



Christmas Greetings and welcome to this seasonal issue picturing a snow covered, icy Tarn bridge in January 2010. A decade later and nine months into the Covid-19 pandemic, that seems a distant memory. Now, a new variant has moved us into Tier 4, further restricting our movement and dashing the plans of many for a Christmas together with family. In supporting our local community, I hope this seasonal issue will bring a little cheer and help keep us together at a time of such adversity. In true Christian spirit, let's help one another to get through this - and you can do this through Keep Connected!



Church Matters
St Andrew with St Alban

A Christmas Letter from Revd Ian Welch, Rector, St Andrew with St Alban

“Christmas 2020 promises to be a Christmas like no other. Usual patterns of celebration and family traditions will need to be amended, or perhaps, even jettisoned. This is bound to be disappointing for many of us, as Christmas is a time when families greatly value being together in mutual solidarity. There are, of course, the virtual platforms: Skype, Teams, Zoom, and other means of techno linkage. Let's face it, this year of lockdowns and tier restrictions would have been much more difficult and isolating without such media. They have been a life-line for many, and have certainly enabled organisations of all kinds to communicate safely and effectively and to keep the wheels oiled and in motion.



What has become clear in these last ten months is our need for 'real' connection, preferably of the face-to-face variety, but above all, a sense of authentic relatedness. This is a deep human need. Absence makes the heart grow fonder, they say, and we have all learned to value human connection in a way that, previously, many of us perhaps took for granted. Along with the inevitable challenges, relative isolation has also opened up new possibilities for spiritual life. Cut off from usual patterns of busyness, there has been time and space for reflection and prayer, and for building a closer sense of inner connection with Christ and our heavenly Father. This has been a rare and extraordinary opportunity. It seems inevitable that this Christmas will be quieter than expected. This opens up the possibility for deeper engagement with the mystery of the incarnation and the birth of Christ in our hearts, in both worship and private devotions.

I pray that this Christmas engagement with Christ may bring you deep joy and peace in these anxious times of pandemic. I also pray that you and your loved ones will be greatly blessed and protected during the 12 holy days and nights, as you celebrate in new and creative ways. Wishing you all a joyous Christmas, and happy, healthy and safe New Year! **lan**”

2020 Christingle - Alison Lawrie reports -

I wasn't convinced. How could a Zoomed Christingle Service ever match the joy and wonder of seeing young children standing in a circle under the Christmas tree in Church, each carefully holding a lit candle balanced in an orange?

But, it *did* work! Thanks to the well organised distribution of Christingle DIY kits to many of our church families' children, there was still a moment of stillness and prayer when living room lights were extinguished and the glow of the candles shone through the Zoom screen windows.

The children were engaged throughout the service, listening intently to the beautiful story, read by Revd Ian, of "The Christmas Angel" by a Finnish author, Pirrko Vainio. The singing appeared to be enthusiastic, although sadly muted, and the experience of making the Christingles was undertaken with delight; surprisingly many sweets remaining intact on their cocktail sticks until the end!

Congratulations to all facilitating the service and participating, and we hope the Save the Children Fund benefits from our donations.



S t Edward's - Alison Lawrie reports on Christmas Hamper preparation and on Carols for Crisis

Hampers: On Saturday 19 December, a group of volunteers gathered at St Edward's Church to bag up essential food for delivery to needy families in our local communities. The enormity of the task was only really recognised as we saw many tables spread with pre-sorted tins and packets of food along with large bags of toys all to be wrapped in Christmas paper. Some were set to work filling bags to a set formula and others started wrapping.

Once the bags were filled and labelled, they were collected by another group of volunteer delivery drivers. Somehow Rev Catherine had managed to inspire and recruit a large team of willing helpers on Saturday, but their work was dependent on the amazing response from our generous community, who gave so much of the produce that was needed.

It was a supremely well co-ordinated effort, which will offer many local families a glimpse of the power of church communities to give hope and practical support, especially at this time of an isolating, extra difficult 2020 Christmas, one that none of us will ever forget.

