

St James Malden

Advent Reflections



“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. **2** Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins. **3** A voice of one calling: “In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD ; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. **4** Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. **5** And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”
Isaiah 40:1-5

1st December

We open our collection of meditations for Advent with an introduction to the season which can be found in the Church of England's book of Common Worship.

Advent is a season of expectation and preparation, as the Church prepares to celebrate the coming (adventus) of Christ in his incarnation, and also looks ahead to his final advent as judge at the end of time. The readings and liturgies in this time not only direct us towards Christ's birth, they also challenge the modern reluctance to confront the theme of divine judgement:

"Every eye shall now behold him robed in dreadful majesty."

(Charles Wesley)

The Four Last Things – Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell – have been traditional themes for Advent meditation. The characteristic note of Advent is therefore expectation, rather than penitence, although the character of the season is easily coloured by an analogy with Lent. The anticipation of Christmas under commercial pressure has also made it harder to sustain the appropriate sense of alert watchfulness, but the fundamental Advent prayer remains 'Maranatha' – 'Our Lord, come' (1 Corinthians 16.22).

In the northern hemisphere, the Advent season falls at the darkest time of the year, and the natural symbols of darkness and light are powerfully at work throughout Advent and Christmas.

In joyful expectation of his coming to our aid we pray to Jesus. Come to your Church as Lord and judge. Help us to live in the light of your coming and give us a longing for your kingdom.

Maranatha: Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

2nd December

Mother Katie, Vicar of St James, writes for us:

I remember it well. Christmas morning and full stockings were waiting. My five year old, hands on hips, pointed at the presents and said, "See! I told you I was good!"

We both knew that Advent had seen her worst behaviour in a very long time. Santa was clearly either very merciful and full of grace or he made pretty empty threats about the naughty and nice list.

But I smiled – recognising myself - we all like to think we are good and that judgment has few consequences for us. So the themes of Advent can be a little disturbing.

The consequences of sin are eternal it says: the book of Jude poetically says, that those who "pervert the grace of God" will end up "wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the deepest darkness has been reserved forever."

Like my 5 year faith can save us if we will believe. *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" Ephesians 2:8*

Comfort indeed, joy undeserved, like a 5 year old astounded at her overflowing stocking! The following year she behaved so much better – because lived what she believed – she was good.

**God our Saviour and Judge,
Keep us as the apple of your eye,
Hide us in the shadow of your wings.
For only in your presence is there is fullness of joy;
and we have no good apart from you. Amen.**

3rd December

Father Clive, PTO Priest, writes for us.



The picture reminds me of this year in many ways and was taken in Sussex. In our nation there are many different trees and their colour, size and leaf falling vary and some who do not shed their coating at all. At one stage they are beautiful in full bloom and at another stripped of their beauty and yet even here they show a great beauty in the countryside against the skyline.

This reminds me of the state of our nation this year as we go in and out of lockdowns and many are becoming depressed and isolated. The tragedy is apparent for so many who have lost loved ones and friends but like the plants and trees that is life and we have to cope with it.

How I hear you ask?

Well Advent is a time of preparation where our minds are being pulled towards the event that changed the world with the birth of Jesus. It is a time of hope for the future, a time that something will happen to reawaken us and this is what will happen in the coming months. We shall look back and see the vast majority who despite all showed how people can grow and bloom by caring and helping others. When the vaccine comes it will be the end of the Covid advent and the arrival of the deliverance that so many seek.

Whatever happens at Christmas does not mean that in our own hearts and minds we cannot celebrate the arrival of God's son for there will be a rebirth and like the trees in the picture beauty and life will return to normal.

All we need is faith- a faith that has been shared through Advents and Christmases for the last 2000 plus years.

Part of the Prayer of Saint Francis says.....'where there is doubt, faith and where there is despair, hope' Let us all take these words to heart.

I offer these words to meditate and pray from Every Happiness by Pam Brown

'I wish I could save you from every sorrow, every disaster, every failure. But then you would be cut off from all other creatures on the planet. It is our heartache as much as our happiness that makes a family, or a marriage or a friendship'

.....that makes us the fellowship of Saint James

4th December

Emma Green (Brown Owl) and Mike Green (Safeguarding Officer) write for us:

2020 has been a very strange year living through a pandemic. What it has made us realise though is that fundamentally we all care about one another. We've been clapping for carers, making sure our neighbours, family and friends are all safe and well.



Health carers have risked their lives during this challenging year to care for us, and to be there for our loved ones when we can't.

Some people have even changed their businesses to ensure that people who are facing hardships having lost their jobs or just not being able to cope financially are fed.

Teachers went back into schools to ensure that all children have an opportunity to learn. Delivering laptops and essential food to families to enable them to learn.

There is so much love in the world, providing comfort and joy.

Dear Lord

**As we prepare for your birth with joy and hope
for the year ahead.**

**We know you will provide us with comfort
and guide us safely through the daily challenges of 2021.**

Amen"

5th December

Rev Sally Leeson, part of our preaching team, writes for us:

Toddlers are often possessors of comfort objects. My younger sister used to have a 'shawlie' and woe betide anyone who'd try to take it from her!

