

Dear friends,

To all my friends, past and present, that subscribe to this now bi-weekly email. There are literally hundreds of people from churches I have served in across this country and abroad, far too many to write to individually, so please let me wish you all

A VERY HAPPY CHRISTMAS.

The situation regarding Covid-19 goes from bad to worse, affecting millions of people's Christmas plans but let us hope that this is the dark before the dawn before the vaccination programme starts to take effect. I know several people locally who are being vaccinated this week so the roll-out is definitely happening. However, hopefully as a point of light amidst the encircling gloom I have recorded a YouTube reflection on the meaning of Christmas which you can access by clicking on this link. <https://youtu.be/FytNgWTLxbs>

Alternatively, if you'd prefer to read it you can do so on my Blog by clicking on this link. <https://revmartinjacques.blogspot.com/2020/12/the-meaning-of-christmas.html>

There was a medical emergency of a different nature at Otterton on Sunday which delayed the start of the service by 35 mins. Our prayers are with Beryl.

The Carol services

Our Filmed St. Peter's Carol service has been completed and will be ready to watch online **from 10am on Christmas Eve**. The link will be on our website of course but I'll provide the link here. <https://youtu.be/MPMJyI2ydIY>

The **Live-streamed Carol service** from All Saints East Budleigh **at 6pm Christmas Eve** can be accessed then by following either of these links.

<https://app.faith.online/p/events/spLsscSJV>

Or phone 01395 891035.

The Live Carol services at both Otterton and Budleigh Salterton last Sunday evening were each marvellous in their own special way - many thanks to the

singers, readers and everyone involved with putting on these services – they were a point of light amidst the encircling gloom. The St. Peter’s choir bolstered by lots of youngsters from the cathedral school added a little extra range and volume and sounded marvellous.

I’ll be taking a short break from sending this communication. “My next soul food” communication will be on the 6th January

Christmas Eve and Christmas day readings

Quite complicated because there are three sets of permissible readings for Christmas. **I will be using “set 3”** for both the midnight Mass service (11pm) at St. Peter’s on Christmas Eve and the 11am Christmas day service at St. Michael’s Otterton. **Reverend Trevor Jones has chosen “set 1”** at All Saints East Budleigh which are Isaiah 9:2-7, Titus 2:2-7 and Luke 2: 1-14 (15-20). **Rev. Karen Young** will preside at the 8am and 11am at St. Peter’s and will choose either **set 1,2 or 3** for them. I provide a reflection on the set 3 readings here.

Isaiah 52: 7-10. A messenger appears on the horizon bringing good news to a broken and besieged city that salvation is on its way. When the watchman realise it is good news they spread the message amongst the people of Jerusalem and eventually they all sing for joy. Emmanuel “God is with us” is the message of Christmas, and our role is to react with joy and spread that message until the whole world is singing with joy

Hebrews 1: 1-4. Whilst the humanity of Jesus is the subject of chapter two of Hebrews the letter starts by stressing the divinity of Jesus much like John’s prologue which follows. The wisdom of God is manifested in Jesus “the reflection of God’s glory, the exact imprint of God’s very being”. This manifestation of God’s presence and glory in the world is what we call “the Christ”

John 1: 1-14. The Christ was not a bolt from the blue but was “with God in the beginning” a revelation of eternal truth. The universal Christ made human in Jesus, is the presence of God himself who stands at both the beginning and the end of all history – but was made tangible at a certain point in historical time – making clear and apparent the will and purposes of God to human beings. God is Love and Grace and Truth and He wills the healing and salvation of all creation. Quite a message! And we are charged with living out and spreading that message.

The set psalm of the day is psalm 98. A psalm of joy and rejoicing

O sing to the Lord a new song,
for he has done marvellous things.

His right hand and his holy arm
have gotten him victory.

² The Lord has made known his victory;
he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations.

³ He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness
to the house of Israel.

All the ends of the earth have seen
the victory of our God.

⁴ Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.

⁵ Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre,
with the lyre and the sound of melody.

⁶ With trumpets and the sound of the horn
make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord.

⁷ Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
the world and those who live in it.

⁸ Let the floods clap their hands;
let the hills sing together for joy

⁹ at the presence of the Lord, for he is coming
to judge the earth.

He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with equity.

Musical interlude!

What else could it be but the dulcet tones of Sir Noddy of the Grand Duchy of Holder belting out this classic. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BpfHSqLXePI>

Thought for the day

Can you remember Christmas as a child? Of course you can – the anticipation, the excitement, getting up and creeping downstairs to see your presents when you thought everyone was asleep. When I was young Christmas was all about the presents first and foremost, then the traditions

like hanging your stockings up (come to think about it – that’s presents again isn’t it?), Turkey dinners, crackers, Christmas trees and decorations, too much chocolate, and everyone making a conscious effort to be nice and friendly (it can’t hurt once a year can it?) I’m sure there are thoughtful, reflective, spiritual children out there but I wasn’t one of them and neither were any of my friends. The “story” I spend my life trying to preach nowadays didn’t really impinge on me at all. It was purely a dimly perceived backdrop to the festivities. So, I’m in no place to judge anyone who doesn’t respond to the story or worry that youngsters don’t appear to care one way or another because once upon a time neither did I. Your perspectives change as you mature (for most of us anyway) and your spiritual side develops slowly, moulded by life events in the main. What that story *means* is the 64,000-dollar question and that also takes time to unfold and changes over time as certainties unravel and re-form in different ways in that classic “order-disorder – reorder” schema I wrote about recently. For me, the incarnation used to be a feature of the Christian story that I knew about but didn’t care much about, but late in my theological development it is now fundamental to my belief system and essential to understanding the coherence and nature of the sacraments not as supernatural things but as entirely natural. In short, creation was the first “incarnation” or “sacrament” and Jesus fulfils and reveals that truth in what we now generally refer to as the incarnation. God is transcendent but God is also imminent in all things. As Jesus says when he became a man many years later in Luke 17.

²⁰ Once Jesus^[9] was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, “The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; ²¹ nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There it is!’ For, in fact, the kingdom of God is within you.”

Remember that whether you are spending Christmas alone or with family and friends this year – the Kingdom of God is WITHIN YOU so you are never alone.

The Prayer for Today is offered by the C of E on their website

**Jesus, Saviour, son of Mary,
you know us and love us,
you share our lives
and hear our prayer.
Glory to you for ever.
Amen.**

Love and peace,

Martin

Please note my new email address is vicar@rmcommunity.co.uk