

Wednesday 22 December 2021

Dear Friends,

Advent is coming to an end and the season of Christmas is almost upon us. In our three churches carol services have been sung and trees have appeared. One of the transformations in the past weeks has seen the arrival of the Christmas cribs – each church having its own unique set. I love those nativity sets, especially when I see young children interact with them. I'm sure you know the origin of the scene.

We can blame St. Francis of Assisi, who is credited with staging the first nativity scene in 1223. The only historical account we have of Francis' nativity scene comes from 'The Life of St. Francis of Assisi' by St. Bonaventure, a Franciscan monk who was born five years before Francis' death. According to Bonaventure's biography, St. Francis got permission from Pope Honourius III to set up a manger with hay and two live animals—an ox and an ass—in a cave in the Italian village of Greccio. He then invited the villagers to come gaze upon the scene while he preached about "the babe of Bethlehem". (Francis was supposedly so overcome by emotion that he couldn't say "Jesus".) Bonaventure also claims that the hay used by Francis miraculously acquired the power to cure local cattle diseases.

I'm not sure our nativity scenes in church will be good for local wildlife, but they may be good for us. Taking time to look closely, to sit with all the characters, to reflect on the miracle of Christmas, may be what we need in this challenging and difficult time. Although for us it is a silent scene without live animals, we can imagine the noises, the smells of the stable, the sound of the crying babe in the manger (I'm sure he did cry at times, being a child just like us).

Christ was born in a real world, as messy and challenging as ours. His parents, like you and I, faced insecurities, were anxious about safety and the future. Yet, they knew that their son was different, that he was God's son. So they protected, cared, loved him. And people around Mary and Joseph witnessed that and responded in turn.

Wouldn't it have been wonderful if that night, that holy night in Bethlehem, had made all well again? If that night had brought justice, freedom, health, peace immediately? Yet, although that night was holy and special, they needed to wait longer, but this time knowing that God had come, Emmanuel was with them.

Our challenge, as was that of Mary and Joseph, is to keep faith and to keep hope; that God does keep the promises made to our forebears and to us. As Mary sang:

*For his mercy is on them that fear him : throughout all generations.
He hath shewed strength with his arm :
he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He hath put down the mighty from their seat :
and hath exalted the humble and meek.
He hath filled the hungry with good things :
and the rich he hath sent empty away.*

My prayer for all of us is that this Christmas, whether we are at home alone, in church, in hospital or elsewhere, we may experience the hope which Mary sung about, which Joseph kept, which the angels proclaimed, which the shepherds witnessed. For the Christ child brings hope to you and to me, even in our complex world, whatever the future holds.

With our prayers and Christmas blessings,

Anne, Charlie, Neil, and Wilma

This week the letter has been written by Revd Canon Wilma Roest

Please pray for:

...**Fr. Jamil Khadir and the Anglican congregations in Nablus** in the West Bank and the Anglican Church in Beirut; also for the peace of Jerusalem

...**Christ's School**, and for all schools in the Richmond Team

...**Glass Door staff** and for all volunteers, especially those who are working to provide hot soup and sandwiches

...**the sick and those in need** – Hermione Lockyer, Ron Bond, Madge Thorns, Joy Clarke, Pat Mygind, Veronica Huci, Penny and Michael Carleton-Smith, Megan Vaughan-Jones, Claire and Peter Day, Charles Stiller, Keith Hogan, Suzie and Mark Cox, Margaret Myatt, Fiona Bartlett

...**the departed, may they rest in peace** – Revd Robin Ferguson

Church Services:

The government has announced that, from Friday 10 December, **masks should be worn in places of worship**. We continue to be careful and look after each other, as is our Christian duty.

St John the Divine's Sunday service at 11.00am is both in-person and live-streamed via their [Facebook page](#).

St John's midweek service takes place on Tuesday evenings with a half an hour of silent contemplation at 6.30pm, followed by the Said Eucharist at 7.00pm.

St Mary Magdalene is holding in-person Sunday services at 8.00am, 9.30am, 11.30am (third Sunday only) and 6.30pm. The 9.30am service will also be live-streamed via their [Facebook page](#). During the week St Mary Magdalene is holding an in-person service at 10.00am on Wednesdays.

St Matthias' 9.30am Sunday service is both in-person and online via Zoom (please [contact Revd Anne Crawford](#) for log-in details). There will be no midweek Eucharist at St Matthias on Thursday 23 December.

Orders of service and readings can be found here <https://www.richmondteamministry.org/orders-of-service-readings>

Private Prayer:

St Mary Magdalene will be open for private prayer on Saturdays between 10.00am and 12.00noon (not Saturday 1 January) when you will be able to light a candle, and reflect or meditate. The church is also open Monday – Friday, from 8.00am till lunchtime (not Monday 27 or Tuesday 28 December or Monday 3 January).