We grow up, but our need for comfort doesn't completely leave us, although we may misjudge the why and the what of it from time to time.

The biblical idea tends towards the sense of encouragement. Comfort, O comfort my people says your God. (Isaiah 40.1) The person who taught us some Hebrew when I was at theological college said that the word comfort here could describe words to a frightened or reluctant horse, 'there, steady, come on old girl!' So comfort is less the duvet and bubble bath, and more of a strong whisper in the ear to help us back into life in all its pain and potential.



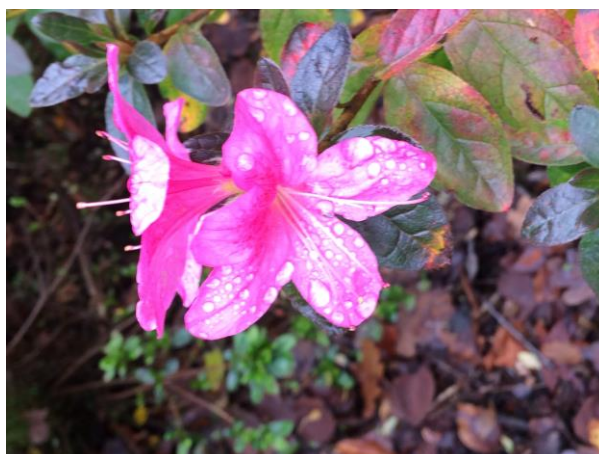
As for joy, we don't have 'joy blankets' to cling to because, as the poet William Blake so wisely says, such possessiveness would kill. "He who binds to himself a joy/Does the winged life destroy;/ But he who kisses the joy as it flies/ Lives in Eternity's sun rise."

And children, although they may still need their comfort objects, are often the ones to remind us adults what it is to live in the joy of the present.

So, the tidings we will sing about at Christmas and what we are preparing for in Advent, are not an escapism which shuts out the world, but news of the birth of a Saviour who encourages us to live with an openness like a lily of the field, trusting in God. And the face of a man, woman or child who lives like this –if only perhaps for a moment-is both comfort and joy in itself.

**Holy God, breath into our ears
words of comfort and encouragement;
so that having faith you are with us
we may we kiss those joys which help us
love that life you came to share with us. Amen**

(Image supplied by Mike and Emma Green)



6th December

Serena Joselyn, our Reader, writes for us:

These weeks of Advent are a time of spiritual awakening as we prepare for the celebration of Christ's birth. We spend this time in prayer and reflection with a renewal of hope and love.

Let us all remember that this is the celebration of the first coming of our saviour, Jesus Christ. At this time in particular, we anticipate his promised second coming.

As Christmas approaches, we all think in particular about the children. The joy that children find at this time of year shows them, by example, the way that love can brighten the lives of others.

For many children, it provides an active introduction to the story of Christ's birth. In most years, some will become involved in Nativity plays at their local churches. Sadly, although some churches have made attempts to continue this tradition, for many, these performances will become more limited this year.

Whatever activities are able to proceed, we must not let the commercial problems of these months obscure or spoil the holiness of the Advent season. This year has been a great challenge, with the pandemic, but it is certainly not the first problem of this type to have affected the population of the whole world. With God's support, thousands of people are working towards a solution. There are many different possibilities, we have already seen how many ordinary people have helped in less direct, but equally important ways, some raising additional finance, others giving their time in practical acts, in the support of those in need.

Let us pray for God's help to all those who are giving their own form of support at this difficult time:

Bring into our homes the joy of those who trust in your love and share that love with one another.

May the tender protection of Joseph and the gentleness of Mary be with them and support them in all that they do.

Now let us pray as we prepare for the coming of the Lord:

May the Church be faithful and vigilant, ever on guard against evil and as a good servant, ready for the Master's call.

At this Advent time, grant to her ministers and all her people the grace to prepare in prayer for the coming Nativity.

Through the faith shared by all Christian people, bring the whole church into unity.

Give peace among all nations, between races and each human heart.

May this prayer be acceptable through Christ the Lord, who has come, is present here, and will come again. Amen.



(photograph by Mthr Katie)

7th December

Mother Katie, Vicar of St James, writes for us:



Light and dark have always fascinated me – I took this photograph deep in some Cornish caves. The small flames of light were the only thing holding back the darkness, but as small as they were they were also brilliant; allowing us to find our way out.

For me faith is like those lights – it doesn't have to be big in order to be a powerful and sure guide for our paths. Faith can start small or have periods of time when the flame dims for a while as what really makes a difference is not the single flame but the many lights working together.

Jesus said "I have come into the world as light so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness." John 12:26

How can we help bring light to someone else's darkness today?
How might we share our faith with someone who is lost?

Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord; and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of thy only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.

