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Briefing 92: Tuesday 30th November, 2021.

Dear friends,

We've got our first Christmas Carol singing this week. I've already had my first mince pie. And the Christmas decorations are out of the loft and ready to put up, probably on Thursday. Yesterday we announced our Christmas Carol Service plans to the world- the hard-copy leaflets to distribute across our parishes will be here by the end of the week- and over the next few days my task is to write my Christmas talks and plan the drama for the Christingle services. So, despite those headlines of doom about the latest variant, (don't the newspapers love doom!) Christmas is beginning to dominate my time. Perhaps that's true for you as well.

But as I said on Sunday, the focus of the Christian season of Advent isn't the countdown to Christmas, but on preparation for the return of King Jesus. The difficulty of course is that we don't know when that will be. We know He is coming. The Bible is clear on that. We just don't know when. And that makes living in the light of the return of Jesus harder. Harder, but not impossible.

Of course, if we knew the date we could make plans, use our time wisely, allocate our resources accordingly. If it was some way off, we could put a program in place to increase our witness and evangelism as The Day got closer, and make sure that we didn't book holidays or family gatherings that clashed! If it was in just a few days' time, we'd cancel everything and spend time in prayer and fasting, knocking on doors, telling everyone of Jesus' return and helping them get ready.

But we don't know the date, do we? So how might we live now in a way that shows we are increasingly clinging excitedly to the hope of Jesus' return? Let me suggest 3 ways.

1: Make sure we are ready ourselves. Jesus told lots of parables about people being caught out when the master of the house returned or the bridegroom suddenly arrived. In both cases doors were shut and people were locked out. Don't let that happen to you. **Today** is the day of salvation. **Today** we can come to Jesus in repentance and faith and ensure that our eternal destiny is wonderful. No one knows except God what will happen tomorrow. Jesus might come back. We might die. Use today to get ready.

2: Use your resources for eternal purposes. Over the coming weeks you'll hear about the poor state of the finances in both churches as the gap between our income and expenditure has grown. So, do our finances and giving show we are heavenly minded? What about our time? Many of us have full or part time jobs, many have family demands and it's right we fulfil them, and we all need time for rest. But does your diary show that you are concerned for God's eternal kingdom? And are we looking for opportunities to speak of Jesus to friends and family? You or I may be the only Christian they know. Are we willing to risk ridicule, shame or rejection to share the good news of Jesus with them? Are we living with eternity in mind?

3: Think about it. On Sunday I shared these thoughts about what the return of Jesus will be like: *I imagine that like the disciples on the Emmaus Road, our hearts will burn within us. I imagine that like Anna and Simeon in the temple, we will gaze at Jesus and burst into songs of praise. Like long separated loved ones, I imagine that we will weep tears of joy, and like Mary in the garden, we will want to grab hold of Jesus and never let him go.*

I wish I could say that I have such thoughts often, but sadly it's the things of today and tomorrow, of this world and its pain and pleasure that so often dominate. Yet I know I'd be so much happier, I'd have so much more hope, and I'd be so much more motivated to live for Jesus if only the thought of his return was more often in my mind. I'm sure it would have the same effect on you too! Perhaps this Advent we might make that our aim.

Grace and peace,

Dave

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

COVID PROTOCOLS: A reminder. If you sit in a **masked** area of the church, please keep your face coverings on for the whole service. If you'd rather sit without a mask, please sit in the 'mask free' areas provided.

PARKING at St NICHOLAS: If you are able to walk easily, please consider **NOT** parking your car directly outside the church, but a little way up the road, to save the spaces for those who really need them. Thank you.

ADVENT DEVOTIONALS: Churches together in Stevenage have released an online Advent Calendar with something to read, look at or watch each day here: <https://calendar.myadvent.net/?id=d14f59345b055f3a4996e7ba5a8ccc43> The Church of England have also released some Advent material which can be accessed online or downloaded to your phone. Details here: [At the heart of Christmas: our 2021 Advent and Christmas reflections | The Church of England](#)

Come and Pray!

PRAYER GATHERING: Wednesday 1st December 7:45pm in St Nicholas church.

We'll begin with sung worship, hear from God's word and spend time praying together for the Christmas Journey and for our personal renewal, the mission and outreach of the church, the world, our government and those in need. Come in person or ask for a Zoom link to join online. If you can't make the meeting, a prayer guide for the Christmas Journey is attached.

Tuesday mornings 7am-8am: 7/12 Wednesday evenings 7:45pm-9pm: 1/12, 15/12

Private Prayer in St Nicholas church THIS WEEK and NEXT WEEK.

Tuesday 30th from 2pm-4pm, Wednesday 1st from 12noon-2pm, + Thursday 4th from 10am - 12noon

Tuesday 7th from 2pm-4pm, Wednesday 8th from 12noon-2pm.

ST NICHOLAS DAY: From 1:15 to 2:15 (ish) on Saturday 4th December, we will once again be leading some carol singing at the St Nicholas shops as part of the St Nicholas Day celebrations. The event runs from 1:30pm to 4:30, but the opening ceremony will only be about 40 minutes long. Please let Dave know if you will come and sing with us. Local schools will sing and there will be refreshments and activities afterwards in the community centre.

WELWYN GARDEN CITY BRASS BAND- Christmas Concert in aid of **Bridgebuilders Christian Trust**. Saturday 4th December, in St Nicholas Church. Tickets £7:50- pay on the door. Come along and bring your friends!

ST NICHOLAS WALKING GROUP: The next walk will be from the White Lion at Walkern on Thursday 2nd December commencing at 10.00am from the pub. The walk will be approximately 5 miles and will take in the Beane Valley.

READINGS FOR THE NEXT FEW WEEKS: The readings for the next 3 weeks are as follows:

5th December: 1 John 4:7-12 12th December: Colossians 1: 15-20 19th December: Matthew 11:20-30

BIBLE BY THE BEACH: Would you enjoy a few days of great Bible teaching in a beautiful part of the country? Come to Bible by the Beach next May. Details are here! [Bible by the Beach 2022 - Bible by the Beach](#) or on the leaflets in church. If you would like to go, do let Mike or Evelyn know. Just 1 more person required to get a group discount!

RACHAEL AND BERNIE MULJUTA: Send a Christmas card to our mission partners in Uganda by using the form here: [Christmas cards | Crosslinks](#)



CHURCH CHRISTMAS CARDS: To help us all save money (and paper!) would someone in both churches like to volunteer to create a large (A3 or larger size) Christmas card which we could all sign to send our Christmas greetings to each other. The money saved could then be sent our mission partners as an extra Christmas gift. Could you do this? Talk to Dave asap.

SHOULD ONLY MEN LEAD CHURCHES AND PREACH? The recording of the session- with the question and discussion time is here... <https://saintnicholaschurch.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Can-women-be-pastor-teachers.mp3>

CHRISTMAS SERVICE INVITATIONS: Invitations cards for both churches will be ready on Sunday. Do take some for family and friends. Can you also help deliver them across the parishes? Please speak to one of the church wardens to find out how you can help.

SCHOOL GOVERNOR VACANCY: Would you like to serve as a governor of St Nicholas Primary School? If so, please speak to Dave asap.