

St John's Lindow

INTOUCH

Winter 2020



The Promise of Joy

*'I will give them comfort and joy instead
of sorrow' declares the Lord*

Jeremiah 31:13

www.saint-johns.org.uk

SIMON'S SCRAWL

by Simon Gales

Many of us are looking forward to Christmas more than ever. After all the difficulties of this year, when we've not been able to meet friends or see those we love, surely when it comes to Christmas things will be different?! (although as I write the details are still to be announced and it certainly won't be 'Christmas as usual'). Perhaps because it's been absent for so long, the joy of seeing family & friends seems more precious than ever.

But wonderful as such times can be they don't always match expectations and the harsh realities of life will soon return. Covid 19 will not have disappeared and we'll still face many of the consequences.

But the theme of this magazine, and the message of Christmas, is *Comfort & Joy* so joy is certainly appropriate for Christmas, but the real joy of Christmas is so much bigger and better than a few days respite from lockdown! The angel said to the shepherds 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people'. Joy not just for a select few when everything is favourable; its joy for people in all sorts of situations; a joy that survives in the worst of times! How come? *'Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord'*.

This bigger, better joy is that **1. a Saviour is born** – someone to save us from the mess we've got ourselves into, the foolishness of living in God's world as if he wasn't there, and all the

brokenness that brings. Jesus didn't come to tell us how to be saved but to save us. The difference is crucial. He doesn't stand on the edge of the river, offering drowning humanity advice on how to escape (that's the best that other belief systems can offer). Instead he dives into the dark water to lift us out of sin and death by his own death. **2. Christ is born** – the eternal King who God had promised who would overturn death and rebuild the whole of creation. **3. The Lord is born** – who else could accomplish such eternal salvation and never ending rule? No one less than God himself!



As you consider this good news of great joy (maybe collect a copy of 'A Very Different Christmas' – see p10) notice two words of the angel's message that are easy to miss: A Saviour is born to you. He is born for each of us personally. It's possible to agree that the message is true but find no joy or comfort in it. Joy is lit within us when we grasp this Saviour, King and Lord as our own.

Trust him, and he brings fearless joy and bold comfort!

Yours, Simon

SKETCHY THEOLOGY

BY BEN HOLLINSHEAD

"MAYBE BISHOP MARK WILL HAVE A MORE PASTORAL APPROACH..."



VIEW FROM THE PEW

Rachel Hollinshead

Marc: I may know plenty about you but that doesn't mean you have any less to share! How was life growing up for you?

Rachel: Well we've been in Wilmslow longer than a lot of people in the church family! I've lived here for the majority of my life with brief transitions to Lancaster for university and Derbyshire for another job. However, I've always been drawn back to Wilmslow.

Marc: So would you say you've had a quiet life up to now?

Rachel: My job gives me anything but a quiet life! As a special needs secondary teacher in Greater Manchester every day can have its challenges.

Marc: I'm sure a lot of people in church can relate! Has being a Christian helped with this stressful lifestyle in any way?

Rachel: It has provided me with fellowship and support and an alternative perspective on life, which many of my colleagues at work don't have. It's definitely changed throughout the years I've been a Christian, having become one in my early teens.

Marc: What was church like for you through your early teens?

Rachel: It was a big part of my social life. I made good friends as I started to learn about who Jesus was and the role he would have in changing my life. I didn't become a Christian on a specific date. It was a gradual process like a jigsaw puzzle being put together. The pieces all fit once I attended church as well as Pathfinders, because I used to see Pathfinders "just" as a youth group.

Marc: Now that you're older, what is it about church that helps you as a Christian?

Rachel: St John's has helped deepen my biblical understanding of God's grace. I still struggle with



timelines and a lot of the old testament history, but I do find it interesting when this is explored in church. Maybe this is something I could look at in the new year!

Marc: I think a lot of us are looking forward to the new year after a tough 2020. How has your faith helped you through this year?

Rachel: I've taken lockdown day by day and I've enjoyed the fellowship that St John's has provided. For example I have followed Simon's word of the day and listened to the Keswick convention online, so I've been able to balance this with working remotely. Now that schools are open I can continue to meet with St John's and focus on my own personal study.

Marc: I imagine being a teacher has added a lot of stress and anxiety during this tough time!

Rachel: Honestly, I am a person who gets stressed easily! However, I know that God is in control of this situation and I don't have to rely only on myself for everything.

Marc: Well said! I think that is something all of us can reflect on now that we are nearing the end of the year. Thanks, Rach, for taking some time out to share a little more with the church family.

