



Newcastle City Temple Connected

Reimagining Church Together

Dear Friends

Welcome to the final week of Advent - Christmas day will soon be upon us and I want to take the opportunity to thank each and every one of you for your support over these past 5 months since I arrived in Newcastle to take up my new appointment among you. I want to say how much I look forward to serving alongside you in 2021; when hopefully (and before too long) we will be able to return to some form of public worship at Brunswick - and also start to see some positive progress regarding the new build at Cowgate. This of course will all be dependant on whether or not we end up in stricter lockdown again in January, which sadly looks increasingly likely.

Having just heard the PM's announcement regarding the fact that the relaxation of social restrictions over Christmas has now been rescinded (3 households were permitted to mix over a period of 5 days - this is now only allowed on Christmas Day and no mixing of households for those in Tier 4), then like many my heart is breaking right now, and I find myself struggling to know what words of comfort and joy I should bring.

Hopes to have quality time away with family have been shattered and it's a struggle to feel positive; a feeling which will be echoed by many; but as much as my heart breaks right now, my heart also goes out to all those families for whom there will always be an empty an chair at the table as this dreadful pandemic has so far claimed the lives of more than 67,000 people here in the UK alone. Chris Witty said 'If you've packed a bag for travel over Christmas—Unpack it' & Headlines Report 'Christmas is Cancelled'.

But Christmas isn't cancelled is it? Not if we believe!

In last weeks Carol Service I spoke of the meme which has been doing the rounds on social media which says 'The first Christmas was pretty simple—therefore it's ok if yours is too'. So many hopes have been dashed, so many expectations will be unfulfilled, but whilst we may not be able to celebrate in the way that we would have wanted to—with plans curtailed or even scrapped—the 'reason for season' remains. Two thousand years ago things didn't quite go to plan for Mary & Joseph; In Matthews gospel we read;

'This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly'(Matthew 1:18-19)

We don't know when Joseph planned on marrying Mary, but to discover that she was pregnant - must have come as a real blow - throwing into turmoil whatever *plans* there may have been.

Then, a little while later - having made the journey to Bethlehem to be registered in accordance with the census which had been issued by Caesar Augustus, they arrived to find 'No Room in the Inn' - surely this wouldn't have been what Joseph would of *planned* for his heavily pregnant wife either!

In Romans 8:27 & 28 we read;

'...he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose'.

These verses have helped sustain me through the past year, ever since we entered the first lockdown back in March, especially during times when I felt that any plans I may have had had been frustrated, none the least because they remind me that we are not alone in our suffering - God is with us.

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Romans 8:28 is a verse which naturally raises many questions in relation to suffering - difficult questions like - Did God cause our suffering? Does he sympathize with us in our suffering? Why does God allow suffering and Can he do anything about our suffering?

I'm not sure that I can fully answer those questions - nor will I pretend to be qualified to do so; but let me just say that Romans 8:28 does not tell us that God causes people to suffer, and it doesn't say that God considers suffering in and of itself to be good, what it does say is that *God works all things together for the good of those who love him and who are called according to his purposes.*

God holds the plan... This verse doesn't solve the problem at a philosophical level, the problem of how God can be all powerful and all good and yet good people can suffer, but it does describe how God is at work in a suffering world. We know he has identified with that world through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ; wasn't that the purpose for his coming? Consider these words of prophecy found in Isaiah 53;

Indeed, who would ever believe it?

Who would possibly accept what we've been told?

Who has witnessed the awesome power *and plan* of the Eternal in action?

² *Out of emptiness* he came, like a tender shoot from rock-hard ground.

He didn't look like anything or anyone of consequence—

he had no physical beauty to attract our attention.

³ So he was despised and forsaken by men,
this man of suffering, grief's *patient* friend.

As if he was a person to avoid, we looked the other way;

he was despised, *forsaken*, and we took no notice of him.

⁴ Yet it was our suffering he carried,
our pain and distress, our sick-to-the-soul-ness. (The Voice)

Yes, Christ, the babe who was born in Bethlehem, who's birth we celebrate - died on the cross—suffered—for our sins and participated with us in a suffering world. Surely it is true - How can we not say that He is *with us* in our suffering!

To get the full appreciation of verse 28 however, we need to read it in the context of chapter 8 as a whole, for it is there that we are reminded that God is busy recreating this world and that those of us who are united with Christ by faith are being transformed. God is transforming His church, and it is through His Church (His People) that God will eventually transform this whole world to bring suffering and oppression to an end.

That is how God is working all things together for good, for those who love him and are called according to his purpose!

1 Peter 1:3 calls upon us to give 'Praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!;

(For)... In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Therefore let us hold fast. Let us keep on supporting one another through this 'season of suffering' and having had our own plans stripped back—let us focus on Jesus IMMANUEL GOD IS WITH US.

