



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 45: Wednesday 6th January, 2021.

Dear friends,

If I haven't had the chance to do so in person yet, let me wish you a very happy New Year. Sadly, the year has begun under a Covid-shaped cloud and a new lockdown, with all the disruption that brings. However, with a huge vaccination process underway, there is hope that by God's grace we will be approaching some kind of normality in a few months' time. And as Christians, we have the added hope that all things work together for the good of those who love God, even Covid-shaped things!

In this first briefing of 2021 I want to bring you up to date on our response to the latest lockdown and reflect a little on the first question in the New City Catechism we started on Sunday.

Church under Lockdown

**HEADLINES: CHURCHES REMAIN OPEN FOR SERVICES + PRIVATE PRAYER
A REMINDER OF COVID PROTOCOLS
AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO ENCOURAGE**

Given the effort that we, along with churches up and down the country, have put into being Covid-19 secure, it was wonderful to hear the Prime Minister announce that churches can continue to meet both for communal worship and for private prayer during this latest lockdown.

Both churches will continue to run Sunday services at the usual times, keeping in place the Covid safe protocols that have kept us safe so far, and monitoring the situation carefully. We recognise the wonderful opportunity that we have been given to continue to meet, and we will do our utmost to honour that freedom. This decision will be kept under review, with both PCCs meeting in 3 weeks' time in the first instance.

St Nicholas will also remain open for private prayer for 3 sessions a week: Tuesdays from 2 – 4pm, Wednesdays 12 noon – 2pm, and Thursdays 10am – 12 noon.

The Covid-Protocols are shown lower down this briefing. Please read them again and make sure you keep them.

For those of you unable to join us in person, services at St Nicholas will continue to be live streamed via our YouTube channel each Sunday morning, so if you're not able to join us in person, please do join us online. The service can be watched live or at a later time. For those of you watching this way, can I strongly encourage you to both like and share the service. This helps raise the profile of our live feed and gives us free advertising!

In these difficult days, the need for us to encourage and support one another has once again been raised. There is, of course, great comfort in private prayer and Bible reading, but to receive a telephone call or email or a card from someone else in the church family reminding you of God's goodness, faithfulness and love carries extra weight. So as you did in the 1st lockdown, can I please encourage you to be in touch with one another and be the encouragement people need. Don't be embarrassed that you haven't been in touch for a while. Don't worry that you may not know the person very well. Let's demonstrate true Christian love and affection for one another by being in touch and sharing a word of encouragement and a simple prayer.

These difficult days of lockdown will end, and we will have grown through them, for God's purposes always come to pass. Let's keep our eyes fixed on him and encourage others to do the same.

New City Catechism Question 1: What is our only hope in life and death?

On Sunday we looked at the 1st of 52 questions designed to strengthen our hearts and minds by focusing on the foundations of our faith in the truth of the gospel. The 1st question could hardly have been more appropriate for our time. On Sunday we looked at the children's answer – that we belong to God. The full answer goes like this: "that we are not our own but belong, body and soul, both in life and death, to God and to our saviour Jesus Christ."

As I said on Sunday, we belong to God twice over. We are his because he made us, and if we are Christians, we are his because he bought us back to himself with the precious blood of Jesus. And if we belong to God it means all we have, our souls, our minds, our time, resources, energies, passions, everything we have is now under new ownership.

And whilst that may seem daunting – the truth is that we were never truly free before we came to Christ. As enemies of God we were facing his wrath and were slaves to sin, and as the Bible tells us, the wages of sin is death. But God's plans for us are good, because he is good and his love endures for ever. Therefore, it is gloriously good news that we now belong to him, because he loves and cares for his own with an un-dying affection that brings us real hope; life-changing, eternity-guaranteeing, hope.

So when your doubts or questions rise, or times of suffering or sadness or persecution come along, remember that your hope comes from the God who loves you, and gave himself for you, that you might belong to him.

May God bless you and your families richly,

Yours in Christ,

Dave

A REMINDER OF COVID PROTOCOLS FOR ATTENDING CHURCH IN OUR BENEFICE

BEFORE

- Please book using the booking link (released weekly by email and Facebook) or by calling Alison Hare.
- If you are showing any signs of covid-19 symptoms, or have been told to self-isolate, **you must not come to church**. If you are ill, stay at home!
- Face masks are required and should be worn at all times, unless you have a medical exemption.

ON ARRIVAL

- As you walk up the path, please stay at least 2m away from others not from your family/bubble. There will be some lines on the path to help you.
- A steward will greet you and signs will be posted to remind you of the rules for public worship.
- You'll be asked to use hand sanitiser before you enter the building. We will have some available, but you might like to bring your own.
- Bibles will not be issued so please bring your own. Service cards and hymn books will be used at St Mary's (these should be left in the pews after the service), whilst at St Nicholas, all words will be on video screens.
- A steward will take you to your seats. These will be in household groups (whether 1, 2, 3 or more), with 2m between your 'block' and those of another household.
- For the time being our children's groups will NOT be running – but there will be activity packs for children to use during the service.
- At St Nicholas the downstairs toilet will be available, as will the stable toilet at Graveley, but please try to avoid using them.
- To help with track and trace, names and telephone numbers of those gathering will be recorded and kept for 21 days weeks as per government guidance. You may also like to sign in with the track and trace app.

