also of the early Pugin church at Uttoxeter.

Saturday dawned bright and breezy, so I checked the grass for dryness but was not able to cut it. Our paper contained a full-page advert for hedgehog houses costing £30. I wondered whether I should go into business, but not for long. On Sunday morning Steve tolled the tenor eleven times to mark the hour, and after the two minutes silence tolled it for five minutes. This was typical of what was done at many churches throughout the country. Later in the day I received the full details of the tuning of the bells in the garage, which turned out to be more or less what I expected - the ringing bells are good and the unhung bells have potential to make quite a good six.

Phil Gay



Date for the Diary

The Christmas draw will take place on **Saturday December 12th**

The money raised so far has reached almost £500. Thanks to Angela for her inspirational idea and to all of you who have bought tickets.

All monies raised will go towards the fabric of the church.

From the Registers

Funeral

26th November Beryl Keeling

Church Officers

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NB Articles for the magazine should be sent to the editor by the 12th of the preceding month.

