

At the heart of Christmas

A Christmas message from Bishop Ruth

What is at the heart of Christmas for you? Is it the feasting and festivities? The carols and the candles? The stockings and the gifts? Or the presence of those you love?

This Christmas we may find ourselves investing more in our preparations, as last year's plans were curtailed or cancelled. We were to have had all our family gather before my husband had a positive Covid test. Everything changed and neither of us felt well enough to enjoy a special meal together let alone welcome others. So, this year I want to pull out all the stops!

The children and grandchildren will be with us and apparently Father Christmas will be paying a special visit! However, we are also wanting to make sure that we don't get carried away with all the tinsel and trappings and forget the heart of the story. So, we shall limit our spending on pressies but make sure that we really value the presence of one another and particularly of the Christ child at the heart of it all.

This year as you anticipate Christmas, through the stories told through Advent windows, or carol services, how might you prepare your heart for the coming Christ child? The wonder of Christmas is that God has never given up on us and in fact loves us so much that he wants to spend time with us.

The birth of Jesus, God's Son, into a humble human family, brought God into our very midst, into the heart of our homes. This Christmas let's make space for Him once more and listen to the words of love, hope and joy He wants to share with us. And may that inspire our faith in the future, for ourselves and our world.

Wishing you much joy and peace this Christmas.

Bishop Ruth ■

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News in brief

New pupil chaplains for Wellington

St John's CofE Primary School is celebrating having seven new pupil chaplains.

The pupil chaplains, who volunteered for the role and had special training, will be supported by their school chaplain. They hope to plan and prepare Collective Worship and community events, help on the playground and take part in assemblies ■



Churches & schools mark COP26

At St Thomas', Wells, COP26 was marked with an all age service on climate change.

Artwork by children from Horrington and Stoberry primary schools was on display and inspired the congregation to write individual pledges that focused on what they could do to help look after our world. After the service the pledges and artwork remained on display for visitors to view ■

A special Christmas service

St Mary's, Timsbury is holding a carol service for special needs children and their families on 12 December. Revd Julian Davies, himself a father of a son with autism and severe learning difficulties, says, "Families with special needs children can feel very isolated. As a family we wouldn't have gone to the pantomime were it not for their special performances. I know it can be difficult taking a child with special needs to such a service as other families often don't understand the behaviour of the child with special needs. I am hoping to give them a space where they feel welcome and comfortable among people in a similar situation." ■

Join us this Christmas

How will you experience the joy of Christmas this year?

We hope and pray that many of the familiar experiences that help Christmas come alive return to our homes, our churches and communities, but whatever December brings there are number of ways you can embrace the true spirit of Christmas where you are.

Services and nativities are being planned in churches, online and the Christmas story is being brought to life in a host of creative ways: St George's, Wembdon is taking its mobile nativity around the community again; a number of places are holding Advent window displays while St Mary's, Timsbury is holding a service designed to accommodate children with special

needs and their carers.

You can join us online in Advent as we take a global perspective and journey through the account of Jesus' birth. Developed with children and young people in mind by our youth advisers, along with the [Send a Cow charity](#) and [Movement, the youth and young adult ministry](#), our advent activities have something to offer all ages.

Each week of Advent will begin with a two-minute video presented by Sam Davis and Emily Hatton, from the Movement family, and feature Send a Cow project workers in Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Zambia reading part of the Christmas story from the Good News translation of the Bible. Christmas Day's video will feature



Bishop Ruth. There will also be daily challenges on social media; all based around the themes of hope, joy, peace and love.

You can also join the Church of England online with their 'At the heart of Christmas' campaign, which is an invitation to everyone to discover – or rediscover – the good news of God's saving love as revealed in the birth of Jesus. Starting on Christmas Eve and continuing daily (Monday to Saturday) until Epiphany on 6 January, you will be able to hear 12 stories and meditations from the archbishops and guests as they explore themes close to the heart of Christmas ■

A time to celebrate

Emily Hatton, who features in our Advent campaign, prepares for her first Christmas as a Youth Minister

How did you get involved in the campaign?

Having worked with Movement, the Go Team and Send a Cow over the years it was great to get involved with the joint Advent Around the World project. Those who read the scriptures do so with such joy, that it's almost like hearing them for the first time. It really gets you thinking about what Christmas is all about.

What does Christmas mean to you?

For me, Christmas is (obviously) all about Jesus. But it's so hard not to get caught up in the commercialisation of Christmas that's happened in our developed countries, isn't it? But for me,



Christmas is about remembering that God so loved the world that He gave his one and only son – God incarnate. So for me, Christmas is really exciting!

How will you celebrate with young people in your church?

I'm looking forward to getting stuck in with all that will be happening: Christingle, carol services, a

community Christmas tree festival, and school events. We hope to have a number of the youth group getting baptised in the weeks leading up to Christmas. What an amazing time to see teenagers commit their lives to living wholeheartedly for Jesus!

How do they feel about this year's Christmas celebrations?

After last year, I think the young people are just looking forward to taking up their Christmas traditions again, seeing their family and friends - and not just on the one day! Carols were really missed, so being able to sing again is really exciting. Read the full interview at www.bathandwells.org.uk/youth-christmas ■

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