DURING THE SERVICES

- Whilst we will have live music, hymns and a small group of singers, no congregational is allowed (you are allowed to hum!). Please stay seated during the songs and resist the temptation to sing.
- We will stand for the creed to give us all a chance to stretch our legs and backs.
- In shared responses, such as the collect or confession, please speak in your normal voice, not at full volume.
- We will not take up an offering, but gifts may be placed in a receptacle by the door.

IF COMMUNION IS SHARED:

- It will be in bread only, received standing by the vestry door at St Mary's and brought to your seat at St Nicholas, so you may stand or sit or kneel as you prefer.
- Hand-sanitiser will be offered as you prepare to receive the bread.
- Please receive with hands out-stretched. The minister will place/drop the wafer into their hands with arms outstretched, maintaining as much distance as possible.

AT THE END OF THE SERVICE

- Please maintain social distancing as you leave.
- At the present time no mingling between people/bubbles is allowed inside or outside the building. So as hard as it is, please don't linger for a chat. Instead, why not arrange a phone call for when you get home?
- Once everyone has left the church will be cleaned as required.

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

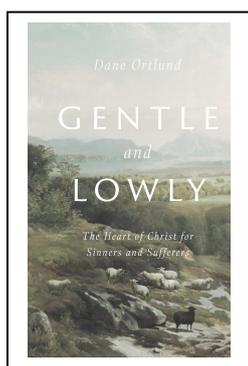
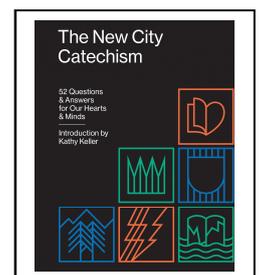
BAPTISM PREPARATION: Starting Monday 11th January at 7:30pm, this 3-week course is designed for parents who have been worshipping with us for 3 months or more, and who are seeking to have their have young children baptised. It covers both the basics of the Christian faith and works through the baptism service, helping parents and Godparents (who are invited too) to understand the promises and commitments they will be making. The course will run on ZOOM so there's plenty of room. Contact Dave for details. The next course will be held just after Easter.

COME AND PRAY TOGETHER! Next Wednesday night (13th) is our next **Church Prayer Gathering**- to be held on Zoom from 7:45pm to 9pm. Contact churchwardens@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk for a link. Our next early morning prayer meeting will be on Tuesday 17th January at 7am.

IDENTITY COURSE: Starting Tuesday 4th February and running for 7 weeks, this free course works through John's gospel to investigate the identity of Jesus and the implications for us when we discover who he is. The course is engaging and entertaining and offers plenty of room for questions and discussions, and whilst it is designed for those investigating Christianity for the first time, it would be great for anyone simply wanting a refresher. **Sadly this will now need to start online via ZOOM** rather than in church, but we will switch if the restrictions are eased. More details can be found by contacting Dave or by visiting <http://www.identitycourse.com/index.asp>

CHILDREN'S WORK ON SUNDAYS: Under tiers 4 and 5, we are unable to hold separate children's work in church. However, activity packs will be available to tie in with the talk and the question from the New City Catechism, so do bring your children along. We love to see them and they are part of our family.

NEW CITY CATECHISM RESOURCES: from this Sunday I hope that we will have simple children's books of the questions and answers (£1) and hard copies of the adult devotional book (£4) available at church. If you would like copies but won't be coming along in person, please do let me know and I'll be delighted to bring them to you – incorporating the visit to my daily exercise routine. However, if you'd rather have something electronic, there is a free app available – simply search for new city catechism – or if you don't have a smart phone, you can access the material via www.newcitycatechism.com



LENT COURSE: This year our Lent study course will be Dane Ortland's excellent book '**Gentle and Lowly- The Heart of Christ for Sufferers and Sinners**'. The 23 chapters with a separate booklet giving questions for personal reflection, will be spread across the 40 days of Lent and the 5 intervening Sundays. The course will be perfect personal reflection, but I'd encourage you make the time to discuss each chapter with 1 or 2 others, perhaps from the family or in your home or with a friend at church. That might be difficult to do in person, but it could easily be done over the telephone, over a WhatsApp call or a Zoom link. I'd like to order all the books on 25th January, so you have 3 weeks to get your orders in. The book is hardback and very new, but we've found a great source for discounted books making the cost price just £10 per set. Please sign up in church or email me or call me to place your order.

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