St John the Divine is normally open on Tuesdays between 9.30am and 12.30pm (not Tuesday 28 December), Saturday mornings between 10.00am-12.00noon (not Saturday 1 January), and at various other times when Fr Neil is working in the office.

Morning Prayer, Monday – Fridays, at 8.30am:

Morning Prayer is now taking place in church and via Zoom. We will meet at St Mary Magdalene on Mondays, on Tuesdays we will be at St John the Divine, Wednesdays and Thursdays are at St Mary Magdalene and Fridays at St Matthias.

Please note there will be no Morning Prayer from Friday 24 December to Tuesday 28 December inclusive, nor on Monday 3 January 2022.

On Zoom, Monday - Thursday:

Join Zoom meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86999464069?pwd=QkFpVDBSZIN3ck5MSTIxR0FkSIQzZz09>

Meeting ID: 869 9946 4069

Passcode: RTMPrayer

And on Fridays:

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81983343470?pwd=ejVpVnB4d3VGdkFtWjl2c2tTOC9XUT09>

Meeting ID: 819 8334 3470

Passcode: FriPrayer

Evening Prayer, in person, takes place in St John's on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at 4.30pm. All welcome. **Please note there will be no Evening Prayer from Friday 24 December to Monday 3 January 2022 inclusive.**

Advent course 'The Family of Jesus'

The last session is tonight, Wednesday 22 December, 2021 7.30pm on Jesus' mother, Mary

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86913030418?pwd=aWlYK3NpOTFRQWJpQl9wbzh3T09NQT09>

Meeting ID: 869 1303 0418

Passcode: RTMAdvent

All our **Christmas Services** are now listed on our website – **you will need to book for some of them**. Please go to our website, click on the service you'd like to attend, and the text will tell you if you need to book and give you a link to Eventbrite to reserve ticket/s if necessary (if there's no text then you don't need to book for that service). **Please do not book more tickets than you need** because that will stop others attending (please send me an email if you've accidentally booked for the wrong service / church and I'll cancel your booking).

Children's Services at St Mary Magdalene

The next Children's Service will be on Saturday 8 January 2022 at 4.00pm. All are very welcome to a celebration with some very special gifts.

After January, the children's services will be on the first Saturday of the month again.

Please note that the Parish Office is now closed until 9.00am on Tuesday 4 January 2022.

Church, Community and other news:

A letter from our Diocesan Bishop:

In the birth of a child, parents and onlookers glimpse the miracle of creation, a truth which at other times is less apparent becomes amazingly visible. In the birth of Jesus Christ, we are reminded of the fulfilment of God's loving purposes for us, for all his people, for those who do not know their need of God and those without a full experience of human love – because God is love and the archbishops this year have asked us to go to the heart of Christmas, and that is, of course, what lies at the heart of Christmas and in this Diocese, we have an opportunity to share that message of love in the way we celebrate Christmas, in the way we think about others: particularly the marginalised, particularly those who will hunger and thirst this Christmas, particularly those without a depth of experience of human love, and particularly those in particular need and those continuing to suffer from COVID and all its many ramifications. If we go to the heart of Christmas, then our message can truly be from the heart, and we will give joy and encouragement and love to others.

I wish you and those you love the peace and joy of Christmas.

Bishop Christopher

UPDATE: From Parish Rooms to RTM Centre

On **Sunday 23 January** each church will receive an update on the work that has been happening on the architect's plans. In the afternoon you are invited to visit the Parish Rooms to have a look around and to see the proposed plans in more detail. A leaflet with an update on the work the Working Group has done will also be available from that date.

Glass Door

It is with a heavy heart that Glass Door has taken the decision **not to open communal night shelters this winter**. Unfortunately, despite all their best efforts over many months to provide a COVID-safe environment, staff and trustees felt the risks are too great. The transmissibility of the new Omicron variant and the related changes to self-isolation rules were important factors in their decision.

However our local team in Richmond is offering take-away soup and sandwiches two days a week. It's not a warm place to sleep, but it is warm food and human connection. The service runs from St John the Divine Church in Richmond and takes place on Wednesdays and Thursdays from 5-6pm. If you are interested in being part of our baking and soup rota please contact Sarah Percival: sarahpercival52@gmail.com and for volunteering and donations please contact Isabelle Swann: swannisabelle@hotmail.co.uk Many thanks.

Give A Little

We are hugely grateful to so many who continue to make their weekly or monthly contribution to the finances of the Team, by standing order or direct debit. Contributions can also be made electronically in church and there will also be a plate for cash collections at the back of each church. However if anyone would like to make an additional donation to the work of our churches this can be done at <https://givealittle.co/campaigns/5260a080-4ee0-49b6-a1c3-d552ef9a0700> Whilst this is a challenging time for many, financially as well as emotionally, I hope we can continue to count on your support for the work of our 3 churches.

With best wishes,
Tina

Tina Roberts
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Richmond Team Ministry
St Mary Magdalene • St Matthias • St John the Divine
www.richmondteamministry.org

Registered Charity No 1130018

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