8th December

Wendy Morris, Parish Safeguarding Officer, writes for us:



It seems to me that these days we aren't very good at waiting.

We live in a world where it's possible to fulfill most online desires by the next day. Gone is the idea that you save up for something – looking forward and enjoying it all the more for the wait. No point when you can click now and pay later. Vanished is the notion that you might savour the next part of your favourite TV series – pondering carefully in the interim what might happen. It's just too tempting when all episodes are streaming now.

But Advent is a time of waiting. And we've all done a lot of waiting already this year. Waiting to hear news of the health of family and friends, waiting for test results, for technology to work, for government rulings, for the phone to ring, for the

next piece of cake, for singing together in Church. So we should be pretty used to it by now.

And possibly what we need to realise is that there is great comfort in waiting and patiently looking ahead to a joy that we know will eventually come - because some things really are worth waiting for. A shared meal with friends. A hug after months in lockdown. A family Christmas gathering. Church choir and organ in full voice.

Advent tells us there is comfort in waiting – and joy in knowing the good things that will come to us at last. Perhaps not as soon as we would like, but all the more precious for the long looking forward.

Dear Lord

Help us to enjoy the waiting we face this Advent.

Guide us to be patient

and to hold onto a bright hope for tomorrow.

Use each one of us in these dark times

to shine a light to all in the house –

this Christmas and always.

Amen



9th December

Christine Menhenett leads our skilled gardening team and for our Advent booklet she offers us a poem which is normally always said at the Mothers Union Christmas Carol Service.

Christmas by John Betjeman

The bells of waiting Advent ring,
The Tortoise stove is lit again
And lamp-oil light across the night
Has caught the streaks of winter rain
In many a stained-glass window sheen
From Crimson Lake to Hookers Green.

The holly in the windy hedge
And round the Manor House the yew
Will soon be stripped to deck the ledge,
The altar, font and arch and pew,
So that the villagers can say
'The church looks nice' on Christmas Day.

Provincial Public Houses blaze,
Corporation tramcars clang,
On lighted tenements I gaze,
Where paper decorations hang,
And bunting in the red Town Hall
Says 'Merry Christmas to you all'.

And London shops on Christmas Eve
Are strung with silver bells and flowers
As hurrying clerks the City leave
To pigeon-haunted classic towers,
And marbled clouds go scudding by
The many-steepled London sky.

And girls in slacks remember Dad,
And oafish louts remember Mum,
And sleepless children's hearts are glad.
And Christmas-morning bells say 'Come!'
Even to shining ones who dwell
Safe in the Dorchester Hotel.

And is it true,
This most tremendous tale of all,
Seen in a stained-glass window's hue,
A Baby in an ox's stall ?
The Maker of the stars and sea
Become a Child on earth for me ?

And is it true? For if it is,
No loving fingers tying strings
Around those tissue'd fripperies,
The sweet and silly Christmas things,
Bath salts and inexpensive scent
And hideous tie so kindly meant,

No love that in a family dwells,
No carolling in frosty air,
Nor all the steeple-shaking bells
Can with this single Truth compare -
That God was man in Palestine
And lives today in Bread and Wine.

In your prayers today we ask you to remember the St James ministries which Christine is involved with: Gardening Group; Mothers Union; the Altar Servers and the Intercessors – we give thanks for them all.

10th December

At St James we support Christian Aid – a charity which brings comfort and joy to people around the world living in poverty. Clem Norman is our Co-Ordinator and he writes for us:

For many years we, at St. James, have been involved in collecting for Christian Aid.

It started with street collections around the Parish and throughout New Malden which were co-ordinated with other churches.

This evolved into church fundraising and we now try to raise the equivalent of our street collecting as a single church - which comes to about £2000 a year.

This year has been challenging as we have not been able to do our usual collections in church during Christian Aid Week.

We have done pretty well to keep enthusiasm alive joining in the Christian Aid week this year with the theme of 'Love Thy Neighbour' and sending eEnvelopes for our donations. And whilst we can't be sure exactly how much St James contributed we do know we were part of a national effort where 12 thousand churches took part. 57 thousand volunteers gave their time and talents, £8million was raised and 1.7million people were reached by programmes. Not bad considering the difficulties!

At Harvest this year we were back in church and although with a reduced congregation we were able to raise enough to plant 500 trees.

Christian Aid exists:- 'To create a world where everyone

can live a full life free from poverty' and a special Advent carol has been written. Here are the words from one of the verses.

When out of poverty is born
a dream that will not die
and landless, weary folk find strength
to stand with heads held high,
it's then we learn from those who wait
to greet the promised day,
The Lord is coming; don't lose heart.
Be blest prepare the way!

And this prayer is from Christian Aid liturgy for Advent and Christmas.

**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.**

Christian  Aid
We believe in life before death

11th December

Fr Donald, retired priest, writes for us:

What a wonderful book is the Prophecy of Isaiah, how often we read from it in our worship and of course Jesus took his mission statement from it.