MISSION UPDATE

Johnny & Ann McClean

Comfort & Joy in Bangkok

Christmas in the past has often focussed on our comfort, our food, our presents. However, this year is going to be different for so many of us. Covid-19 has helped us to see the comfort and joy of the first Christmas in fresh ways as we prepare to celebrate Christmas in Bangkok this year.

Silence - Many Bangkok streets are quieter than normal without the 40 million tourist arrivals. Many of our church members are quietly trying to make ends meet. But imagine 400 years with God seemingly absent, silent, no great miracles, no great prophets. God's people groaned under the oppression of a series of brutal regimes - the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans. No wonder the shepherds were terrified when they saw the angel, nothing like this had happened and they had little expectation.



Separation - Looking through a pane of glass at a loved one self-isolating has been the experience of many people this year. Wherever we go in Bangkok we are reminded to keep our distance. For our two Afghan refugee friends in the International Detention Centre here in Bangkok, separation is not just for a few weeks but for the foreseeable future, possibly even years. As I look at the 'findmy' app on my phone I can see our son Matt stuck in lockdown in his university dorm 6100km from us. Christmas is a reminder that God did not keep his distance from us.

As a church we have had to step up our help to those facing financial hardship, Jesus stepped down at Christmas to be 'Immanuel' - God with us. He came to be the cure for the pandemic that is as old as mankind itself that infects us all - sin.

Joy - In our house the Christmas tree is already up, Ann is preparing for our first Christmas dinner with some Thai friends, I have tried on my Santa suit, and a turkey is defrosting in the fridge. Bethan asked us to decorate the house early as 2020 has been such a gloomy and difficult year. Christmas is a reminder of joy, that God has come into our dark world, he understands the burdens we carry and he is saying "Come to me all you who are weary and I will give you rest".



Comfort - On 19th December we are looking forward to carol singing around our church neighbourhood, in shops, markets, and slums. Our prayer is that many will receive the good news that they are not forgotten, alone, or abandoned. We pray too that our carol singing round church members homes (December 12th) and our main Christmas service (Sunday 20th December) may be a comfort to our church members.

Please pray for our family here in Bangkok as we declare 'Joy to the World, the Lord has come!' this Christmas season.

CHRISTMAS JOY

Why it's hard NOT to sing at Christmas

*“Tonight’s events were planned in heaven,
The greatest story ever penned.
Heaven and earth have come together
And Life has come to Bethlehem”*

This is the chorus to a children’s song that pupils at Nether Alderley school sing every Christmas. It gloriously sums up the message of God’s holy plan to rescue people, through the astonishing sacrifice of sending His son Jesus to live among us and pay our debts.

Singing is a great way to say out loud the truths that we know about His grace and love, and to express the joy that Jesus brings, both privately and to one another. For me, as a music teacher, it is also a chance to cut through the fluff and nonsense that gets mixed up with the nativity by teaching songs that tell the truth of Christmas.

...and then came Coronavirus! No socialising, no hugging NO SINGING!...

For those of us who express ourselves most readily through music the impact was devastating. Huge parts of our lives had gone, overnight.

Singing on one’s own is a poor substitute to singing with others (although on ‘Zoom church’ many of us

have given it a good go!)

I have spent many weeks working out a way to produce a COVID Christmas celebration for the children! Now at school we do a lot of singing outdoors (put your coats on) or spread out in the hall with all the doors and windows open (yes, you still need your coats on). I have a lovely pair of fingerless gloves so that I can still play the piano. No class may meet with another class even though some songs are sung by everybody. There have been some steep learning curves in multi-track music editing but singing expresses the joy of Christmas like nothing else!

It’s all felt stressful, tiring and almost overwhelming but God is good and even when we are rushing about trying to ‘solve’ things He is working out his plans and just waiting for us to turn back to Him. This new approach to a Christmas production has allowed me to introduce more biblical aspects to the Christmas story that let God’s truth shine through the tinsel. Big scary angels, not reception girls with fairy wings; an army of Magi descending on Jerusalem because it wasn’t a ‘magic’ star but a real star placed in the heavens by God as part of His plan. Lots of questions and discussions arising from these changes and for some of the children a dawning realisation that this is more than Father Christmas and a pretty tree.

By God’s good grace, the joy of his divine rescue is coming to life through the songs we are singing.

