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ST PETER'S CHURCH BRACKLEY

"Loving God, loving each other, loving Brackley"





I love Christmas.

The lights. The anticipation. The music. The tradition. The smell of dusty decorations, cloves and pine needles. The pigs in blankets. I love the whole shebang. Throw in the added excitement that we're expecting our next child on 22nd December, and we have plenty to look forward to in our household. We might even have a live nativity!

However, as we all know, things are going to look very different this December. One of the cheesier seasonal hits goes, "It's the same old, same old Christmas Eve. It's the same old Christmas Day. It's the same old, same old Christmas. But I like it, I like it that way." For many, the idea of changing Christmas will be deeply disappointing. And coming off the back of the past few months, this December may well feel bleaker, lonelier, darker.

More than ever, we need to hear those ancient words:

"The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned...
For unto us a child is born,
unto us a son is given." (Isaiah 9:2, 6)

The good news for Christmas 2020, is that any light seems brightest when the surroundings are darkest. In a more standard year, modern Britain's version of Isaiah's words might read: "The people walking in the light-polluted glitz of commercial Christmas have been too distracted to see a great light." But this Christmas, robbed of some of its normal sparkle, the gift of God's Son might actually dazzle us as it should.

You see, much as I love the sentimentality and same-ness of Christmas, it can fool me into thinking that's the essence. Quite the opposite: the original Christmas was just that, extremely original – much more about novelty than nostalgia. However 'unprecedented' this Christmas may feel, it has nothing on that first noel. After all, virgins

don't have babies, stars don't behave like satnavs, and kings aren't born in stables. Obviously. The immortal wouldn't choose to be mortal, and the infinite wouldn't choose to be infantile. Of course not! Except that... he did.

This truly was unprecedented. God cared too much to stay at arm's length, instead he committed the most sacrificial breach of social distancing. With zero PPE and complete disregard for his own safety, he came in-person to bring the life-saving intensive care we all need and crave. For God so loved the world that he didn't come by Zoom. No, he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him can have eternal life. And peace. And joy. Security, purpose, and hope.

So, why not come to one of our Advent/Christmas events at St Peter's Church, if restrictions allow. Subject to lockdown lifting, we hope to put on a 'Handel's Messiah' evening for music lovers (Sun 6th, 7:30-8:30pm), a 'Blue Christmas' service for those who find Christmas especially difficult (Wed 9th, 7:30-8:30pm), and then number of short Christingle services for families (Christmas Eve, 3pm onwards). Please book your places in advance via our website (**stpetersbrackley.org.uk/christmas**). You'll also find on the website our online Christmas activities and services if it's not safe to attend events in the flesh.

Whatever happens, I hope you find this year (as every year) that "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5). Lockdown or no lockdown, Christmas isn't cancelled. If anything, it might just be clarified. Even though it won't be "the same old, same old Christmas," that may actually be a good thing. Who knows, could this December turn out to be the darkest and most dazzling in decades?

Wishing you a very happy Christmas! Rev. Rich Duncan

PS – My plan, at the moment, is to take two weeks of paternity leave from Monday 28th December to Sunday 10th January. Having said that, Woody Allen once quipped, 'If you want to make God laugh, tell him about your plans!'



Christmas

AT ST PETER'S CHURCH, BRACKLEY

**Handel's Messiah
Blue Christmas Service
Christingle Services
Christmas Day all-age
Advent activities for all the family**

6 Dec, 7.30-8.30pm
9 Dec, 7.30-8.30pm
24 Dec, 15-min services from 3-5pm
25 Dec, 9.30am
Throughout December online



More info and online services at
stpetersbrackley.org.uk/Christmas

How to impress the cat this Christmas

If you are going to spend Christmas in a house with a resident cat, it may be worth knowing how to win its favour on the big day.

Recent research at Sussex University has found that humans become more attractive to a cat when they slowly blink at it, and mimic what is known as a 'cat smile'



Cats are more likely to slow-blink at their owners after their owners have slow-blinded at them. Cats are also more likely to approach an outstretched hand after a person has slow-blinded the cat.