However the main thrust of the story it contains is how the people of Israel fell from being a nation state to being defeated, their Temple destroyed and the best of the people being taken into exile. This, says the prophet is the result of apostasy the people deserting their God who had brought them from slavery in Egypt and led them to the Promised Land. Now, in the first 39 chapters we see how the prophet tells of God's punishment, yet how He also yearns that once again they will return to Him.

How the mood changes at the beginning of chapter 40.

'Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for.' There has been a radical change, the exiles are returning home, the Temple being restored. Israel is becoming a nation under God once again. There will be no king now, Israel is a theocracy.

The word 'comfort' here is not just telling the people that all is now well, patting them on the back as it were, it is in fact an imperative, it is about being strong in facing the new situation, the renewed nation. We are reminded of the word comfort as referring to the Holy Spirit which Jesus promised his disciples; one called alongside to help.

Over the past months we have experienced lockdown, exiled to our homes, we have not had the freedom that we normally enjoy. It has been like being exiled. Many people have suffered pain, heartache, and death has taken its toll. There have been

many instances of the kindness of strangers, people have worked together as never before. There has been much love and concern for others.

It now seems that there will be an end as the vaccine is spread. So perhaps the words of Isaiah will help us, 'Comfort, comfort my people'. We must not forget the pain and suffering, but we have to see that in returning, it is to a 'new normal'. A time when society will be built on love and concern. It is also up to us as Christians to tell of that greater love, of God which could bring a greater transformation to our world.



Comfort my people and quiet her fear;
tell her the time of salvation draws near.
Tell her I come to remove all her shame;
"She that is pitied" shall be her new name.

Say to the cities of Judah: "Behold!
Gentle, yet mighty, the arm of the Lord
rescues the captives of darkness and sin,
bringing them justice and joy without end."

Mountains and hills shall become like a plain.
Vanished are mourning and hunger and pain;
never again shall these war against you;
"See, he comes quickly to make all things new."
Amen.

(Text based on Isaiah 40 – source unknown)

12th December

Peter Morris is our St James Website Manager and the local Scout Leader – today he writes for us:

Advent, the period covering the 4 Sundays before Christmas. Usually crammed with carol concerts, social gatherings and a total surfeit of mince pies!

Like others, our family has lots of Christmas traditions: don't put up decorations before the first Sunday in Advent; make sure you take them down again before twelfth night in case the bad fairies come.

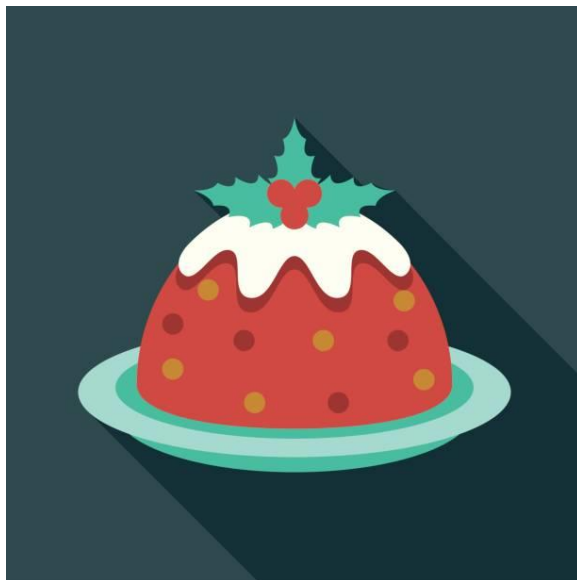
An early fixture in the season occurs each year on the Sunday before Advent, variously known as "the feast of Christ the King" or less formally as "Stir-up Sunday". It gets its name from the beginning of the collect for the day in the Book of Common Prayer, which begins with the words, Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people;. Tradition in many households (as well as on the Archers) is that this is also the day when you should make your Christmas Pudding (to give it time to mature before Christmas).

For me, Stir-up Sunday; always reminds me of my dear old Nanna Nellie, my maternal grandmother. She lived a long and eventful life which included a period in service in a kitchen in a house in Eaton Square before the first World War. She was in consequence an excellent cook, a stickler for tradition and knew a thing or two about Christmas pudding! I can see her now in her late 80's, sitting in her wing backed arm-chair in my parents living room in front of a warm fire, laying out instructions on the making of the pudding mixture. We would all have to help stir the mix and recite the following rhyme:

“As I stir the Christmas Pud,
make a wish and make it good,
make it loud and make it clear,
and it’ll come true before next year!
I wish for.... &.....(your wish here)”

My wish, or prayer, this year is that God grants us all a fruitful
Advent, a joyous Christmas, and a happy and healthy New Year.

What is yours?



13th December

Val Gibbons, the PCC Secretary, writes for us:

As we move in to the Advent season we look forward to the birth of our Lord. There is so much to anticipate in a normal year; Advent carols, Nine lessons and Carols, Christingle, the familiarity of much loved scripture readings and the joy of seasonal music.

In the secular world we would be looking forward to spending time with family and friends, the anxieties caused by the pre-festive arrangements forgotten in good company once the day arrives. The year ahead unknown and the past called to mind.

