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Briefing 35: Wednesday 21st October, 2020.

Dear friends,

Although Judy and I thoroughly enjoyed our time away, it was wonderful to be back with you all on Sunday. Despite the lack of congregational singing, after church coffee and the chance for long conversations, there is no better place to be on a Sunday than with one's brothers and sisters in Christ. So unless you are told to shield or quarantine yourself for a number of days, let me encourage you once again to come along. Being in church, socially distanced, with sanitised hands and masked faces, is probably one of the safest places to be. It's certainly a place that is good for your soul. Over the last few weeks we've had plenty of space at both St Nicholas and St Marys, so if you are able to come, please be brave and give it a go! We'd love to see you!

To those who are shielding or exceedingly anxious and are having to watch our services via the live stream, I'm happy to report that we are developing plans to improve both the visuals and sound on a Sunday morning. We hope very much to have some new tech in place before our Christmas services. More on that later! I'm also finalising plans to launch a monthly (initially) service for those who are shielding. Numbers will be limited to around 20 so we can have double distancing in the church, and the number of people involved in the service will be kept to an absolute minimum. I hope to be able to announce a date for the first one of these on Sunday.

With winter coming and the number of cases expected to increase, planning for events at Christmas is going to be rather problematic this year. Who knows what level of restrictions we will be under by then? However, the government has recently announced that, in England at least, churches, with their high excellent Covid-safe regimes will not be forced to close, even if a region is deemed to be at level 3. Finally, it seems, that the government has realised just how important spiritual health is to the nation. As I said last week, there can be very few people in our nation right now who do not need to hear the extraordinarily good news of the kingdom of God. So whilst our means may be restricted and our singing may be halted, we must find new ways of engaging and re-engaging with those in our parish, many of whom don't just lack hope in the present, but hope for eternity.

How might we do that at Christmas?

Over the next few weeks, we will be putting our plans together for the Christmas season. But let me assure you, there will be carol services, although not as we have known them. There will be events for families with young children, although not the packed Christingle services as we have enjoyed for many years. There will be a late-night service in our benefice on Christmas Eve, and services in both churches on Christmas Day. But we are also looking at ways of taking the good news of Jesus out to our parishes and town, in a Covid safe way. Carol singing in small groups of no more than 6 people will be a wonderful way to do that, and might be a way we can be a blessing to those in sheltered or residential accommodation, even if we are not able to go inside. Why not start practising now? Churches Together in Stevenage are also putting together a set of Advent videos, watch out for those and share them on your own social media platforms. And of course, even before the Christmas season gets in full swing, we can all get involved with **Operation Christmas Child**, see the opposite page for details.

But the good news of Jesus, like dogs and turkeys, isn't just for Christmas: it's for everyday of the year. If you're not sure what that good news is, do take the opportunity to join in with the **Identity Course**. Details are on the next page. It starts tonight (Wednesday 21st October) but if you miss this date, you can still join in next week.

If you already know the good news of Jesus for yourself, why not be praying about how you can share something of that this week. If you are lost for words, why not take some of the '*hope in the face of Covid*' tracts we have in church, keep some in your pocket or purse, and hand them out? You might share this letter on social media, and like and share the Sunday services, or invite people to join you in coming. Many of these attempts may yield little fruit, but the more seeds we scatter, the more seeds God can use to bring his hope to people who badly need to hear it.

IMPORTANT STUFF – DON'T JUST GLANCE- TAKE IT ALL IN!

PRAY WITH US! TONIGHT from 7:45, we'll be gathering at St Nicholas to pray for the church, the world and one-another. Do come along! If you can't get out- why not set aside that time to pray using the materials, including links to the music, that are at the end of this newsletter.

Next Tuesday morning we'll be praying again via ZOOM from 7am-8am. Contact Dave on for a link.

OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD: There's not long to go now so here is all you need to know.

- To watch the **inspiring video** again see here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E5VVDymhGr4>
- **To volunteer** to help with receiving boxes at the Church OR as a driver, collecting boxes from around our area, both during week of 9th-15th November, contact Stuart on stuart.j.marshall@ntlworld.com
- To find out what you **can and can't put in your boxes**: click here: <https://www.samaritans-purse.org.uk/what-we-do/operation-christmas-child/how-to-pack-a-shoebox/>
- To **pack a box online** without visiting a shop, click here: <https://shoeboxonline.samaritans-purse.org.uk/>

There will be 50 flat-pack boxes available from Sunday- do remember to collect one if you'd like to. There will also be some leaflets if you struggle to make the links work.

