



The Aldershot and North Camp Anchor

Issue 35: Sunday 20th December 2020

The Fourth Sunday in Advent
and Christmas Day!



Dear Friends,

This week's edition of the Anchor contains a number of 'notices' and so, in place of the usual letter, may I simply send Christmas Greetings to you all from Joy and myself.

For all of us, this has been a deeply challenging year. Some of those challenges have been shared with others around the world, while some of those challenges have been, for some us, deeply personal.

The Good News of Christmas is that God does not stand at a distance from our difficulties and struggles but that in Jesus he has become 'Immanuel', God with us. I pray that you will know God with you as we celebrate Christmas and as we look ahead to the new year,

Yours in His service

Digital Christmas Card.

This is to remind you that you are invited to record yourself, and others in your household, saying 'Happy Christmas everyone' Send your recordings (landscape orientation and with a few seconds before and after you speak to allow for editing) to chris.blake@methodist.org.uk no later than mid-day on 19th December.



The Anchor is now taking a Christmas and New Year break. The next edition will be prepared for Sunday 10th January.



Worship Reflection

O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvellous things (Psalm 98 v 1)

Hymn (StF 165 verse 4)

Mary's gift, beyond all telling, was to give Christ room. She gave God a human dwelling in a mother's womb. Who could guess the final story? Cross and glory; empty tomb.

Prayer: Living God, teach us that the joyful message prepared at Bethlehem all those years ago is Good News for us today. Amen

Bible Readings

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.' Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her. (Luke 1 v 26-38).

Reflection

It is easy to imagine the meeting between Gabriel and Mary as a rather gentle encounter. Perhaps we have watched so many nativity plays involving softly spoken young children that we inevitably picture the scene in 'soft focus' with Mary being surrounded by a warm glow. The reality must have been very different. Gabriel says to Mary 'Do not be afraid' for the simple reason that Mary must have been absolutely terrified. She is an

ordinary girl from a backwater town and suddenly she is face to face with God's angelic messenger who speaks words which will turn her life upside down. It is therefore so wonderful that, at the end of her conversation with Gabriel, Mary responds simply but profoundly "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.'

For Mary, that was only the start of her journey. Ahead of her would be not only the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem at census time but also the arrival of the most unusual of visitors to see her young child. Ahead of her was a mysterious conversation with her growing son who, when he was only twelve years old, wanted to talk with the religious teachers in Jerusalem. Then as Jesus began his public ministry there was the deep pain of seeing her firstborn son choose the way that would lead him to death on a cross.

The message of Gabriel 'Do not be afraid' is one that Mary would have needed to hold on to many times over the journey that was ahead of her.



Through Advent we have been following that journey as we have included Mark Earey's hymn in our worship reflections. The final verse below, takes us to Christmas Day – but verse four, included at the start of this reflection, perhaps gives the sharpest insight into Mary's pain. *"She gave God a human dwelling in a mother's womb. Who could guess the final story? Cross and glory; empty tomb"*.

At that moment when she was visited by Gabriel, Mary could not have guessed the final story and yet she was prepared to trust God. None of us know what 2021 will bring for the world, or for each one of us personally, but, like Mary we are called to say, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.'

Prayers of Intercession

This week let us pray especially:

- For those who have lost loved ones over this last year and who face Christmas at a time when being with others is not easily possible.
- For cooperation between rich and poor nations to ensure that Coronavirus vaccines are available to all during 2021.

Gracious God, we ask these prayers through Jesus Christ, our risen Lord and Saviour. Amen

Hymn (StF 165 v 5)

Advent candles tell their story, On this Christmas Day. Those who waited for God's glory: They prepared the way. Christ is with us: loving, giving, in us living, here today!

Final Prayer: Lord Jesus, child in the manger, man on the cross, risen Saviour, Lord of all, be born in us today. Amen



Precious Memories

Thank you to all who have contributed to the 'Glimpses of God' series. In the new year I will be inviting you to send me contributions under the heading 'Precious Memories. Perhaps you would like to write about a family member or friend who was an example to you of what it means to follow Jesus – or perhaps you might write about a memory of a special place where you have sensed God's presence – or perhaps about someone who stood by you at a difficult time. If you can find a photograph to go with your article that would be good - but if not, articles without photographs will be accepted. So why not look out those old photograph albums and get writing!

Christmas Services



At Aldershot, we will be meeting on Dec.20th at 4.00 p.m. for our Carol Service, and on Christmas Day at 9.30 a.m.

At North Camp, we will be meeting on Dec. 20th at 6.00 p.m. for our Carol Service; on Christmas Eve at 4.00 p.m. for our Christingle Service; and on Christmas Day at 10.30 a.m. Booking is required for each of these three services. Links to the on-line booking system can be found in the latest edition of the North Camp E-News or, if you are unable to book on-line, please ring Chris Blake on 01252 548215.