

Littlehampton United Church

Mini Newsletter 19



Keeping
our church
together

As I write the introduction to Newsletter number 19, I am thinking that it would be good if I could announce when services in church will resume, but like the rest of the UK, we nervously wait to see what the government will say in the next few days. Meanwhile may I remind you that Naison is holding services by zoom on Sundays at 10.30. There will also be a prayer meeting at 7.30pm on Wednesday 1st December. Prayer meetings and Bible Studies will alternate fortnightly. The codes that you need to log-in will be emailed round. If, like me, you had difficulty logging in or using zoom to join some of the services at the start of the first lock-down, I am reliably informed that many of the difficulties have now been ironed out and it is worth trying again.

Christmas Greetings Presentation

The usual presentation of Christmas greetings is in the process of construction. Please remember to send your message to Peter Spencer in order that they may be included. If you wish to make a donation towards the Christmas meal and the continuing work at Unity School, Mombasa, you can do this in various ways: By cash or cheque sent to our Treasurer, Nigel Stapley or on-line using a debit or credit card. The church website has links to the various charities that members support. If you click on Friends of the Mombasa Children you will be taken to the Virgin Money Giving page for this charity: www.littlehamptonunitedchurch.org.uk

Plans have also been made to publish a page (or more if needed) of greetings in the Christmas edition of the newsletter, for all those who are still not able to attend church or if we are not back at church.

Meanwhile, the season that the church calls **ADVENT** is almost here. Even though we are not meeting, we will still be putting up our Christmas tree and the large crib scene in the Foyer together with Christmas posters on our notice boards. We would like, passers by to see that we still feel that the birth of The Saviour is worth celebrating.

This newsletter was written and edited by Chris Azzaro, who can be contacted on 01903 718070 or by email: christopher.azzaro@sky.com

Contributions to the newsletter are always welcome

There is also information about our church on the website: www.littlehamptonunitedchurch.org.uk

Advent

Getting ready for Christmas - Is that the point of advent?

How you answer that rather depends on your priorities. For some, it is the season of panic, Christmas is nearly here and there is everything to do; from buying and wrapping presents, sending out Christmas cards and preparing the festive food for the hordes who are about to descend –assuming that “the hordes” will be allowed to descend at all this year.

For the preacher, it is a season when the themes of the four Sundays are well defined and, generally not too difficult. An appropriate message, something that encourages spiritual preparation while contributing to the approaching excitement at the Birth of the Saviour can usually be found. Not this year, though. The four lectionary readings for the first Sunday in Advent are rather serious and really test our understanding of God. These passages, that would have been for this coming Sunday, were set long before covid-19 was ever heard of, but three of the four could have been written by those sharing our current predicament.

Isaiah 64 verses 1 - 9: The prophet is convinced that God, in anger, has turned away from His people

Psalms 60: Again God appears to be angry and is not answering the prayers offered by the psalmist.

1 Corinthians 1: verses 3 - 9: Paul addresses a people who are wondering if they can hold true to the end.

Mark 13 verses 24 - 37. Jesus uses very dark imagery that may have frightened his listeners. There is a suggestion that the sky will fall upon them, most likely in the form of the might of the Roman Army. Despite the uncomfortable forecast of the apocalypse that is hard to appreciate, Jesus urges us to be alert to the signs of summer even in the darkest of winters. Both Isaiah and Mark remind us that the coming of God in the darkness of our world, or the darkness of our personal experience, will be unexpected (Isaiah 64.3; Mark 13.32). And so, every year, at the darkest time of the year, we have this season of the Church year to remind us of the need to wait for the unexpected, and to be alert for signs of the kingdom.

I could stop writing here and end on that note of optimism but, as I said, these passages could have been written during a pandemic such as we are experiencing now, so I have added a little more. I have been reading a short booklet by Bishop Tom Wright “*God and the Corona Virus*”. The (now retired) Bishop examines natural and man-made disasters through the Old Testament, the Book of Acts and events up to the present time. He writes:

“So often when people look out on the world and its disasters they wonder, why God doesn’t just march in and take over. Why, they ask, does he permit it? Why doesn’t he send a thunderbolt (or perhaps something a little less like what a pagan deity might do), and put things right? The answer is God does send thunderbolts – human ones. He sends in the poor in Spirit, the meek, the mourners, the peacemakers, the hungry-for-justice people. They are the way God wants to act in his world. They are more effective than any lightning flashes or actual thunderbolts. They will use their initiative; they will see where the real needs are, and go to meet them. They will weep at the tombs of their friends. At the tombs of their enemies. Some of them will get hurt. That is the story of Acts, all through. There will be problems, punishments, setbacks, shipwrecks, but God’s purpose will come through. These people, prayerful, humble, faithful, will be the answer, not to the question Why? But to the question What? What needs to be done here? Who is most at risk? How can we help? Who shall we send? God works in all things with and through those who love him.”

Tom Wright. “God and the Pandemic”, published by SPCK - Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

News of the Family

Please remember Alison Spencer in your prayers as she undergoes more treatment and more hospital visits.

John Stevens is still awaiting hospital treatment.

Doreen Redington is awaiting hospital appointments for her shoulder.

Please remember in your prayers all those who are unwell but also their partners and friends who care for them.

Littlehampton Churches Together

The leaders of the Churches in Littlehampton meet regularly (via Zoom) to keep up to date with events in the town and each other's churches. As with so much this year, what is not able to happen tends to cast a shadow but there is positive news to share:

Turning Tides are most grateful for the response from the Harvest Appeal. Letters will be sent to the churches and organisations who responded.

Plans are going ahead to send Christmas Greetings to all shops and businesses in Littlehampton.

A virtual Holiday Bible Club is planned for the first week of the School Christmas Holiday.

A short video "Share the Light" has been produced by Christian Publishing and Outreach (CPO) which churches are hoping to promote on-line.

Next Edition of the mini Newsletter

I hope to publish the next newsletter by 6th December when we expect to know if and how we can meet as church in December. This edition will also contain Naison's Pastoral letter.

Just before Christmas we will send out the on-line and printed versions of all the Christmas Greetings,

From The Coronus Bible: Revised Satirical Version

John 2:1-12 Jesus turns water into hand sanitiser

A wedding took place in a large open space in Cana in Galilee to keep people an appropriate distance apart. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited. When all the hand sanitizer was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more hand sanitiser!" "Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. And his mother answered him thus, "Because if you don't help, they won't be able to serve tacos." So Jesus said to the servants, "Fill those huge jars with water" and they did so. Then he told them, "Now scoop some out and take it to the head chef." They did so, and the head chef saw the cleanliness of his hands, smelt the heavenly fragrance of the sanitiser, and noted the moisturising nature that left his hands feeling soft and supple. He said, "Everyone usually brings out the best sanitiser first and then fills up those expensive looking bottles with the cheap stuff from Walmart when no-one cares anymore because their hands are so chapped from washing. Yet, you have saved the best until now!" What Jesus did in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory. His disciples believed him, but not enough to stop them from filling their pockets with the stuff in case it ran out.

. Translator: John Spencer

The Coronavirus Bible: Revised Satirical Version . Kingdom Collective Publishing. Kindle Edition.