Carols for CRISIS: On Saturday 12 December, a volunteer group of singers gathered on the grass outside St Edward's Church in St Keverne's Road on Mottingham Estate. Masked and socially distanced underneath a recently erected gazebo, we continued the annual tradition of Carol Singing in aid of Crisis at Christmas. We were fortunate that it wasn't too cold or raining. Although we were away from the main shopping area, we collected £271.52 which was gratifying. Afterwards we were treated to hot drinks and mince pies, provided by St Edward's stalwart catering team, for which we were very grateful. Later some of us visited the



church to admire the lovely crib scene and Christmas tree, arranged and decorated by volunteer members of St Edward's congregation. Being able to join for ecumenical Carols in the open air and to be inspired by the church display, was a fitting start to Christmas celebrations. Thank you Revd Catherine, for organising it on behalf of Churches Together in Mottingham.



Diane Hudson has been involved with 'Carols for CRISIS' since it was conceived. She reports: "I appreciate this is long but wanted to set out the history of Carols for CRISIS

At a Churches Together In Mottingham meeting many years ago members discussed the commercialism of the Festive Season and what could we do to promote the more spiritual aspects of Christmas around the streets of Mottingham. It was decided that we should have a Carol Singing event and we would collect money for a charity at the same time. CRISIS was the charity chosen. We all went out in good voice around the village streets. Although, some residents came to the door to listen to the singing and gave generously, many did not. It was felt that one of the reasons people didn't respond may well have been that they didn't hear the singing, due to their double glazing. The following year CTIM took the Carol Singing event to Mottingham Station and sang there during the evening rush hour. We only started singing when we could see the trains coming around the bend into the Station and we did reasonably well. Many children used to come as they enjoyed seeing the trains come and go. Then, one year the Waiting Room on the down side of the station closed. Some carol singers used to keep warm there whilst waiting for the next train to come in. Also, timetable changes meant there were longer times between arriving trains making it very uncomfortable on a cold winter's night. So, CTIM decided to change the venue once again. The venue chosen was at the Co-op in Kimmeridge Road. Saturday was also chosen to give more people an opportunity to come. We sang outside there for many years with a change for a few years by the Nisa supermarket in the village. Our Methodist friends supplied the mince pies and coffee in their hall after the event! For the last couple of years we have returned to the Co-op in Kimmeridge Road. This year, due to the coronavirus, we couldn't go to the Co-op but instead we were invited to sing Carols on the green in front of St Edward's. A good number came and although there were not many people passing by to put money in the bucket we raised the most money for CRISIS ever recorded (*See Alison's report above - Ed*). Most of the money came from the Carol Singers themselves, perhaps because all those who attended were so pleased to be singing Carols together (St Edwards supplied refreshments). I really enjoy this event as we usually get to sing nearly all the carols in the Bethlehem Carol Sheet in an hour. So, the chances are that you get to sing your favourite carol!



Mottingham Matters



Cllr **Will Rowlands** said (*before the introduction of Tier 4 on 20 December - Ed!*), "The recent enforcement of tier 3 restrictions failed to alleviate any grand plans I had to avoid a panic-induced raid on the nearest high street or shopping centre on Christmas Eve - realising once again, that shopping has been left too late to be completed online. The highest levels of adrenaline pump through one's veins as, just like last year, many of us shoppers make a desperate search in shop after shop, looking for something remotely acceptable to send to a loved one. With the words muttered last year, "never again" echoing through our minds when we are greeted with disappointing leftovers, we inevitably realise that many have adopted the same tactics – and yet everyone else

always seems better at this game!

Being caught off guard earlier than in previous years has brought home in many ways what Christmas really means.

Apart from questions relating to Covid-19 (the council is still awaiting answers to these from Messer's Hancock and Whitty) these come to mind;

Will Father Christmas force us into self-isolation should he cough half-way down the chimney?

