



Rev Dave Brown
Rector of St Nicholas Stevenage & St Mary Graveley
2a North Road, Stevenage. Herts. SG1 4AT
Tel: 01438 213587
Email: revdmbrown@gmail.com



Briefing 40: Wednesday 25th November, 2020.

Dear friends,

It seems very likely now that this coming Sunday will be the last one (at least for a while) when we won't be able to meet in person. I know that many of you, like me, will be very relieved at this, and I look forward to gathering with many of you on Sunday 6th December at both St Nicholas (9:30 AM) and St Marys (11:30 AM). I am aware, however, that until the vaccine is rolled out and the LORD removes this virus from our midst, that a number of you still won't be able to join us. Let me assure you that you remain very much in our thoughts and prayers, and we will continue to do our best to stay in touch and encourage you as much as we are able. But if you feel that no one has been in touch with you for a while, do take the initiative and call someone yourself. Next week we are also installing a far better video system at St Nicholas, so if you are reliant on our YouTube streamed services, you can expect better picture and sound quality coming your way soon.

With the news that so many vaccines are proving effective, the day when we can finally all gather again without restrictions seems to be drawing nearer. Of course, there's a long way to go, so we mustn't be complacent. As churches, we will continue to make sure that our gatherings are as Covid-safe as practicable, but won't it be wonderful when we can shake hands and sing and share food once more!

As Christians, of course, we have so much more to look forward to than simply the end of Covid-19, and over the next 4 weeks that will be very much in our sights as we work our way through the last 4 chapters of the book of Revelation. It isn't an easy book to fully understand, and I certainly won't be dealing with all the many varied interpretations of these chapters: there simply wouldn't be time! What we will see, however, is that the return of Jesus will bring an end to history, and an end to death, an end to ignorance, and an end to hope. (And in case you're wondering, even the last one is incredibly positive – but you'll have to wait until Sunday 20th December to find out how that is so!)

I hope you'll find this short series engaging and inspiring. The original recipients of the book of Revelation certainly felt that way. They were living at a time of intense persecution, and in a context where the power of the state to dominate and frustrate the mission of the church was growing all the time. Like us, they often had to face diseases and plagues (often far more dangerous than covid-19), and they did it all without the comforts of modern homes and the wonderful medical advances that we take for granted. For such a beleaguered good group of Christians, the book of Revelation taught them two incredibly important truths: firstly, that Jesus was coming back and he would be absolutely victorious over all their enemies, and secondly, that in the meantime, a battle would be raging between God and the forces of evil, a battle that would bring with it much pain and suffering.

John's encouragement, then, was for people to fix their eyes on the end of the story and to live through the battle in eager anticipation of the day Jesus will return and usher in his perfect and glorious kingdom. With that event fixed in their minds and the thought filling their hearts, they would be able to withstand anything the enemy threw at them.

Some people have said that it's possible for Christians to be so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good! But I have to say, I've never met a Christian who would fit into that category. In fact, in my experience, Christians who have the firmest grasp of eternity and the greatest sense of anticipation of the glories of heaven are almost always the ones who are the most earthly good. They are the ones who have recognised the true value of being a member of the kingdom of heaven, and who are therefore willing to risk their lives, to sacrifice their comfort, and to give of their time and money and energy to proclaim Jesus so that others can come to trust in Jesus as well.

Martin Luther said that there were 2 days imprinted on his mind as more important than all others. One was TODAY- a day of salvation for the lost and new opportunities to serve. The other was THAT (capital D) DAY, the day when Jesus returns. For Luther, understanding the latter helped him know what he had to do in the former, and that will be true of us too. With all the troubles in the world around us today, I think we would benefit from fixing our eyes more firmly on the kingdom of heaven. And over the next 4 weeks we are going to do just that. I hope you'll come along or tune in and have your eyes fixed heavenward, that we all might be inspired for TODAY.

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

LET US PRAY TOGETHER! Next Tuesday morning between 7 and 8am. Contact Dave on for a link.

MATILDA ROGERS-WRIGHT. As you will have heard, Matilda sadly died last week. Her body will be taken home for a funeral service and burial, but there is an opportunity to pay your last respects at Austin's Chapel of Rest on Letchmore Road this Friday night between 5:30 and 7:30pm. I'll be saying some prayers at 5:30pm, but after that friends are free to pop in. Matilda's daughter Jeannette will be there to welcome people in, but due to Covid, access will be strictly limited to 1 or 2 at a time.

MEN'S VIRTUAL BREAKFAST: This Saturday from 8:30-9:30am. Contact Mike Wilton for a link to enjoy some good fellowship and biblical encouragement as we begin the weekend. mikewilton@hotmail.com

OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD: The lockdown has meant a delay to the collection of shoeboxes, but once the lockdown has been lifted, there will be a lot to do and Stuart will be looking for volunteers to man the church and welcome the boxes in from 5th-14th December, 10am-4pm. In the meantime, why not pack a box online without visiting the shops, or start to put your own box together. Details of all those things are below.

- 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 contact Stuart via enquiries@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk
- 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://shoebonline.samaritans-purse.org.uk/>

There are still plenty of flat-pack boxes and leaflets available in both churches- do remember to collect one if you'd like to. There will also be some leaflets if you struggle to make the links work.

OUR SUNDAY SERVICE for the benefice will be broadcast live on YouTube at 10 AM on Sunday morning. If you haven't done so already, you might find it helpful to subscribe to our YouTube channel which you can find here: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzRGAalRTsJuKFRBvkljAtQ> this week, our focus will be Revelation chapter 19- although it might help to have read chapter 18 before you watch!

- **SUPPORTING OUR MISSIONARIES THIS CHRISTMAS-** Instead of sending Christmas cards around the church, the church wardens and I want to encourage you all to sign the virtual card on our Facebook pages (**available soon**), and make a donation to be sent as a Christmas gift to Jimmy and Katia in Brazil (St Nicks) and Rachel and Bernie in Uganda (St Marys and St Nicks) Please bring your gifts to church in an envelope marked **Christmas Gift** or use the 'ways to give' below and send an email to the treasurer letting them know that your gift is for that purpose. Email addresses are: treasurer@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk OR via enquiries@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk (for Graveley)

WAYS TO GIVE: Our churches still have costs to cover, even when we are not meeting in our buildings. So if you do not already give by direct debit, why not consider setting one up. It's very easy. Get in touch with me and I'll send you the appropriate forms. Alternatively, both churches have ways to give online, with just a few clicks.

For St Mary's, click here: <https://givealittle.co/campaigns/fcb2cb18-94af-4c38-8b07-1471769b64c8>

For St Nicholas, click here: <https://givealittle.co/campaigns/5f594bca-73e3-426b-82f0-c46e9bfa2e96>

CHRISTMAS CAROLS: We may not be able to sing in church at Christmas – but we can sing outside, socially distanced of course! So far there is just one opportunity to do so, with hopefully more to come...

Wednesday 23 December at 3pm in the courtyard at Pine Lodge Care Home!

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

Yours in Christ,

Dave