



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 41: Wednesday 2nd December, 2020.

Dear friends,

I saw a cartoon on Twitter the other day. A man was staring at a large Advent calendar with his wife looking on. The caption underneath read, *"I can't bring myself to open the doors. I've had too many shocks already this year!"* I think we can all resonate with that.

2020 has not been the year we expected, and at every turn there seem to be more difficulties and challenges, increased restrictions, greater worries and more and more disappointments. Even the hope of restrictions being lifted at Christmas brings its own issues. For those of us in large families, how do we choose which two other households to mix with? And then there's the fear of being an unwitting carrier of Covid and passing it on to our loved ones. Shouldn't we just batten down the hatches, and stay alive until everything goes back to normal?

But 2020 has shown us that there is every chance that we won't go back to normal, whatever that was. We live in a time of unparalleled wealth and security in the West. In fact, right around the world life expectancy is rising, poverty levels are decreasing, standards of education and opportunity are also on the up. And still, despite all our technological advances, the normal world has ground to a halt because of an unexpected virus too small to see. It's enough to make many people bury their heads and lock their doors, but as Christians, we are in a unique position to think and act differently. It's not a licence to be reckless, it is a way to be hope-filled, and eternity-focused.

This Sunday we will be looking at Revelation chapter 20. One of my commentaries described this chapter as one of the trickiest in the Bible to explain, and whilst there are some aspects of this chapter that have caused great debate and even division because of widely different interpretations (not least the Millennium), our focus on Sunday will be uncontroversial: that the return of King Jesus will bring about the end of death.

That which people and governments fear more than anything now, and that they are doing everything they can to avoid, will one day come to an end. Not with technological advance or a miracle cure, but with the return of King Jesus. The great hope from this passage is that when Jesus returns there will come a day when all goodbyes cease, and when funeral directors are put out of business and cemeteries are all closed as death itself is buried.

But of course the great hope of the Christian isn't just the end of physical death, it's tied up with the hope of eternal life in God's new creation, where even the fear of death is banished and we can enjoy God's perfect presence for ever. And on that score of course, Christians have a glorious and certain hope. For just as Jesus died and rose, so will we. Just as Jesus ascended to the presence of his Father in heaven, so the Christian who dies before the return of Christ, will enjoy that perfect spiritual rest until they are raised bodily to live with Christ forever.

I'll say more about this on Sunday, but this hope of eternal life, a hope made certain by Jesus' own death and resurrection, frees us from living lives that are plagued by the fear of death. We rightly don't want to hasten that day by foolish behaviour, nor put others at risk for our own pleasure, but neither should we so want to hold onto this life that we fail to live out the days we have been given with joy, courage, love and confidence. For we know who, and something of what, will be waiting for us the other side of death's curtain.

For all of the bravado that some people show in the face of death; for all of the wishful thinking and fairy tales that people tell themselves to blunt the pain of death, those outside of Christ sadly have no hope. But as Christians we do have a sure and certain hope, and at times like this, when there is so much uncertainty, and so much fear, we need to be living like it and speaking of it.

The last 9 months has shown us that despite all the greatness of human achievements, we are still weak and frail beings. But as Christians, we know one who is strong, good, unchanging, unfailing, all loving and eternal. He is the one who gave us life, he is the one who leads us through life, and he is the one who will take us, at his perfect time, to be with him for ever. The thought of that, should take away our fear of death, as we wait for death itself to die.

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

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

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 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://shoeboxonline.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.

SUNDAY SERVICES: now lockdown is over, we will be back in church this Sunday. St Nicholas will have a service at 9:30, and St Marys will have a service of Holy Communion at 11:30. The booking link for the service can be found here. <https://forms.gle/S5mAPy8ePWh4ywrn8> If you are not able to make it in person, the service from St Nicholas will be streamed live on our YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzRGAAIRTsJuKFRBvkLjAtQ>

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 cards on our Facebook pages.

The St Nicholas card can also be found here: <https://www.groupgreeting.com/sign/ef4e18e7e65000b>

The St Mary's card can also be found here: <https://www.groupgreeting.com/sign/9e78fef31839f60>

Once you've signed the cards, do consider making a Christmas gift to Jimmy and Katia in Brazil (St Nicks) and Rachel and Bernie in Uganda (St Marys and St Nicks). Links to give online are below and on the Facebook posts. Or alternatively, bring your gifts to church in an envelope marked **Christmas Gift**. If you do donate on line, it would be really helpful if you could send an email to the treasurer letting them know that your gift is for that purpose. Email addresses are via: enquiries@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk (for Graveley) or treasurer@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk (St Nicks)

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 are three opportunities to do so, with hopefully more to come.

Saturday 19th at 6pm: Drive in Carol Service at the Coptic Cathedral. Save the date + time- more details soon.

Tuesday 22nd at 4pm: Singing outside Halcyon days in Graveley

Wednesday 23rd at 3pm: Singing in the courtyard at Pine Lodge Care Home.

Don't forget, there will be a collection for the Stevenage Food Bank at the St Nicholas shops this Saturday. Do take some donations along between 10am and 4pm.

One more thought: You might also like to gather a few friends (no more than 6 in a group) and do some carol singing around your neighbourhood. Perhaps you could visit some of our church members who haven't been able to get along to church, or those you know are housebound or alone. There are plenty of Christmas tracks and gospels at church if you wanted to take some and handout as you sing.

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

Yours in Christ, *Dave*