And... yes! In case anyone is in any doubt, I preach these words firstly to myself! GOD BLESS x

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THIS WEEK'S INTERCESSIONS

We thank Heather again for providing details for this weeks intercessions,

MAJOR RODNEY BIRCH still remains very weak. **MAJOR LILIAN, JAYNE AND PETER** are finding it very difficult, even with the help they are getting from the Macmillan team.

HEATHER RICHARDSON is still caring for her mum and dad , **DAVE AND MARY**, day by day. **DAVE** has to attend Hexham hospital two or three times a week to see his consultant and have the wound on his head dressed. Which is stressful for all of them.

LYNDSAY AND JOSH RICHARDSON have asked for prayers after a difficult week. **JOSH** was the victim of an unprovoked attack by boys who have bullied him in the past. **JOSH** was at football training when he was attacked by the boys who somehow had broken into the sports venue. The police had to be called and **JOSH** spent some hours in A&E . Thankfully the attack was stopped before he was badly hurt, but both **LYNDSAY AND JOSH** are naturally shocked and upset.

JOY AND ADRIAN have asked for your prayers for family of **STEPH, ADAM'S WIFE**. **STEPH** had to travel to Hull to be with her dad as her grandmother, who is over 90, had been diagnosed with Covid. Unfortunately **STEPH'S** grandmother passed away shortly after **STEPH** had arrived, but was grateful that she was able to at least have some communication with her before she died. Please pray for **STEPH AND HER FATHER**, as they come to terms with this loss.

DAVID AND CHRISTINE SCOTT are still finding things difficult. **CHRISTINE**, in particular , as she struggles with the loss of speech after her stroke and is very frightened . **DAVID** is trying to be positive for her, but is struggling with his own health problems.

MARIE MATSHI, one of our African ladies has been very ill in London for a few weeks but is now believed to be home.

We continue to remember in our prayers **CHRIS ESCRITT**, who has another ultra sound this week, **CAROL PURVIS, GORDON QUINN, ROBERT PATTINSON, MARION TOWERSEY, TREVOR TULLETT, DOREEN MANNING, ALISON WRIGHT, STEWART JEAVONS ELSIE RICHARDSON,** and **RUTH PLATT. DAVID AND LILY BUDDING, THE CARTLEDGE FAMILY, and THE HOCKLEYS.**

There is good news for our families who have loved ones in residential homes, who have not been able to visit. **BERNICE AND TRACY** will be able to see **LEN** for the first time on Wednesday. **TERRY AND CATHERINE** have begun weekly visits to **IRIS**, and **ROSIE STUBBINGTON** reports that her **NANNA, JOAN MIDDLEMAST** is being allowed one visit per week from this week, which means her mother and brother can at long last visit. **ROSIE** says the family have been really grateful for prayers and ask that we continue to remember them.

Given the news this evening—it seems appropriate to repeat these words from last week;

REMEMBER... Whatever *you, those you love, those we pray for,*
are facing right now

GOD IS WITH US

HE IS WITH YOU. HIS PRESENCE IS WITH ALL

ISAIAH 7:14

"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign. Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel."



With every blessing
Major Liz

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Christmas Joy

This afternoon at 3pm, a video of our 2nd Pre-Recorded Carol Service 'Christmas Joy' should be available for viewing both on Facebook (Newcastle City Temple Salvation Army Church) and on You Tube via the following link; <https://youtu.be/hDL47plGapM>

Virtual Christmas Card

A reminder that the virtual Christmas Card can be viewed via the following link;

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1sq-3Sjj1EGsKmSaC0vkqoXIQGYBrQ1c?usp=sharing>

I have received a number of appreciative comments for this presentation, and a number of people have been sharing this card with others including former members and officers of the corps.

Bill Ions shared with me that he has personally received Best Wishes to the Corps from Cols Don and Dorothy Oliver (New Zealand - former Co's) Majors Peter and Pat Exon (former CO's) & Gerald and Joyce Birkett (former Soldiers).

The amount raised to be split between the Corps Building Fund (80%) & YP Corps (20%) is £236.50

Virtual Christmas Fayre

We have now stopped taking orders and we are pleased to report that the final amount raised is £382.75, all proceeds to the Building Fund.

Annual Toy and Gift Appeal

Thanks to the overwhelming response to the Annual Toy and Gift Appeal, I am able to report that we have been able to provide Toy & Gift Parcels for just over 300 children this year. In addition we have been able to support a number of local families with food parcels too, and provided gifts for 14 men who are resident in the Anti-Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery units Safe House here in Newcastle, plus lots of toiletries for those connected with the AHTMSU Connect Programme.