Will the police be on guard to ensure that Rudolf and Co. maintain a 2m distance at all times?

What happens to the delivery of presents when Santa's grand entry breaks the rule of six?

Christmas this year will hopefully be less materialistic and more family orientated. I think that one thing 2020 has taught us is that whilst owning the latest gadgets and smartest clothes etc gives us a lift, the boost of human interaction, both in the form of family and community, provides us with the biggest lift of all. The best present I could have this Christmas would be to finally see my mother again.

And so, as the curtain draws on the drama that has been 2020, I sincerely wish you and your families a healthy and joyful Christmas, and a prosperous and rewarding new year!

Mottingham Library: *Alison Lawrie* reports - We are so lucky in Mottingham to have such a dedicated team running our local library. In spite of all they have had to contend with during this past year they have remained cheerful, committed to providing the best service they can under difficult circumstances and have given up their “free” time to run Zoom reading groups, provide signed singing and activity sessions for children and prepare armchair travel talks - is there no end to their talents? To cap it all, they dreamt up entertaining party games and provided party bags for the reading groups to enjoy Zoomed social gatherings to celebrate Christmas. Thank you Chris, Claire and Esther for all your hard work and we hope you have a relaxing holiday. (The Zoom screenshot shows the participants demonstrating their millinery skills at Chris’s highly organised Reading Group Christmas party!)



This space was where the **Christmas Opening Times** information was meant to be placed, but sadly, as we are only too aware, there will now be no opening until at the earliest 30th December, when Bromley will reassess the situation after the Government’s next announcement. It does look as if we shall have to forego the use of this wonderful service for a while yet.

Community Matters - I received a range of responses to my enquiry on readers’ Christmas plans, which are now subject to Tier 4 restrictions, of course! So, I will make this general comment to cover all - ‘we’re spending Christmas at home’! Nonetheless, I include brief comments from respondents in this section, which opens with two seasonal pieces from,

David & Thelma - *Mary’s Dream*

I had a dream, Joseph. I don’t understand it, but I think it was about a birthday celebration for our son. The people in my dream had been preparing for about six weeks. They had decorated the house and bought new clothes. They’d gone shopping many times and bought many elaborate gifts. It was peculiar, though, because the presents weren’t for our son. They wrapped them in beautiful paper and stacked them under a tree. Yes, a tree, Joseph, right inside their homes! They’d decorated the tree with sparkling ornaments. There was a figure like an angel on the top of the tree. Everyone was laughing and happy. They gave the gifts to each other, Joseph, not to our son.

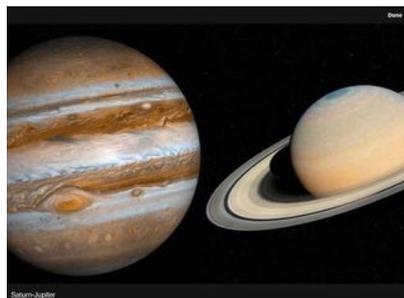


I don’t think they even knew him. They never mentioned his name. I had the strangest feeling that, if our Jesus had gone to this celebration he would have been intruding. How sad for someone not to be wanted at his own birthday party! I’m glad it was only a dream. How terrible Joseph, if it had been real!

Christmas Star

The two largest planets in our solar system are set to align in a conjunction for the first time in 800 years to create a “Christmas Star”.

Jupiter and Saturn will line up this year on December 21 and appear to form a double planet - just in time for the festive season. The Great Conjunction, also nicknamed the “Christmas Star” or “Star of Bethlehem”, hasn’t been seen for 800 years.



This “once-in-a-lifetime” sighting won’t occur again until 2080 and then sometime after 2400. NASA says the conjunction will appear “spectacular” with a normal telescope or even the naked eye.

In 1614, German astronomer Johannes Kepler suggested that a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn may be what was referred to as the “Star of Bethlehem” in the nativity story. Others have suggested the Three Kings could have been following a triple conjunction of Jupiter, Saturn and Venus to visit baby Jesus.