My mind goes back forty years to the last Christmas I was able to share with my much loved father. My parents that year were staying with me although my father was not too well. A few weeks earlier the doctor had diagnosed gout. It was, for us, a traditional Christmas.

On Christmas Eve we visited friends before attending midnight mass.

On Christmas day, we would leave the house around 10.00am and spend the next eight hours visiting six or seven friends and relatives around London, enjoying their company and catching up on what might be the year's news. We would eat on return before popping next door to complete a very social Christmas.

My father died two months later from undiagnosed Hodgkins Lymphoma – it being diagnosed in my brother six months later but, thankfully, it was caught early and the kid is still alive. Out of sadness came the joy of women eventually being able to serve at the altar.

I had the privilege of serving for the first time at midnight mass.

The year past has not been normal due to the pandemic and we pray that the coming year will see us being able to spend time with our loved ones and hug each other. Let us also pray that we continue the reconnection with our neighbours and the wider community, so prominent in the past year.

14th December

John Taylor is our Treasurer and a star in the The St James Players – he has written a poem for us:

An Ugly New Virus

As we head towards Christmas
What a strange year it's been
There's an ugly new virus
Called Covid-19

It's caused national lockdown
Anxiety and fear
We can't see our loved ones
Or go out for a beer

The High Street is quiet
Many jobs are on hold
This ugly new virus
Is far worse than a cold

It strikes without warning
Can affect mental health
And doesn't discriminate
If you've power or wealth

But it's not all about darkness
There's a glimmer of light
We await a new vaccine
But we must still do things right

Just follow the rules
And allay all your fears
If you don't social distance

It will all end in tiers

Soon will come Christmas
And Lord Jesus you'll find
Will bring comfort and joy
To all of mankind

John Taylor

Please pray today for all those who currently have COVID, are recovering from COVID or have died from COVID. And all those who care for them.

15th December

Rev Iain McKillop, PTO Priest, writes for us today:

I spent November writing a series of 40 daily meditations on Advent, Christmas and Epiphany for church and Christian friends who are isolating. So I feel slightly Advented-out already but drawing those thoughts together, it was so stimulating to be immersed in the Christmas Story for over a month. I re-read and questioned again many elements of the narrative in the Gospels.

Critics often treat Christmas as a fairy story, or wishful thinking, like Santa (who, thankfully, still comes to me!) But at the heart of the writings about the Annunciation, the journey to Bethlehem, angels, shepherds, magi, Jesus' presentation in the Temple and flight into Egypt, I explored so many truths about what Jesus has brought to the world, to my life and to us all. Christmas isn't just an historic story, its message applies to each of us. "God so loved the world (US!) that he gave his only Son, so that all who believe in him should not perish but

have everlasting life!" [John.3:16].

That is the promise of the Nativity in the stable and all that is said or sung about Jesus in the first two chapters of Luke and Matthew.

Some popular non-biblical bits in Christmas stories – the ox and ass,, innkeepers and midwives, the magi being ‘kings’, and miracles at the crib, come from C2 nd to C6 th, , legends, about which I’ve written. Such fictional supplements to the Gospels were often invented for sincere devotional reasons. But when you reach into the kernel of the Nativity, you don’t need those fantasies.

It is wonderful enough that God chose to self-reveal through a human life. I’ve sieved through Christmas stories and found nuggets of gold that make me believe even more in the relevance and truth of Christ. If you’d like to read the meditations they can be found on my website at:
<https://mckillop.weebly.com/advent-meditations-2020.html>

Creator Lord, who chose to reveal yourself through the vulnerable human life of Jesus:

May I carry your truth to the world as Mary carried and revealed Christ;

May I protect your people as Joseph protected his family;

May I nurture others in truth as Christ grew to teach and nurture faith;

May I feed others as Christ fed his followers, and as you feed me.

Redeemer, Christ, “Eternity contracted to a span...

Heaven in earth, and God in man...

Great little one, whose all-embracing birth

Lifts earth to heaven, stoops heaven to earth,

**expand our minds to recognise the wonders that your life fulfilled.
AMEN**

[Words in italics are from Richard Crashaw's poem 'On the Holy Nativity of Our Lord']

16 December

Anne Norman, with her husband Clem, faithfully delivers our Food Bank donations each week. She writes for us:



It's hard to celebrate the good news of Christmas with an empty larder and hungry kids, or on your own and worrying about the future.

This last year has been hard for many people: jobs have been lost; incomes may be precarious and building up reserves of cash has often been impossible. Sometimes life can unravel frighteningly fast.

At St. James we try to fill gaps in the food supply by supporting the Food Bank all year round but this service is more necessary than ever now as the weather gets colder and life becomes more difficult.

Hard working people use the service. Many simply do not earn enough to be able to provide for themselves properly. These form the majority of those using the Food Bank. No-one is accepted without a recommendation, possibly from a doctor or social services.

