

**Pandemic Pastoral Letter #12 | 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2020**

***While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.***

***Luke 2: 6-7, NRSV***

Dear «Forenames» «Surname»,

Reading the Nativity story in Luke this week I noticed something I've always known, but never properly thought about before. I noticed that Mary and Joseph didn't go to Bethlehem to give birth. The reason they go is because the country has been turned upside down by the call for a census, and the people knew that meant that with everyone registered, taxes would be expected to be paid.

The reason for being in Bethlehem is not to give birth, but to comply with the request of the dictates. As Luke tells the story, it's almost an afterthought to say – while they were in Bethlehem the time came for Mary to give birth. Luke, a doctor, speaks so matter of factly. A baby is born, a normal day's work!

Yet for me this speaks so powerfully into the current turmoil we face. The pandemic continues on, and with the emergence of the new and thought to be more transmissible strain, we approach 2021 with a continued uncertainty as the turmoil continues.

Into that turmoil, Jesus comes to us. A normal day for Immanuel – God with us. Pandemic or no pandemic, God is in the thick-of-it with us. God is with us in the mess, in the uncertainty, in the turmoil. Wrapping his loving arms around us, giving us comfort and hope, joy and peace.

I pray you will know the presence of Immanuel with you this Christmas, and into the new year.

***God is with us. In peace & hope,***  
***Rev Dan***

***And finally, if you want a laugh, this is me after losing the Santa Beard challenge at our Christmas Activity Morning this week. My excuse is I didn't put enough Vaseline on my face! ▶ ▶ ▶***



## News & Updates

### COVID Update

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The latest round of updates from the government have not directly affected our activity as congregations, but with the uncertainty about the new strain, and some significant rises in case numbers across Arun over the last week or so, it does remind us of the importance of vigilance.

Remember to:

- maintain 2m distancing
- refrain from singing
- wear a face covering (unless exempt)
- keep all surfaces clear
- use hand sanitiser

All these things cannot make our buildings 100% safe, but if we all play our part we can keep them, and therefore one another, as safe as we can. As always, please don't attend the building if you have been asked to isolate or are experiencing symptoms.

### Together

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The Worshipping Together booklet for January is enclosed. Meetings will continue throughout January at **9am on Sundays**.

#### Join Via Telephone

1. Call one of the Dial in by phone numbers from a mobile or landline.  
0203 481 5237                      0203 481 5240                      0203 051 2874  
0203 901 7895                      0131 460 1196
2. Enter the meeting ID,. For **Together** this is **878 7997 8475** and press **#**
3. (optional) You will be offered opportunity to add a participant ID, you can skip this step by pressing **#**
4. Enter the meeting password. For **Together** this is **473352**

Please Note: the cost of the call will be equivalent to your standard rate as per your telephone bill.

#### Telephone Controls when in a call.

Get the attention of the host by pressing \* 9

Mute/Unmute by pressing \* 6

#### Join Via Zoom

Meeting ID **878 7997 8475** Password **473352**

### Christmas Social

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For some of us Christmas will be quiet, and perhaps lonely. Joyce Stroud (FP) is coordinating a Christmas social on Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> December, 6:30pm, via zoom and phone – connect via the Together address - to include a quiz from 6:45pm led by Abha, from Bognor Regis MC. All welcome.

## January Services

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Below is a summary of planned services for January – **all subject to change**

January	3 <sup>rd</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	17 <sup>th</sup>	24 <sup>th</sup>	31 <sup>st</sup>
<b>Together</b> 9am	Joyce S & Malcolm L	Dan Balsdon <i>Inc. Covenant</i>	Dan Balsdon	Dan Balsdon	Dan Balsdon
<b>Bognor Regis</b> 10:30am	Liz Bates	Geoff Craghill	Rev Dan <i>Covenant</i>	Rev Tony Brazier	Rev Dan Balsdon
<b>Felpham</b> 10:30am	Lynne James	Malcolm Lindo	Sheila Morgan	Rev Dan <i>Covenant</i>	Adam Cook
<b>Westergate</b> 10:30am	---	Rev Dan <i>Covenant</i>	---	Bob Boyce <i>Church Anniv.</i>	---

**Reminder:** We have to maximise natural ventilation, which may mean having a combination of doors and/or windows open in our buildings. If you feel the cold, we encourage you to wear an extra layer or bring a blanket for face to face worship.

All services at Felpham will be streamed via zoom, accessible by phone and webcam via the same access instructions as for Together (above). All welcome.

## Covenant

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January currently looks uncertain, and I am very aware not everyone will be able to attend a covenant service this year. For many of us I know the covenant service is an important time that reminds us of God's faithfulness to us, and affirms us as we continue on our journey as disciples.

I will include a form of covenant service within the Together service at 9am, 10<sup>th</sup> January, and also include a bookmark with the covenant prayer on for you to reflect on.

**Explore: Read through the prayer slowly, one line at a time.**

- What jumps out at you?
- What would you find easy to say?
- What would you find difficult to say?

**Think how it might apply to your life – the whole of your life.**

- What things might God be asking you to stop?
- What might God be asking you to continue?
- And what new things may God place in your life?

## And Finally...

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After 27<sup>th</sup> December I hope to take a week of annual leave, returning to ministry on Tues 5<sup>th</sup> January.

Even if we cannot gather in person  
Emmanuel, God with us.  
Even if some Christmas traditions have had to go  
Emmanuel, God with us.  
Even if we might not get to hug family and friends  
Emmanuel, God with us.  
Even if we cannot sing carols beside each other  
Emmanuel, God with us.  
Even if Christmas cheer is harder this year  
Emmanuel, God with us.



***Christmas 2020, by Alan Bower***

We celebrate the baby's birth  
God sent his son to us on earth  
Our celebrations may be stilted  
But our Saviour Christ will not be jilted  
As we recognise the glorious event  
We remember friends and family at distance sent  
We zoom and face time to keep in touch  
Because the day should mean so much  
Christ came to show us the way  
He is with us whether at work or play  
So welcome him on Christmas day  
We hope the world will listen to what he has to say

2021 another year  
Let's hope it's another with far less fear