THE COMFORT AND JOY OF MESSIANIC PROMISE

When Jesus was born of Mary in Bethlehem this was the fulfilment of age-long *divine promises* at the “midpoint” between distinct eras (BC/AD). The *Messiah* (Hebrew: *Anointed One* or, in Greek: *Christos*) was to receive universal dominion as God’s supreme Servant-King. Many facets of Jesus’ life and ministry were foretold or foreshadowed in prophecy, including his crucifixion, burial and resurrection (eg. *Psalm 22*; *Isaiah 53*). Here we focus upon other aspects of his first advent,

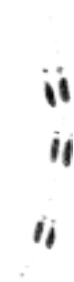


Primaeval Promises: In the temptation narrative of Genesis 3: speaking to the serpent, God announced the protoevangelium - i.e. the earliest promise of the Gospel: Eve will become the progenitor of One who will deliver a mortal blow to the serpent’s head: “I will put enmity ... between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel.”



Abraham receives promises of blessing: Genesis chapters 12, 15, 17-25 tell how God called a man named Abram, a citizen of Ur of the Chaldees near the Persian Gulf. The LORD said to Abram: “Leave your country, your people and your father’s

household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you ... And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” This was all part of God’s plan to create the nation, culture and society of Israel within which the line of descent would lead to Jesus.



Israel in Egypt; the Exodus; desert wanderings and entry into the promised land. During this extensive period, narrated in Exodus through to Judges, messianic promise was developed - via typical deliverances from bondage and by the structural symbolism of the Tabernacle, or Tent of Meeting. This foreshadowed the later Temple in Jerusalem and ultimately the Temple of Christ’s body.



The historical books of Samuel and Chronicles:

These books develop the theme of kingship, notably in the lives of David and Solomon. The future character of the Messianic king Jesus is foreshadowed by contrast with their sins and deficiencies. In 2 Samuel 7: God promises to King David: “I will establish a house for you: ... I will raise up your offspring to succeed you ... and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ... Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.” This promise received partial fulfilment in Solomon, but ultimate fulfilment in great David’s greater Son





Prophecy in Psalms, Isaiah, Micah and Daniel:

Extensive Messianic promises are found in the Psalms, beginning with Psalm 2: "You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession."

Some of the best-known Messianic prophecies are found in Isaiah 7:14; 9:2, 6f; 11: 1-11:

"The Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel"

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light"

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders ... Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it ..."

"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him"



And through Isaiah's contemporary, Micah (5:2), the

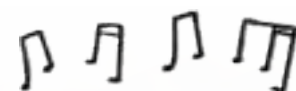
character – as Shepherd king – and location of Messiah's advent was specified. "But you, Bethlehem ...out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old".



Finally, amongst the mysterious prophecies recorded in Daniel, (9: 20-27) during the Exile in Babylon, there is an indication (duration is expressed in multiple "sevens" of years) of the approximate time of the advent of the Anointed One (= Messiah) and the subsequent destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, in AD 70. The Gospel According to Matthew (2: 1-12) records the visit to the Christ-child of the star-led Magi from the East (or Babylon) who were probably familiar with the prophetic elements of Daniel.



Likewise, the faithfulness of God in fulfilling his age-long promises remains our comfort and joy throughout times of trouble.



WHAT DOES COMFORT & JOY MEAN TO ME THIS CHRISTMAS?

*Reflections from the
St John's church family*

Rachel Hollinshead

As a teacher I personally never thought the schools would close. I waited and waited to hear this announcement so when it did, I found I had a lot of time to myself. Suddenly I had no excuses to do things I'd put off due to time. Including reading my bible.

I have been studying the book of Numbers and how God leads His people out of Egypt. They never stop complaining and turning away from their leader, Moses, yet He is still with Moses when his people turn on him. How apt for today's world and situation. God is always there and in control. Even when we don't like it. I am a very stubborn person so I am in awe that He hasn't let me go. Time and time again we fail and fall down. But He stands strong with us, like those in exodus, those who doubted Jesus and those who follow Him today. What wonderful news!

Joel Norman

I work with individuals who live with complex learning difficulties, amongst other complicating factors. Most of these people lack the capacity to sufficiently understand the pandemic, yet they implicitly understand that their lives have been dramatically changed. Restricted access to their families, friends, and preferred activities is something that they recognise, but cannot fully comprehend. The average 'neurotypical' person can see a route out of this pandemic, but for many of those with learning disabilities, they are existing within a new, immutable reality.

This Christmas is no different, and those who depend on me will continue to look to me (and my colleagues) for the comfort and joy they need. As a follower of Jesus, I look to shine his unique light

into the lives of those I care for. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (John 1:5)

Jane Seymour

2020 will go down in history as one of the most challenging times the world has seen to date and will possibly be the subject matter for a degree syllabus in the future!

I've noticed Christmas lights and trees appearing in homes across the town much earlier than customary; possibly a sign we all need a little sparkle and cheer in our lives. There have been many days throughout this year when things haven't gone too well. My favourite saying has been 'roller coaster ride'. It continues to be so, but it's so comforting to know God is happy for me to cry out to him when things haven't gone too well.