If that happens food vouchers are given which may be exchanged for food. This will provide them with emergency food for three days: a rescue package to provide a respite.

There is also help from non-judgmental volunteers who listen and advise. Sometimes it saves lives. One person said 'Without the Food Bank I don't think I would be here today'. Another describes how he 'was starving for about a week' before he could pluck up courage to ask for help.

Please give all kinds of tins and packets e.g. pasta sauce, tinned meat, puddings (there's a longer list in the church) and perhaps some Christmas food or treats. Drop your contributions at St. James between 10 and 12 on Wednesday mornings, on Sunday mornings from the 2nd December or at the Vicarage anytime.

**Lord, if we have an abundance let us give from it.
If we do not have enough, may our needs be met,
Let us remember we are all members of one another.**

Amen



17th December

Alison Brennan, member of our PCC writes for us:

“Mince pies!”-said a friend.

“Waitrose curry!” said my husband.

For me comfort and joy mean: A hug from those I love (More joy than comfort!) The view from a hilltop in the Lake District, more and more valleys coming into sight the higher I walked. Meals in a garden this summer with friends and family. The day of my Confirmation in 2002, feeling the love and friendship of the St James congregation supporting me and the other candidates. Midnight Mass, walking home and wishing each other Happy Christmas!

As a child: My grandmother’s smile. The squishy feel of the stocking at the end of my bed Christmas morning. Sitting round the warm fireside at twilight, with my family, us children reading our Christmas books and playing with our Christmas toys, wondering if my mother would notice if I ate some more of the chocolate money on the tree.

What brings you comfort and joy?



Thank you, Lord Jesus, for coming into the world, for putting the weak and unimportant before the

powerful and by your compassion and healing deeds showing us the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

Thank you for enduring the cruellest of deaths to secure those who repent and follow you eternal life.

As we await your birthday celebrations, lighten our shadows and darkness in this uncertain time.

Help us to be disciplined in preparing for your arrival, ready and waiting to serve you when you come. Help us to share your light and joy with all.

Amen

18th December

Nicola Ash, St James Altar Server writes for us:

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light'

Advent, to me, is a journey, travelling from darkness to light. There is comfort and joy to be found on this Advent journey, which is as spiritually important as the destination; Christmas Day.

Light has many qualities; Light brings comfort and love - like a night-light. Light is a celebration - like birthday candles or fireworks. Light is a beacon in the darkness, to protect and to guide - like a lighthouse. Light is in the dawning of a new day; the absence of darkness.

In Advent, we prepare ourselves to receive God's son, the Light of the World and perfect gift of love, to comfort and guide us,

to banish the darkness, to give us joy and hope of new beginnings.

Over the past 20 years it has been a most wonderful privilege to be an altar server at Saint James. My first service was Midnight Mass when I was asked to step in minutes before the service began. I was given the instruction to carry the Cross and 'follow the lights'! (Great advice in any situation!) I particularly love the services that start in near darkness, with the light from a single flame gradually building through the church, from clergy and servers, to choir and congregation, as each person's candle is lit.



There is a stillness in Advent that grows inwardly and outwardly before bursting in wonder and delight on Christmas Day. The Advent candles on our wreath count down the weeks. We hear again the familiar and comforting Bible readings with the Advent messengers pointing the way to Christ. We delight at the children's Nativity play, circle the church with light at Christingle, attend the joyous Nine Lessons and Carols, until Advent ends....and Christmas comes once more.

Throughout all our many services the ever present Pascal Candle at the font, bears testimony to the final chapter of this wondrous story, one that has been a 'best-seller' for over two millennia!

This year as we each step onto our own Advent journeys, and, though recently our dreams may have been tossed and blown, may we joyously walk with the Everlasting Light and be comforted by His never changing presence in our troubled world.

Loving Jesus

Stretch forth your hand, our health restore, and make us rise to fall no more.

O let your face upon us shine and fill the world with love divine.

Amen

19th December

Roger Kelly, member of our PCC writes for us.

People have all sorts of views about Advent. Some think it's the best of Christian seasons, but I never have.

For me, it's usually a time of impatience, waiting for the Great Festival to arrive, waiting for the outpouring of love at Christmas and the chance to blast out 'Hark The Herald Angels' a few times.

With a far-flung family that has spent almost ten years trekking like nomads, pitching their tents in Indonesia, Abu Dhabi and now Singapore, I have to confess that recently Advent has often been more about their coming rather than the Christ child. Appalling I know.

Equally appalling, too often Heathrow Terminal 3 has replaced the stable at the inn in Bethlehem. A few days before Christmas, I'm not absolutely sure which offers the better facilities!



Now we are at the end of *'The Year To Forget'*. The year that tested our society, our love for each other and our stickability as individuals and families. .

Where am I going with this? Well, bizarrely, 2020 has changed everything for me. My wife and I haven't seen our Singapore nomads - my daughter, son-in-law and two lovely grand-daughters – since January. We have no idea when we will see them again. Certainly not Christmas.