As one professor said, this is something 'you can try yourself with your own cat at home, or with cats you meet in the street. It's a great way of enhancing the bond you have with cats.' (Presuming you want such a bond!)

'Try narrowing your eyes at them as you would in a relaxed smile, followed by closing your eyes for a couple of seconds. You should find they respond to you in the same way. You might even start a sort-of conversation.'





How Father Christmas got where he is today

One person you are bound to run into this Christmas season is Father Christmas. These days he seems to frequent shopping malls and garden centres. If he looks tired, just remember that he has been around a long time and gone through a lot of transformations.

Father Christmas wasn't always the red-suited, white-bearded star of the retail trade that he is today. He began life as Nicholas, born way back about AD260 in Patara, an important port on the southern coast of what is now Turkey. When his parents died and left him a fortune, Nicholas gave it away to the poor. He became a bishop of the nearby city of Myra, where he almost certainly suffered persecution and imprisonment at the hand of the Roman Emperor Diocletian.

Nicholas was a serious theologian: he was a participant at the First Council of Nicaea, which formulated the Creed which we still say today. He even, reportedly, slapped another bishop in a squabble over the exact nature of the Trinity.

Nicholas died in Myra about AD343, but the stories of his generosity and kindness were just beginning. One enduring tale tells of the three girls whom he rescued from certain prostitution by giving them gold for their dowries. When the father confronted him to thank him, Nicholas said he should thank God alone.

In the UK, Nicholas became the basis for Father Christmas, who emerged in Victorian times as a jolly-faced bearded character. Meanwhile, Dutch and German settlers had taken him to America with them as Sinter Klaas and Sankt Nicklas.

It was in America that Nicholas received his final two great breaks into real stardom. The first was when the Rev Clement C Moore, a New York Episcopal minister, turned from his life-work of writing a Hebrew/English lexicon, to write a fun poem for his children one Christmas. His 'The Visit of St Nicholas' is now universally known by its first line: 'T'was the Night Before Christmas'.

From Clement Moore we discovered that St Nicholas is round and pink-cheeked and white-bearded, and that he travels at night with sleigh, reindeer and a sack of toys on his back. It was Clement Moore who also revealed that St Nicholas enters houses down chimneys and fills children's stockings with toys and sweets.

So how did we find out that Father Christmas wears red? That was the US Coca-Cola advertising campaign of 1931, who finally released the latest, up-to-date pictures of Father Christmas: wearing a bright red, fur-trimmed coat and a large belt.

These days, it is good that Father Christmas uses reindeer and doesn't have to pay for petrol. In order to get round all the children in the world on Christmas Eve, he will have to travel 221 million miles at an average speed of 1279 miles a second, 6,395 times the speed of sound. For all those of us who are already exhausted just rushing around getting ready for Christmas, that is a sobering thought.

Chuckle Time



Christmas Wish

When a father asked his little boy what he wanted for Christmas, the boy replied, "A baby sister."

As it turned out, the wife was pregnant, and delivered on Christmas Eve. On Christmas day she brought home a brand new baby sister for their son.

The next year, when the father asked his little boy what he wanted for Christmas, the boy said, "If it wouldn't make mummy too uncomfortable, I'd like a pony."

If you have enjoyed this short online edition of the current magazine, you can purchase the full 20 page printed edition for the modest sum of 40p.

The magazine is available at Jems on the Market Place or you can have delivered to your door at no extra charge monthly.

If you would like to take out an annual subscription for home delivery please email Marilyn Israel at

marilynisaels2017@gmail.com



*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

Isaiah 9 verse 6

Dear Parishioner,

Whether or not I see you in person to wish you well, I sincerely hope you draw fresh strength and comfort from our Saviour during December and on into January.

When you feel out of control, remember the government rests on His shoulders. When you feel lost, talk to the Wonderful Counsellor. When you feel anxious, turn to the Prince of Peace. When you feel weak, know that He is Mighty God.

Whatever else we get (or lack) this Christmas, we've already been given HIM.

On that basis, let me wish you a truly merry Christmas and a happy New Year!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rev. Rich Duncan".

Rev. Rich Duncan