A more comprehensive report, which will be posted as a Thank You to all our donors and sent to our key supporters (including Asda, Morrison's, Waitrose, John Lewis, British Airways, Northumberland Freemasons, Dame Allen Junior School & Cross Country Trains) will be issued in the New Year. When it becomes available please feel free to share this with individuals outside the corps who you know have supported us too. We estimate that in excess of 1500 individual toys and gifts were donated which is a staggering amount.

A VIRTUAL CHRISTMAS - WITH NEWCASTLE CITY TEMPLE

Sunday 20th December: *Christmas Joy!* Pre-recorded Carol Service available from 3pm

Friday 25th December: Christmas Day

Manger Scene - A simple pre-recorded service available for viewing from midnight on Christmas Eve

Sunday 27th December Please note there will be no Sunday Morning Zoom

Sunday 3rd December Please note there will be no Sunday Morning Zoom instead we are all encouraged to log into watch a service prepared by our Territorial Leaders as per the details below;

Vision and Commitment 2021

Join our Territorial Leaders for an online Vision and Commitment Sunday meeting that premieres live on YouTube (www.youtube.com/salvationarmyvideo) **Sunday 3 January at 9am**. The meeting will include the installation and welcome of Colonels Paul and Jenine Main as the new Chief Secretary and Territorial Secretary for Leader Development.

VIRTUAL COFFEE MORNING - FESTIVE FUN!

22nd December Virtual Coffee Morning 11am via ZOOM

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/94036559399?pwd=S3lCVFU1QklkcWVsQnJrRUpWNDlNdz09>

Meeting ID: 940 3655 9399

Passcode: 236837

THIS IS THE SAME LOG IN AS LAST WEEK—WHICH IS A DIFFERENT CODE TO PREVIOUS CODES
This is the final issue of NCT Connected for 2020. The next issue will be posted on Sunday 10th January 2021. Please also note that Major Liz will be taking Furlough from the 3rd - 9th January.

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Reimagining Church - Let's Worship Together

SUNDAY: 20th December 2020

Theme: Advent Windows 4. *A Season of Celebration*

Key Text: Luke 2:8-20



Last Sunday we lit the candle of joy. We light it and the candles of hope and peace again as we remember that Christ will come again and bring us everlasting peace and joy.

The fourth candle of Advent is the Candle of Love. Its light is meant to remind us of the love that God has for us.

Jesus shows us God's perfect love. He is God's love in human form. The bible says that *"God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life."*

Love is patient, love is kind and envies no one.

Love is never boastful or conceited, rude or selfish.

Love is not quick to take offense, it keeps no records of wrongs, it does not gloat over other people's troubles, but rejoices in the right, the good, and the true. There is nothing that love cannot face, there is no limit to its faith, to its hope, to its endurance. Love never ends.

As we light this candle today we are reminded of how God's perfect love is found in Jesus.

Prayer

Loving God, we thank you for your gift of love - shown to us perfectly in Jesus Christ our Lord. Help us prepare our hearts to receive Him.

Season of Celebration

Over the past few weeks we have taken time to open different Windows on Advent.

Our first Window opened – the ***Season of Expectation***, and we thought about the incredibly high expectations placed upon Jesus Christ, even before he was born. In Isaiah 9 we read; *'Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given! His name will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace'.*

There was the expectation of 'Wisdom', the expectation of 'Power', an expectation of 'Care' and an expectation of 'Wholeness'.

And we thought how The Word coupled with experience tells us - that Jesus truly lives up to the expectations placed upon him, and He will never fold under pressure.

Our Second Window revealed Advent as a ***'Season of Preparation'***.

We thought about John the Baptist – the one sent by God to prepare the way for Jesus Christ. John the Baptist – came to *'bear witness to the light'*

We touched on three Parables found in Matthew chapter 24 & 25, which speak of how important it is that we take time to prepare ourselves spiritually to not only receive and welcome the Christ child, but to ensure that we are found to be ready when Christ comes again.

Last week we opened the third Window – revealing Advent as a ***'Season of Promise.'*** We said that Christmas is all about promise and fulfilment. An ancient promise from God who cares so deeply about His world that He spoke about the day when he would send forth a redeemer, a ruler, and prince of peace.

Christmas is full of that promise, so dimly perceived and so poorly understood for centuries, but nonetheless so faithfully held among God's people. Christmas is about that promise and about its fulfilment. We believe that this promise *was and is* fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the one who came as a tiny baby born in the Little town of Bethlehem.

Today we open the final Window in this Season – the window which reveals Advent to be a ***'Season of Celebration'***.

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Reimagining Church - Let's Worship Together

Continued...

