



Musings from the Manse

This will be the last Newsletter for 2020 – a year which many of us will be relieved to see the back of! But all the things which plagued the last 12 months have not gone away. Whilst there is a glimmer of hope on the horizon, many are still battling the fallout from a global pandemic and the new tier system has meant an even darker cloud hovering over us for these last days of the old year.

However, when I opened my inbox on Monday morning this week, there was a message from LICC which really put things into perspective. So, I will leave the last word from the Manse to Steve Rouse: Church Team Director, LICC...



'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel'
(which means 'God with us'). (Matt.1:23)

'God with us – you're kidding me! Where was he when I lost my job this year? Where was he when I was home alone for nine months? Where was he when my dad died without his family at his bedside? "Immanuel – God with us"? You can take that Christmas card and put it straight in the bin.'

I wonder whether Mary felt like binning the angel's message when she and Joseph had to flee to Egypt? Whether she asked, 'Where is God? Why is all this happening?' The Christmas story gets dark quickly, but Matthew wants to show us that God has come to us in person to bring light into our darkness.

Like the myth of Santa (sorry!), many have added myths to the story of Jesus – that he has come to fulfil all our dreams and ambitions, that he has come to help me find a parking space in Sainsbury's on Christmas Eve – but Matthew gives us a very practical, pastoral message about the presence of God in the darkest of times.

I discovered that God was with me in the dingy darkness of a Clacton nightclub when I was way down the wrong path, and he lit up my mind with a question: 'Where is your life going?'

Claire found that God was with her in the lonely darkness of her bedroom as she wrestled again with how to make herself sick, and his presence shone a light of hope that life could be different.

Tony met Jesus in his locked prison cell, serving time for his 98th conviction, and suddenly a new purpose began to shine in his life.

Every part of Jesus' life was marked by the disappointment of human experience – poverty, loss, temptation, betrayal, and death. And yet he touched those who others would avoid, he drew close when others turned away, and he ate with those who others rejected.

Immanuel's presence illuminates a new way for us to view everything, including our dark times. We may end this year feeling that darkness has dominated, but the Christmas story radiates the greater truth: that his light has come into our darkness so that we can truly know and say,

'Immanuel – God is with us'.

May God be with you, today and always,

Yours in Christ, Helen <><

Future Services

Now we are in Tier 4 as a consequence of the developments in the spread of the COVID-19 virus - there will be an important email sent on Sunday afternoon with a message from Rev Helen about future Christ Church services

A Prayer for New Year's Eve...

God, above time, above space, yet with us and in us in Christ,
we who are creatures of time and space come to you tonight with thankfulness.

We give you thanks for the year that is passing.

We thank you for the many ways in which you have touched us,
in moments of great happiness or in deep distress.

You have been present in Christ, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

We thank you for the people who matter to us, near and far,
who have given themselves to us and through whom you have been present to us in their love.

We thank you for your church, the community of faith
in whose company we have journeyed,
whose friendship we value, whose challenge we welcome,
and whose wide boundaries are not defined by time, by space or by death.

As we move on now into a new year,
give us grace to leave behind our regrets and our failures and any sense of guilt,
to let go of the past with gratitude,
and to leave each moment in joyful discipleship,
in the company of him who is always Emmanuel, God with us.

Amen.

(Prayer by John Harvey – from 'Hay & Stardust' by Ruth Burgess)

A New Year Song...

Back in 1975 I wrote the following song to celebrate the 80th birthday of Rev'd Herral A. Hall, the Pastor Emeritus of Walnut Street Baptist Church, Carbondale, Illinois, USA, where, at the time, I was serving as organist. The sentiments expressed, though, are equally appropriate as we face a New Year.

Ed Martin

Refrain:

*One year older, one year nearer home,
one more year in which our faith has grown;
a new year starts, we hear the Saviour's call:
"Come, follow me, give me your life, your all."*

1.

As we look back on years gone by, the Master's hand appears.
Each time we've cast our cares on him his Spirit calmed our fears.
In times of sickness we have known his presence ever near.
Yes, hitherto has the Lord led us.

2.

And so today our trust in him is deeper than before.
Each new day brings another chance to serve him even more.
As we commune with him in prayer, our spirit is assured
that day by day his hand is on us.

3.

Now, as we face the years ahead, it is our firm intent
to do our best to work for him no matter where we're sent.
His Word will light the path ahead, each step will be secure,
for from now on God will go with us.

To go with these words are:
the sheet music (*a pdf file*)
and the music
(*an mp3 file created on the computer
by the music software*)

Both are attached to the email
with this newsletter