Yet suddenly I have realised what Advent is all about. It's all about waiting for something SO incredibly special. This year it

won't be my family, but it will be for the arrival of Jesus Christ on Christmas morning.

In a way I'm embarrassed that my personal, family feelings have been the driving force here, but I hope The Lord will agree that enlightenment is fine, wherever it comes from, however long it takes.

A Happy Advent to everyone and a Happy Christmas. Especially to those arriving at Heathrow Terminal 3.

20th December

Sally Leeson, a member of our preaching team, writes for us:

I've heard more than one retired person say to another, who is longing to retire, 'Be careful what you wish for.' The end of work can seem like heaven, but you may end up finding you miss the structure, colleagues and perspectives a job can bring.

T.S. Eliot wrote in his poem East Coker about waiting without hope or love because they could be hope in or love of 'the wrong thing'. What we project into the future and often fantasise about may not bring us what we want or need.

Shepherds on the hillside were not expecting the message of the angels. In Eliot's poem, The Journey of the Magi, the wise men confronted a birth 'which was hard and bitter agony for us.' Fear, wonder, reverence, spontaneity but also a sense of a painful beginning can be discerned in the birth narratives, a birth which on the surface is commonplace, in a place which is, in Eliot's poem, just 'satisfactory'. That's all.

Advent is a time of preparation on all sorts of levels. Some may have their pit falls -lists, scenarios and arrangements- which may contribute to our sense of safety and the familiar but

block out other possibilities. How do we 'prepare' to respond when the channels of comfort, and the moments of joy, come to us from unexpected quarters? An unprepared response might be understandably apprehensive, evasive, even fearful. But preparing ourselves to remain attentive and open, we may find on the other hand such tidings are good, a feast for our souls and for others. We may even find we can become those channels of comfort and joy ourselves.

Lord God, calm our impatient and anxious souls.

Help us to wait with openness

so that the channels of your comforting love

and possibilities of radiant joy

may find a place in our hearts this Advent

and at the coming of your Son at Christmastide.

21st December

Sue Betts organises much of the work and fellowship of the Mothers Union at St James.

The Mothers Union is a fellowship group and a network but it is much more than that – the MU in the UK helped over 1.1 million people in the past year. They sent 2,490 families suffering stress on holiday. They taught 77,988 people to read and write in Burundi. They provided hundreds of scrub bags and face masks to frontline workers in lockdown.

These prayers for your personal devotion are taken from MU resources.

God our Saviour and redeemer, whose coming birth still shakes the foundations of our world, may your coming fill us with such excitement and hope that we embrace without fear the labour pangs of a new time, and a new earth, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

May God's promise of a hope- filled future comfort and bless you and those you will miss this Christmas. May the guiding light of God rekindle your confidence to journey forward with others and serve his world. Amen.

22nd December

Jason Edge, our Director of Music, writes for us:



Advent is by far my favourite of all the wonderfully different times and seasons of our church year. Its message contains a microcosm of everything else related to life and so it maps out the vision of a journey ahead. That journey will be one of highs and lows (there cannot be one without the other) – there's the joy of creation and new life at Christmas, followed by Epiphany and the realisation that we are growing and maturing as part of a universal plan, leading into the rollercoaster ride of Lent, Holy Week and Easter when the path is shown to extend beyond death to a new and triumphant life beyond.

Advent looks forward to and embraces all of this potential. In compiling their book of music for the season called 'Advent for Choirs' (OUP), Malcolm Archer and Stephen Cleobury highlighted seven major themes for the season, some of which overlap. I offer them here as possible loci for reflection and meditation:

- The Witness of the Prophets
- John the Baptist
- Mary
- The Coming of the King and the Kingdom
- The Sin of Adam Reversed in the Birth of Christ
- Preparing for Christmas: Waiting and Expecting
- The Four Last Things (death, judgement, hell, and heaven)

You might like to pause and consider what each of these themes means, how they might be represented in the liturgy and music of Advent, how they weave through the other church seasons, and perhaps most importantly, what they offer to teach us about ourselves – our own lives, our relationships with others, our spiritual essence, our destiny?

In these uncertain and unsettling times, my wish is that everyone is able to find something of the comfort and joy that is the message of the weeks ahead. My prayer is short, and comes in the form of Vesper Responsory for Advent Sunday:

**Judah and Jerusalem,
Fear not, nor be dismayed.
Tomorrow go ye forth,
And the Lord,
He will be with you.**

23rd December

Mother Katie, Vicar of St James, writes for us:

And he will be called "Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

There is so much in those names – but I want to mention just one thing today - in the text the Hebrew El Gibbor is translated Mighty God – but it can also mean Hero. The son is literally our hero – the one who saves and rescues us – the one who fights for our freedom. And with the Son a new beginning is made possible – a way out of exile opens up – a way back home to God is prepared for us.

That son was Jesus – who is the climax of all history – the point at which the calendar stops and starts again. And in him we are given the chance to stop and start again too – because what is on offer this Christmas – is nothing less than the gift of a brand new life.