*Snow is falling all around me
Children playing having fun
It's the season of love and understanding
Merry Christmas Everyone*

*Time for parties and celebration
People dancing all night long
Time for presents and exchanging kisses
Time for singing Christmas Songs*

I'm sure some of you will recognise these words as being found in Shakin' Stevens' Christmas classic *Merry Christmas Everyone*, and until Christmas 2020 they pretty much sum up this season of celebration — don't they!

I mean, what better way to celebrate than with parties, dancing, the giving and receiving of gifts – not forgetting the excuse Christmas provides to grab someone under the mistletoe!!! – well, sadly for many in our society, that is pretty much what Christmas *is* all about, and why so many people have been up in arms about the current COVID-19 restrictions.

In a survey conducted by ComRes on behalf of Theos in October 2011 the following results were obtained:

83% agreed that Christmas is about spending time with family and friends

62% agreed that Christmas is a time when we should be generous to people less fortunate than ourselves.

41% agreed that Christmas is about celebrating the fact that God loves humanity.

40% said Christmas is a good excuse for taking time off and doesn't really have any meaning today.

When we consider those statistics, (& others like them), we realise that there are many people who fail to recognise the true meaning and significance of Christmas and its celebrations, but this is nothing new...

In John 1:10-11 we find these words;

'But although the world was made through Jesus Christ, the world didn't recognise him when he came. Even in his own land and among his own people, he was not accepted.'

THEY MISSED HIM! *They were looking for a lion, He came as a Lamb, and they missed Him.
They were looking for a warrior, He came as a Peacemaker, and they missed Him.
They were looking for a king, He came as a Servant, and they missed Him.
They were looking for the liberation from Rome, he submitted to the Roman stake, and they missed Him.
They were looking for a fit to their mould, He was the mould-breaker, and they missed Him.
Will you? Source: 'A Stocking full of Christmas' Mark Stibbe*

READ: Luke 2:8-20

v20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen.

In the reading of this verse I have an image of The Shepherds – who at best could be described as *'those hired hands who were known for rough living and even worse behaviour. Outcasts, often unwanted and unseen by most of the community'* – and the image I have of them is one of them celebrating. It was through Jesus, that the shepherd's story and our story was forever changed. Advent is the purposeful preparation of the annual celebration which reminds people of the Good News. The very fact that God came down to earth – and that he came for all. Young or old, rich or poor all are invited to embrace His presence.

The first to know The first to celebrate The first to tell.

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Reimagining Church - Let's Worship Together

Continued...

The Shepherds were the first to know – it was to the shepherds tending their sheep on the hillside – that the Angels came.

The Angel said to them *'Do not be afraid; for see - I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people; to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord... And suddenly there was with the Angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying. 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'*

The fact that God made the announcement to shepherds helps us to understand the real meaning of Christmas.

John 3:16 tells us that God loved mankind so much that he sent His son to save us. The greatest birth in history and God chose to make this announcement to and through shepherds first.

Why the Shepherds – well I guess because God wanted to show us that regardless of who we are – God loves us and He counts us worthy to receive the greatest gift He has to offer us.

The Shepherds were the first to celebrate – *'When the angels had left them and gone into Heaven, the Shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem...;'*

They departed in haste, they found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger – just as the angels had said; and then we are told in that *'The Shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen...'*

Christmas has been called the most wonderful time of the year for a reason. It's a time of joy and celebration – because it brings the timeless message of Good News and forgiveness for everyone who wants it.

The best way we can celebrate Christmas is by inviting Jesus Christ into our hearts - and then do as the Shepherds did...

The Shepherds were the first to tell.

After they had encountered the Christ, the Messiah, God himself, they told everyone they saw about Him. We see the Shepherds sharing the good news at His birth.

In the story of his life we see people who after encountering Jesus run and tell others about Him.

The last command Jesus gave us was to tell others about Him.

To share the Good news of salvation to the ends of the earth.

Yes we celebrate the birth of our Saviour but the celebration is really about celebrating the good news of our salvation that He brought with Him through His birth and subsequent death, burial and resurrection.

Advent is a Season of Celebration – and this Good News is too good to keep to ourselves. We must be like the shepherds and tell everyone, that we have encountered the Christ child this Christmas season.

Suggested Carol: Rise up, shepherd!

https://youtu.be/NBna8eSQ_-Q

Suggested Carol: Infant Holy

https://youtu.be/5Q_nyGKcwP4

Band Piece: Joy to the World!

<https://youtu.be/H7NsLYEbBgg>

May the God of the angels, who heralded Christ's birth, bring joy to our hearts this day and always.

May the God of love, who gave his only Son to be born for us, fill our lives with love and peace.

May Immanuel, God with us, be with us in all our doings and all our celebrations, until he brings us into his eternal kingdom.

**And may almighty God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
bless us each one now and forever.
Amen.**