

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 139

Christmas Day 2021

'Virtually Church but with some way to go...'

Welcome

A very happy Christmas to you. Our next edition will be in the New Year, on Sunday 2nd January.

Scripture Passages

Isaiah 52: 7-10

How beautiful upon the mountains

are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,
who brings good news,

who announces salvation,

who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."

⁸ Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices,

together they sing for joy;

for in plain sight they see

the return of the LORD to Zion.

⁹ Break forth together into singing,

you ruins of Jerusalem;

for the LORD has comforted his people,

he has redeemed Jerusalem.

¹⁰ The LORD has bared his holy arm

before the eyes of all the nations;

and all the ends of the earth

shall see the salvation of our God.

John 1: 1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. ⁹ The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Reflection

Does God have a face?

When we look at the vastness of our universe, the nearest star light years away, an unimaginable distance, this question seems a very relevant one.

For in the suffering and turmoil of life a God who is just an abstract philosophical concept is not much help to us. No, we need a God who is alongside us in our suffering and able to help and rescue us. We need to see God's face.

And this year of course there has been much suffering and turmoil for all of us to cope with.

No doubt we think first of all of the pandemic and its impact. There are so many different facets to this.

Most obviously there is the suffering of those who have died, those who have lost loved ones, those whose health has been permanently affected. And then all the other effects that the pandemic has brought in its wake. There is the mental and emotional suffering of the lockdowns and those who have been especially isolated during these times. There is the economic suffering of those who have lost jobs and livelihoods. There is the educational and social suffering of the disruption to schools.

Or maybe this year has brought suffering and turmoil at a personal level for an entirely different reason.

But so much of the time when we try to think about these issues we are confronted with rows and rows of often competing statistics. What is the number of people who will be affected if we take this decision in this way? And how do we balance this against the number of people who will be affected if we take this decision in the other way?

We can feel simply overwhelmed by this mass of statistics. We need to put a human face to these numbers. For people are not just numbers in a set of statistics. Each one has a face. On the BBC website there was a section entitled 'tributes to those who have died in the pandemic'. Each tribute had a photograph attached to it. Looking at these faces and reading their stories really brought their suffering home to me. Of course we may not need to do something like this, we may need simply to think of the faces of people whom we have personally known and loved.

So does God have a face? This is an important question to answer.

Jesus has often been described as the human face of God.

And when we think of Jesus what face comes to mind? When I asked myself this question I have to say that the first image that came to me was the Turin Shroud. This is a striking sepia image of a man who has been scourged and crucified. Yes, but is it the actual cloth in which Jesus was wrapped after the crucifixion? Is this the actual face of Jesus? We just don't know.

Nevertheless what that image and face conveys to me is the immeasurable suffering and compassion of Jesus and of God.

And then there is the face of Jesus that we see so much of as we exchange Christmas cards. It is the face of a new born baby in a manger, weak and vulnerable, but also full of mystery, magic and wonder. This too is the face of God.

And then there is the face of Jesus as depicted by artists of many different eras and cultures. A multitude of different ways of seeing God's face. We may find some of them more helpful than others and they may tell us a great deal about the imagination of the artist and the times in which he or she lived. But even so their impact on us is very real.

But what about the Bible? What does the Bible tell us about God's face? John's gospel claims that 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory.'

This is the amazing truth that lies at the heart of our celebration of Christmas. The almighty and infinite God became one of us, starting off life as we all do in the form of a frail, vulnerable baby.

And although John does not describe in exact detail what Jesus' face was

like, he does tell us that Jesus is full of light. Jesus is the light which shines in the darkness, the true light, which gives light to everyone.

Some people have been struck by the light that they see when they look into the faces and eyes of Christians.

And John goes on to speak about Jesus conveying God's presence, God's glory to us and being full of grace and truth.

So God's face, Jesus' face. But what about our faces and the faces of other people? Can God's face, Jesus' face be seen in us and in them?

The Bible tells us that we are all made in the image of God and so to a certain extent God's face will indeed be seen in each one of us. But time and the issues of life may have made this light more difficult to see. When she had had a particularly difficult encounter with someone Mother Teresa used to speak of meeting Jesus in a very unpleasant disguise.

And when we give way to anger, impatience or hatred as we all do from time to time we make it difficult for other people to see Jesus' face reflected in our own face. And yet we need not despair. There is hope.

For John tells us that all who receive Jesus into their lives and hearts, those who believe in His name, are given the right to become children of God.

So as we respond to God's offer of new life by receiving Jesus into our hearts our broken relationship with God is restored. We become children of God and as a result we can reflect God's face more powerfully and clearly.

When people look at us what will they see? Will they see the light of Christ there and something of the face of Jesus? Surely that is indeed our hope and our prayer this Christmas.

Tristram

Masks are still back

Just a reminder to everyone that under the government's Plan B covid restrictions masks are once more mandatory in churches.

Points for Prayers

- The message of Christmas and reflecting the light of Christ to others
- Continuing concerns about the Omicron variant and decisions to be made following Christmas
- Continued thanksgiving for the care, skill and courage of NHS workers and that they will not be overwhelmed by the demands on them in the winter period
- Those whom we know who are facing illnesses of all kinds and have recently been bereaved
- Bishop Ruth and the rest of the Diocesan staff as they take on additional responsibility in this vacancy in See
- For the choice of a new Bishop, someone who shares God's heart for this Diocese
- For Elliscombe House in Higher Holton now reopened and for its first residents
- Prayers and thanksgiving for contributions to the foodbanks and for those helping to take these to the foodbanks.

Hymn/Carol

There are so many different carols to choose from and I personally have a number to choose from. One of these is 'Silent night.'

Services for Christmas and the New Year

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| Christmas Day | 9.30 am Communion, Blackford |
| Christmas Day | 9.30 am Communion, Yarlington |
| Christmas Day | 9.30 am Communion, Compton Pauncefoot |
| Christmas Day | 9.30 am Communion, South Cadbury |
| Christmas Day | 11.00 am Communion, North Cadbury |
| Christmas Day | 11.00 am service, North Cheriton |
| Christmas Day | 11.00 am service, Holton |
| Christmas Day | 11.00 am service, Maperton |
| Boxing Day | 11.00 am Communion, Galhampton |
| Sunday 2 nd January | 9.00 am Communion, Yarlington |
| Sunday 2 nd January | 9.30 am Camelot Matins, North Cheriton |
| Sunday 2 nd January | 11.00 am Group Communion, North Cadbury |

Excalibur

Excalibur is back in paper form. It contains details of Camelot people, a record of baptisms, weddings and funerals undertaken through the church in the Camelot Parishes. The December and January editions of Excalibur have now been published online at camelotparishes.co.uk and on each parish's A Church Near You webpage.

The Parish Office

If Rob is not in the Office during normal office hours please contact him via email (office@camelotparishes.org.uk) or on 01749 850934.

Growing as a worshipper, a servant and a family

*We pray that 'we might live in love,
as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us'*

(Ephesians 5:2)