I'm guessing there will be a unanimous comment 'we didn't see this coming'. Even during the first lockdown in March no one could predict how serious the whole pandemic would affect the whole world. We've all questioned the reliability of the Government and have sometimes, reluctantly put our trust and faith in both the government and the scientists. There's no disputing it's had a profound effect on every person from every corner of the world. The uncertainty of the future months and long-term outcome presents a questioning time.

As a Christian, I do not need a crystal ball to predict how I will cope with the fallout from the virus as I know that even though I am a tiny, tiny cog in a massive world-wide wheel, God is in complete control and he hears my prayers.

UPDATES FROM THE CHURCH FAMILY



We said farewell to Ed Walker at his funeral on 6 November. He was a member of St John's for many years and a dedicated leader of our Scouts



Clara Kate was born on 19th October, a lovely daughter for Jane & Ewan, and sister for Cameron and Julia



The wedding of Jess Vaughan and Chris Pearson - a very happy day in the midst of lockdown!

BOOK REVIEW

Ian Lawrence

When I Don't Desire God

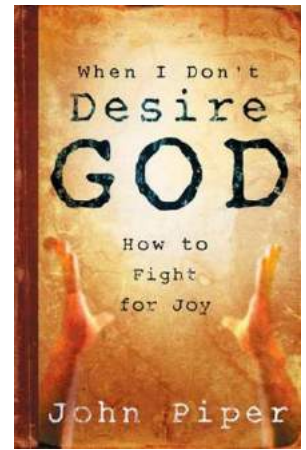
John Piper

John Piper is an American church leader and best-selling author, whose life is shaped by the motto 'God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.' But what about those times when 'satisfaction in God' seems hard to find? How do we overcome that sense of distance from God that sometimes takes us over?

The book acknowledges that there is much in day to day life which gets in the way of our relationship with God and leads to a sense of God being far from us, which means we miss out on the joy that God wants us to know.

There are many helpful nuggets in the book. One that I found especially helpful came in the penultimate chapter 'How to wield the world in the fight for joy - using all five senses to see the glory of God' which quotes Psalms: *'the heavens declare the glory of God, and the*

sky above proclaims his handiwork'. Every part of God's good creation declares his glory. The created world is therefore a holy weapon in our fight for joy. We only need to look out at the garden, go out for a walk, eat a good meal or even enjoy a good book to be reminded of our Creator God's glory!



The book consistently points us to Jesus. We know that he endured the cross for the joy that was set before him. He tasted it. It sustained him through the deepest suffering. His Father was glorified. His people were saved. That is the powerful impact that 'joy in God' can have.

'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Spirit'

Romans 15:13

BOOK REVIEW

A Very Different Christmas

Rico Tice & Nate Morgan Locke

This is a gem of a book. Giving and receiving presents is a major part of Christmas. Thinking of what to give, what would bring delight, needs much thought.

For the purpose of the story we are to imagine we are transported to heaven for Christmas Day. Awaiting us is God the Father, his Son and the Holy Spirit.

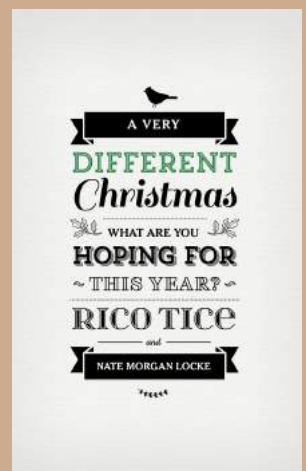
God gave us his present which we carefully unwrapped and discovered...a baby.

His name is Jesus and also Immanuel (God with us).

Jesus grew up and by his way of life and by the miracles he performed many did believe he was the Son of God.

The author then tells us what the Son and the Holy Spirit give the Father for Christmas, which eventually leads us to ask ourselves: "does my life please the Father?"

Pick up a free copy from the Church porch and read on to find out more . . .



Sally Hammond

THEOLOGY CORNER

COMFORT & JOY

Mark Tanner, Bishop of Chester

... and it's tidings of comfort and joy

[cue the BIG pipes on the organ, and the slightly tipsy bass voices upping the volume...]

COMFORT AND JOY,

and it's tidings of comfort and joy...

...and we sit with the same 4 walls staring down at us, realising that Christmas will be far from normal this year, and the words feel different. Will the 'merry gentlemen' (and ladies) have any merriment this year? There seems to be an awful lot to dismay us even if we have escaped the virus personally.

But listen again to that carol:

God rest you merry gentlemen,

let nothing you dismay

For Jesus Christ our Saviour

was born on Christmas day

To save our souls from Satan's power

when we had gone astray...