The gift of Christmas is that God so loved the world that he gave his only son – that whosoever believes in him will have eternal life.

Eternal life – which means God with us forever – and for sure, that is about life after death – but actually, it is also about life in all its fullness now. Life as God intended it. As the angels say this is good news of great joy – for it is the gift of a life with the deepest joy – joy not dependent on circumstances or how good we are or what we have – but joy because of who is with us. And that will make all the difference.

Mary and Joseph discovered the truth of this on their own journey to Bethlehem. .

On the night Mary gives birth – she finds herself isolated and shut out from the main house and left to birth her son in a stable – where she places him in a feeding trough. The manger is mentioned 3 times in the passage – and we are meant to notice it.



This made me smile, but actually the manger is a shocking image.

We've made manger scenes as cute Santa's grotto in today's world - but the truth is it would have been brutal, and cold – frightening for a young girl. There is something disturbing about that first Christmas scene.

And yet the manger is comforting too - a sign of joy – a light in that dark night - because it tells Mary that she is not alone in that situation – that God is with her – even when it seems like he has forgotten.

Imagine Mary, a very young girl, just given birth – and there is no where to lay her newborn. She must have wondered – did I get this right? Would God, Creator of all, really allow his son to be shut out and born in a stable? Has he remembered us?

Mary needs reassurance from God – that would be the greatest gift for her this night – she needs to know the plan is going ahead as it should be – that all is OK. And reassurance arrives with the shepherds – they reveal they were told by angels to look for a baby lying in a manger. And it is just what Mary needs to hear – because only God could have told the shepherds that such a special baby would be in such an unexpected place. And I think that however uncomfortable or unusual the scene – from that moment on she knows that God is with her. The manger is a sign – as the angels said – that God is with us – in the most unexpected places and uncomfortable nights. When we fear things most, we are not alone. We, like Mary, are remembered.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

24th December

Mother Katie prays:

Holy God, as Christmas approaches,

We remember:

A star that shone so brightly, that it drew wise men from afar into its presence.

And we pray for:

All those who still seek you – and we ask you to bless their journey towards faith with joy.

We pray for the churches here in New Malden and the church world-wide – Father, anoint us to shine brightly like the star – reaching out to those in darkness with works of justice and peace as well as prayer and love - drawing people into your presence.

Lord in your mercy, Hear our Prayer.

As Christmas approaches we remember:

An unmarried mother who gave birth in a stable, and a newborn for whom there was no room and no midwife to care.

And we pray:

For all those who have no access to medical care, and for all those without homes.

We pray especially for the countries in this world suffering from conflict and poverty or famine – and those developing that are dealing with COVID without adequate resources.

Loving God, this Christmas be with everybody who feels forgotten, shut out or rejected in anyway; help those who feel worthless, or who doubt their value – know this Christmas, with conviction and faith that they are precious your sight – that you see them – weep with them – and long to bring them joy. Help us who have much to be joy sharers and joy givers this Christmas.

Lord in your mercy, Hear our prayer.

Faithful God, as Christmas approaches we remember:

Shepherds working in the fields and tending their flock...

And we pray for all those who will be working over the Christmas holiday to care for others: We pray for the emergency services; for doctors and nurses – and for the ambulance service; for firemen; the police; and the armed forces – and clergy.

And we ask you to bless and protect all those who work in our High Street and local shops – in the middle of busy days may they find your peace.

Lord in your mercy, Hear our prayer.

Finally as Christmas approaches, we remember that what you gave on that first Christmas beats all gifts ever given – a once in a lifetime gift – and so we thank you for the gift of your Son – our Saviour and friend - and we thank you that Jesus is still given today, to whoever will make room for him in their lives.

Generous God, help us grasp that gift with both hands – and realise just what peace, forgiveness, love, power, comfort and joy is ours because once you came – and have promised never to leave.

Lord in your mercy, Hear our prayer.



25th December CHRISTMAS DAY!!!

Chris Feltham, Church Warden writes for us:

A COVID Christmas

Twass the month before Christmas, when all through the nave
Not a parishioner was attending, they were all being brave;
The wreaths were being hung on the pillars with care,
And under the altar the nativity was there;

The pews were all empty, with half ribboned off,
No one allowed, in case a dry cough;
The fairy lights glistened, a sight to be seen,
Though few could enjoy them, due to COVID-19

As we came into advent, the lockdown had ended,
We're back to tier 2, though slightly amended;
We welcome you back at a safe social distance,
And please wear a mask, it's the Churchwarden's insistence;

The corona virus attacks with no discrimination,
So a requirement of church entry, is hand sanitisation;
Christmas services at St James can now go ahead,
With the choir singing beautifully, though the liturgy just read;

The choir might be singing, but no shaking hands is allowed,
We will still have a great Christmas, but not as a crowd;
A new year is beckoning, and a vaccine in sight,
"Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good night!"



***A very happy Christmas from all of us
at St James and prayers that 2021
brings comfort and joy...***