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Briefing 42: Wednesday 9th December, 2020.

Dear friends,

At the beginning of the Christianity Explored course, participants are often asked this question: *If you could ask God one question, and knew that you'd get an answer, what would it be?* How would you answer that?

Perhaps you'd ask why there is so much suffering in the world, and why God doesn't just step in and sort it all out now. Perhaps you'd ask about the purpose of the suffering you've had in your life.

Perhaps you'd ask about the future, what it will be like, whether this pandemic will ever come to an end, or whether anything can be done to stop human beings destroying one another and destroying the planet.

Perhaps you'd have a question about God: what is he like, and how can we know the truth about him. Perhaps you'd want to know just how powerful he is, or how his love and justice go together, or how he can have compassion and mercy on people who are utterly wicked. Perhaps you'd ask what all the imagery in the book of Revelation really means!

You might have a science question: Is there life on other planets? Exactly how old is the earth? How did God make the universe and everything in it? Or what does it feel like to be on the other side of death?

I'm sure if we sat down and thought about it there would be a whole host of questions that we would want to ask, things that bother us, or things that intrigue us. The good news is, that one day we will have all the answers; because the return of King Jesus brings the end of ignorance.

That's what we will see this Sunday as we take a look at Revelation chapter 21. Once again, there are a number of themes in the chapter which we won't be focusing on, but what we will see is that after the return of King Jesus, there will be a new creation where God will come to dwell with his people. And once God is with us, all our questions will be answered.

At the end of the beautiful passage on love in 1 Corinthians chapter 13, St Paul writes this: *"for now we see only a reflection as in a mirror, then we shall see face-to-face. Now I know in part, then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."* When Jesus returns, we will have no more questions, only answers. No more doubts, only certainty. No more worries, only joys. Right now, God knows everything about us, from the number of hairs we have on our heads, to every thought which passes through our minds. And we shall have all eternity to get to know and enjoy God in the same kind of way. Of course, we will never plumb his depths, we will never reach the end of his glory and majesty, but the answer to all our questions will be there in front of us, in our midst.

For now, of course, we walk by faith and not by sight. But it is not a blind faith. God has already revealed himself to us in remarkable ways with wonderful clarity, and very often our doubts, fears and worries are because we simply do not look and read and think and believe. God has revealed himself in the glory of creation: and it's there we see his power, might and majesty, his complexity and creativity displayed for everyone to see.

God has revealed himself through history, and we have in the Bible, written down for us, in almost every language on the planet, a record of God's deeds with his Old Testament people and through the early church. It's in the Bible God tells us what he is like. It's in the Bible he reveals what we are like and why the world is like it is. And because we live 2000 years after the event, it is in the Bible that we see God's greatest revelation of himself: Jesus.

At our Christmas carol services we will hear again the wonderful words from the beginning of John's Gospel, reminding us that in Jesus, *"the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. ... No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in the closest relationship with the Father, has made him known."*

One day ignorance will be ended, but many of our questions about God would be answered now if only we would look at Jesus and read the Scriptures. So let's not be satisfied with vague thoughts and misunderstandings. Let us open up the scriptures with a renewed hunger, and get to know the God who has already revealed himself to us.

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

COME AND PRAY TOGETHER! Next Wednesday evening on ZOOM between 7:45 and 9pm. Email Dave for a link. There will not be an early morning prayer meeting next week.

CHRISTMAS SERVICES AND EVENTS: Our plan of Christmas events is now out, advertised on Facebook and a copy for each church is attached to this email. Please take a good look, invite your friends and come along.

If you can volunteer to help at either of the children's treasure hunts please do let Dave or a church warden know. We still need volunteers to deliver roughly 500 invitations around the St Nicholas estate. The leaflets are available in church for anyone happy to help out.

CHRISTMAS CAROL SINGING: We may not be able to sing in church at Christmas – but we can sing outside, socially distanced of course! Please let Dave know if you are able to join in any of these events.

Tuesday 22nd at 2pm: live-streamed carol service from St Nicholas for Cygnet Hospital. 6 Singers needed!

Tuesday 22nd at 4pm: Singing outside Halcyon days in Graveley: as many as possible!

Wednesday 23rd at 3pm: Singing in the courtyard at Pine Lodge Care Home. As many as possible!

CAROL SINGING TROUPES: Why not gather a few friends (no more than 6 in a group) and do some carol singing around your neighbourhood, or drop in on some of our church members who haven't been able to get along to church. There are Christmas tracts and gospels at church if you wanted to take some and handout as you sing.

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 on line 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)

CHAIRS: In the New Year, St Nicholas will be replacing the old wooden chairs, and a number of new options are in church right now. Please do sit on them and let Dave or one of the churchwardens know what you think.

OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD: There's still a chance to pack a shoebox and bring along to church or to pack one online. Details are below. Physical boxes need to be brought to church by this Sunday please.

- To watch the **inspiring video** again see here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E5VVDymhGr4>
- 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/> and there are some leaflets in church.
- To **pack a box online** without visiting a shop, click here: <https://shoebonline.samaritans-purse.org.uk/>

WAYS TO GIVE: Our churches still have costs to cover, even when we are not meeting in our buildings. 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>

SUNDAY SERVICES: This Sunday, St Nicholas will have a service at 9:30am which will include Holy Communion. The booking link for the service can be found here. <https://forms.gle/DFhe3cjtX4vneUGMA>

If you are not able to make it, the service will be streamed on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzRGAaIRTsJuKFRBvkJjAtQ>

St Marys **will not** be meeting this Sunday morning, as they have the first of their carol services this Sunday night.

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

Yours in Christ, *Dave*