

A Christmas like no other

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. *John 1.5*

I wonder how you'll be keeping Christmas this year, and how you're feeling about it? Does it all feel sad and empty, a painful deprivation from the parties, meals, services and celebrations that wonderfully make Christmas what you think it really is? Or are you feeling released from some of the strain and stress, free to enjoy time and space? Are you relieved because the things you normally feel you have to rush around doing (but don't always enjoy), have been ruled out of court?

Maybe you're experiencing a bit of both of those feelings. I am. But one thing I think I know; it will be a strange Christmas this year. All sorts of Christmas routines have been thrown up in the air by social distancing and other Covid restrictions. We've had to re-think, re-plan and re-organise so much.

For example, Christmas at church can't be 'normal'. Big services with congregations sitting and singing close together have been made illegal. Sanitising hands, keeping an eye on things and cleaning pews creates a substantial workload, just to keep the building open. So there are serious and substantial limits to what, nine months into Covid-fatigue, we can practically do.

But this wonderful feast must be held, as our Saviour has come, so we will have a mixture of some adapted worship services at Christmas, ***plus the invitation to come and pray as individuals, bubbles and families, at a time of your choosing, while church is open on Christmas Eve.*** There'll be spaces for prayer – at the Crib, and using flowers as a focus. We want to offer the chance to sing, which lots of us have been missing. And though we can't offer extended socialising and hospitality, there will be a warm welcome in the name of Christ for all who want to come. Do drop in for a moment of peace and hope.

It will be different from previous Christmases, and there's much I'll miss about the things we 'normally' do. But I trust in God, that he will meet us if we look for him, and bring his grace into our lives. For he is 'Emmanuel', God-with-us: just as he was in 2019, has been throughout 2020, and will be next year. And maybe, the stripped-down simplicity of this Christmas might even help us meet Jesus anew. For his first coming was quiet, humble, simple, and almost unnoticed. Maybe discarding some of the hype of the season could bring us back to its heart of love and peace. That's my prayer: may even this strange Christmas bring you its beautiful blessing from God. Derwyn.