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**Briefing 95: Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> December, 2021.**

Dear friends,

We've now finished our Advent series on the character of the coming King and have been reminded that our coming King is holy, loving, almighty and gentle. What will you take away from those talks, I wonder? A greater awareness of God's holiness and your own failings- but a greater thankfulness for God's saving love? A deeper and humbling appreciation of the power and authority of Jesus, and a deeper sense of God's gracious gentleness towards us?

Of course, underpinning all those characteristics are the assumptions that the Bible is true, that Jesus is God and that one day he will come back to judge and rule and reign. I take those things as certain, I hope you do too, and I'd argue that we have a strong basis of evidence, not least in history, to believe those things to be true. I wouldn't be a Christian without believing those things to be true. I wouldn't be a Vicar without believing those things. I wouldn't live as I do, act as I do, spend as I do, without believing those things. They impact every area of my life, although if I'm honest, perhaps not as much as they should and I pray that will continue to increase over the coming year.

But are those kinds of sacrifice worth it? One of my favourite films which will undoubtedly be on somewhere over Christmas is Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade. It centres around the search for the Holy Grail, the cup Jesus was supposed to have used at the last supper. Legend says that it's a cup with healing properties, a legend Indy's father believes but that our hero doubts. But with his father shot and dying, he is forced to consider what he truly believes. Will Indy risk his own life to secure the cup and perhaps save his dad? Or sit and do nothing?

Alongside my daily Bible reading I'm currently reading a book called '**Eternity Changes Everything**' by Stephen Witmer. It's a book I try to read every year or so, because it reminds me to look past the things of this world, fading and temporary as they are, and to consider this life, my life, my work, my faith in the light of eternity; in the light of the return and reign of Jesus. One question stood out from my chapter this morning: **Would you give up anything now for something that won't happen later?**

The answer is obvious isn't it. **Of course not.** No one would buy a ticket for a concert that is certain not to happen. Or book a holiday with flights that were sure to crash. And no matter how much we loved a person; we would not risk our lives to save them if it was certain that there was no hope of success. If there's a chance, we **might** take the risk. But if there is no chance. It's simply not worth bothering with.

In the same way, if Jesus isn't coming back. If he isn't God. If the Bible isn't true. If death is the end. If the Christmas story is just a fairy-tale, then we are wasting our time celebrating Jesus' birth, and wasting our time coming to church, and reading our Bibles and serving and giving in all the ways we do. We'd be better to live life for now.

But if the child in the manger IS God. If the Bible IS true. If Jesus IS coming back. If we CAN find full forgiveness and have eternal life through faith in him. Then surely no sacrifice is too much to give, no devotion is too great, no witness too foolhardy, no embarrassment too great, no hope too strong and no celebration of the truth of the gospel too joyful, because the eternal hope we have in Jesus is so extraordinarily wonderful!

What makes no sense to me is a half-hearted, hedge-your-bets kind of attitude where our Christian faith is more like a touch wood, cross-our-fingers, hope for tomorrow. It's either true or it isn't. It's worth everything we have, our absolute undivided devotion, or it's worth nothing. Of course, if we don't really know God or the gospel because we don't know our Bibles and rarely come to church, then perhaps a weak insipid faith is the best we can hope for. But such a life is a pale imitation of a true Christian life where through faith in our holy, loving, almighty and gentle saviour we receive real hope, deep peace and a lasting joy that makes the celebration of Jesus' birth truly worth celebrating.

Is the Christmas story true? Absolutely. Is Jesus LORD of all; is he really coming back as judge and king? Yes, he is! Can we trust him, whatever the cost, wherever he leads us? Yes. In life and in death. The question is, will you?

Happy Christmas, and grace and peace to you all,

*Dave*

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

**HELP NEEDED ASSEMBLING CHRISTINGLE KITS.** If you've an hour to spare on Friday morning, do come to St Nicholas Church and help us put 200 Christingle kits together.

## Services over the Christmas period: Do come and join us!

### St Mary's Graveley

Christmas Day at 11:30am      Christmas Family Celebration with Communion

### St Nicholas Church Stevenage

Christmas Eve at 1, 3\* + 5pm      Christingle and Nativity Service  
Christmas Eve at 11pm      Midnight Service by candlelight with Communion  
Christmas Day at 9:30am\*      Christmas Family Celebration with Communion  
Boxing Day at 10am      Joint Benefice Service with Communion

\*We are aiming to live stream these services on our YouTube channel

**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 sing without a mask, please sit in the 'mask free' areas provided. Government advice is that we take a **lateral flow test** before meeting lots of people. We have lots of free kits in church. Why not take one and use it either on Saturday evening or first thing Sunday morning before you come?


### HOPE EXPLORED:

In January we will be running 2 short HOPE EXPLORED courses. Invitations are in church.

If your faith needs a reboot, why not come along?

If your faith is strong, why not come with a friend who needs to hear of the hope Jesus brings?

More details are below or here: [Christianity Explored Ministries: Hope Explored](#)



**HOPE|EXPLORED**

WHAT'S THE BEST FUTURE YOU COULD EVER IMAGINE?

**Monday afternoons** from 1:30pm on 17<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> Jan

OR **Thursday evenings** from 7:30pm on 20<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> Jan and 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb.

To book a place or find out more, email [enquiries@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk) or call Dave on 01438 213587

**Hope Explored** is an informal and relaxed 3-week course, looking at the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We believe that in Jesus we find **real hope** and a joyful expectation for the **future**, based on true events in the **past**, which changes everything about our **present**.

It's for anyone who wants to find hope, peace and purpose in life.

It's run by ordinary Christian people local to you, and is completely free.

You don't need to know anything about the Bible, you won't be asked to pray or sing.

You can ask any question you like, or you can just sit and listen.

Whoever you are, whatever you're thinking, **Hope Explored** is a place for you to discover the hope of a future that is better than you could ever imagine.

**Why not come and find out more?**

**PRAYER GATHERINGS:** Our prayer gatherings will resume in January with a 7-8am early morning zoom prayer on Tuesday January 4<sup>th</sup> and a gathering in person in St Nicholas on Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> from 7:45pm. Why not put those dates in your diary now and commit to coming along?

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

26<sup>th</sup> December: Matt 21:1-11      2<sup>nd</sup> January: Matt 21:12-17      9<sup>th</sup> January: Matt 21: 18-27

**ST NICHOLAS FINANCIAL UPDATE LETTERS AND FORMS:** If you haven't done so already, please prayerfully consider reviewing your giving. Hard copies of the letters sent out with the previous newsletter are at the back of St Nicholas Church. A similar update for St Mary's will come out in the New Year.

**NEXT NEWSLETTER:** Unless there is any dramatic news or vital updates, the next newsletter will come out early in the New Year.