Do you notice? Can you spot how the COVID tempest blows away the debris which obscures the real source of comfort and joy. Comfort doesn't really come from an annual glass of Baileys, or those hats that make your forehead itch (however much fun they are). Joy doesn't rest on the office party, or the impossible task of keeping turkey moist when cooking for 23 adults, 7 noisy kids, and a retriever ready to pounce on any dropped titbits.

Comfort, theologically and literally, is a profound strengthening to face the challenges of loving, living, sharing, growing, and being human in response to the grace and goodness of God. It comes from God.

And joy is far more than happiness or mere pleasure. It is a deep knowledge that God is good and holds all things. It is peace. It is hope. And it is rooted in the eternal truth that God has been born among us in the person of Jesus Christ, and with His birth dawns the hope that we will be saved.

This is true.



It was true when this carol was written (no one knows when or who wrote it, but it is one of the oldest existing Christmas carols, found in the collection of Robert Harley, 1st Earl of Oxford and Mortimer (1661–1724) for example).

It was true when Charles Dickens quoted it in 'A Christmas Carol' in 1843; true whether you are Ebenezer Scrooge, Bob Cratchit, or Tiny Tim.

And it is true today, even as we approach a COVID Christmas. There may well be hard things. There will be things we miss and things we mourn. But Christ is born, and there is real hope, real peace, real comfort, and real joy. It is held in the arms of this frail child who will grow to a man apparently destroyed by the world around him... and yet who will rise triumphant after wrestling death itself to the ground, crushing the power of sin and radically transforming the broken apparatus of a corrupted creation.

It's for you and for those you know... so...*God rest you, merry gentlemen (girls, boys, ladies, and all).*

Mark Tanner was appointed as the new Bishop of Chester in July and took up his post in September. Since then Bishop Keith Sinclair (Birkenhead) has announced that he will retire in March 2021, so please pray for Bishop Mark as he appoints two new suffragan bishops in our diocese.

SPRING PROGRAMME

Sundays

10am

Lord's Supper on third Sunday

Jan 3	Jeremiah: From dark days to future hope 1. The reluctant prophet Jeremiah 1:1-19
Jan 10	2. The betrayal of love Jeremiah 2:1-37
Jan 17	3. Cheap 'n' easy Jeremiah 3:1 - 4:4
Jan 24	4. Final warning Jeremiah 4:5 - 6:26
Jan 31	5. False Hopes Jeremiah 7:1 - 8:3
Feb 7	6. It's all over? Jeremiah 11:1 - 12:7
Feb 14	7. Shaping & breaking Jeremiah 18:1 - 20:18
Feb 21	8. Leaders false & true Jeremiah 23:1-40
Feb 28	9. A new heart Jeremiah 30:1 - 31:40
Mar 7	10. A new start Jeremiah 32:1 - 33:26
Mar 14	11. The end arrives Jeremiah 37:1 - 39:18
Mar 21	12. A global warning Jeremiah 46:1 - 51:64
Mar 28	The King arrives! Mark 11:1-26
Apr 1	The King weeps 8pm Service
Apr 2	The King dies! 10am Service
Apr 4	Easter All Age - The King rises! 10am Service Easter Parade 6.30pm Service

Homegroups

Meeting in various homes, on Wednesdays, Thursdays & Fridays, afternoons and evenings, to study God's work and encourage one another.

Jeremiah: From dark days to future hope

During the spring our homegroups are linked to our Sunday series.

Meeting weekly via Zoom (at least initially) the groups begin on 7th Jan and finish on 25th March. Dates given are Thursdays but some groups meet at other times (full details on weekly noticesheet). One week each half term will be a Prayer Evening (see below)

Additionally, a women's bible study meets at 9.45am on Wednesdays, and a men's bible study meets at 6.30am on Fridays.

Monthly Prayer Events

Saturday 9th Jan
Prayer Breakfast, 8.30-9.45am

Thursday 4th Feb
Prayer Evening, 8-9.30pm

Saturday 6th March
Prayer Breakfast, 8.30-9.45am

Thursday 1st April
Prayer Evening, 8-9.30pm
(Maundy Thursday service)

Special Events

North West Partnership Annual Conference

23rd Jan - 20th Feb

The sessions will be shown on YouTube in January & February (10am, a mixture of Saturdays & Wednesdays) and will feature guest speakers from across the North West

At the time of writing the restart of events such as 'Evergreens', 'Who let the dads out?', Men's Breakfast, International students visit and Youth weekend away are all uncertain – please see website/ weekly noticesheet for the latest update.