EXPLORING CHRISTIANITY: It's **not too late** to join in our **Identity Course** and explore the claims of Jesus for yourself. The Identity Course works through the gospel of John over 7 sessions that also cover some of the big questions people ask, such as why does God allow suffering, how can I believe the Bible and why do I have to go to church? There's more information available here https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GJ691ji_6-0 or from Martin Bailey, who is leading the course with his wife Sue via martin.bailey2663@gmail.com

IN-PERSON BIBLE-STUDY GROUP: To complement our existing home groups, all of which are meeting on line, from Monday 9th November I'll be running a fortnightly Bible study group in church, starting at 7:30pm. After some central input, those coming will meet in groups of no more than 6 (socially distanced) for further study and discussion. If you'd like to join that group, please do let me email me. If you'd be interested in joining a daytime group, following the same format, please email me too. Depending on numbers we may run both! And if you'd like to join an on-line group, please get in touch with me as well, and I'll pass your details to one of the group leaders. This is all, of course, available to folks from **BOTH CHURCHES!!**

PODCASTS AND ONLINE MEDIA: If you've tried any of the podcast links I suggested a few weeks back, do let me know what you think! One extra one is the *Unbelievable?* Podcast from Premier Christian Radio. You can access the large back catalogue here <https://www.premierchristianradio.com/Shows/Saturday/Unbelievable/Episodes/> or subscribe at your podcast provider! I've had my mind stretched recently by listening to the series of conversations between Glen Scrivenor and various expert guests. These **ReSet** videos are all available from www.speaklife.org.uk

CHRISTMAS APPEAL: In recent years we've made use of Speak Life's Christmas videos to spread the gospel message. This year they are putting a new animation together and are looking for funds to complete the project. More information and a quick taster of the project can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LeYcPcDGD34>

THIS SUNDAY'S SERVICES: The 9:30am service at St Nicholas will include sharing the LORD's supper. The service at St Mary's Graveley at 11:30am, will be a service of the Word. The talks this week will focus on the appalling accusation, levelled at Jesus by the religious leaders, that his miracles were performed by Satan's power. The main reading will be Matthew 12:22-37. Why not read it before you come.

If you are yet to book in, you can do so here: <https://forms.gle/NJQNg3wqJMVXtECh7> If you're not able to make it, do make sure you join us either live on Facebook or catch up later.

There will be a further short update on Friday. Until then, may God bless you and your families.

Yours in Christ,

Dave

PRAYER GATHERING: WEDNESDAY 21st OCTOBER, 2020

1# WE WORSHIP GOD FOR WHO HE IS AND WHAT HE HAS DONE.

Psalm 90: Satisfy Us... <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=taS5tbvtMDU>

A time of worship and thankfulness in prayer for who God is... (*his character, power, majesty and might*), for his many blessings to us in Jesus, and for the many material blessings he has showered upon us, even in our trials.

2# WE PRAY FOR THE ONGOING WORK OF EVANGELISM + DISCIPLESHIP IN OUR PARISH

Song: His mercy is more - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uBZk0bVjCAA>

Reading: Acts 4:8-13

- Pray for the Identity course beginning tonight- Martin + Sue leading.
- Pray for the Baptism Prep course starting in November- Dave leading.
- Pray for the weekly preaching of God's word that it might remain true to the scriptures, clear, Spirit-filled and useful in rebuking, correcting and training us in God's righteousness so we are equipped for every good work.
- Pray for our homegroups that they may be places of deep fellowship, learning and encouragement.
- Pray for the work amongst our children and young people.
- Pray for our churches to be places of welcome, places of fellowship, learning and discipleship and bases for mission to our parish and town.

3# WE PRAY FOR GOD'S CHURCH IN OUR TOWN, DIOCESE AND ACROSS THE WORLD.

Reading: Colossians 1: 1-6

- Pray for the other Anglican churches in our deanery, for true partnership based on unity in the gospel
- Pray for Rev Karen Mitchell, the newly appointed minister at St Andrew and St George.
- Pray for churches in the Diocese and across the CofE as the materials of 'Living in Love and Faith' are released.
- Pray for our mission partners, Jimmy and Katia in Brazil, Rachael and Bernie in Uganda, and Bridgebuilders working in Stevenage. Pray for courage, opportunities, wisdom and the Spirit's anointing.
- Pray for more workers in the harvest field, especially amongst us.

Song: The Lord is My Salvation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MzZaeKr3PD4>

4# WE PRAY FOR OUR COUNTRY AND THE NATIONS OF THE WORLD.

Reading: Romans 13:1-8

- Pray for our Queen, her government and all in authority over us.
- Pray for the Brexit talks to yield an agreement and for the outcome of the US presidential election.
- Pray for peace amongst the nations of the world, a cure or vaccine for Covid-19, for justice, and for peace and freedom to preach the gospel in every nation.
- Pray for those in prison for their faith in Christ, and those who imprison them.

#5 WE PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER.

Reading: Philippians 1:1-11

Pray for the sick, the suffering, the lonely and the lost. The poor, unemployed, the grieving and the fearful. We pray for the old and the young, and all those in between...

Using the Church Family List or simply calling to mind those in our churches and families, let's pray for one another, and especially for those we know are in need. Pray that we all might have a greater vision and understanding of God, that our hope and joy would be first and foremost in Jesus, that we might be more aware of the great riches that are ours in Christ, that we would have power to stand firm and live boldly for Jesus whatever their circumstances, and that we all might know how wide, and deep and high is the love of God for us.

Song: Jesus, there's no one like you... <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-d1uUPrKns>