

Dear Friends,

A 90 year-old woman in a fetching blue Christmas tee-shirt receives a simple injection in her left arm and the world rejoices. The success of a range of vaccines really does seem to offer some light at the end of the tunnel and we must give thanks for the ingenuity of medical researchers and scientists who lie behind it.

But at the same time the tunnel is still a long one and it would be bad news if the hope that the vaccine brings were to cause people to lower their guard. Infection rates appear to be increasing in large parts of the country and have plateaued in Lancashire (with some worrying signs of growth amongst the over 60s). The pattern seems to be very local outbreaks where people have been lax about following guidance and this means that we need constant vigilance in our churches.

We always admire the energy and imagination of Blackburn's parishes and it is good to hear the plans that are shaping up in many areas. **But please remember, Christmas is not a competition!** You do not need to outdo the next door Parish, nor do you need to exhaust yourself or frazzle your brain with stress.

Christmas this year will be a careful balancing act between the duty to worship, the opportunity to proclaim and the need to heed public health guidance at all times. But don't forget, not even Covid, can strip away the unalloyed joy of the Incarnation. A vaccine might protect us for a while from a virus. In the child of Bethlehem we find eternal protection from sin, death, annihilation and indeed from everything that is at enmity with human flourishing.

### **New Guidance from the Church of England**

A great deal of new guidance has been issued by the Church of England in recent days and [it can be accessed on the website](#). The main areas covered are below:

#### **Christmas**

- We have had a number of enquiries about the dos and don'ts of holding **outdoor carol services**. Most questions are answered in the really [helpful tips that can be found here](#).
- There is more formal guidance about **outdoor events**, including a template risk assessment. [This can be found here](#).
- Over Christmas **household bubbles** are permitted to attend acts of worship together. [There is guidance about exactly what that means here](#).

#### **Other**

- You may have seen that the Archbishops have issued some guidance about 'simultaneous communion.' You can read it on the Church of England website above, but please note that your Task Group is highly dubious about the safety or wisdom of what is recommended.

## **Blue Christmas**

For many, Christmas is a time that brings back memories of grief and pain, and that will be especially so this year. Fr Neil Kelley has produced a Blue Christmas resource, focusing on the Christ-child who brings light even into the deepest darkness. It can be [downloaded directly from here](#) . Scroll up and down the resource page while you are there to discover many more things you may find useful, with more being added all the time, including a Blue Christmas reflection video (available from December 15).

## **Weekly Message**

This week's message will be from Archdeacon David and can be found on the [Diocesan YouTube Channel](#). His (intriguing) theme will be, 'Are we nearly there yet?'

## **Sunday Worship**

In recent weeks the Diocesan Service has been touring round the Diocese and this week we are joining the people of St John's Little Thornton for worship for the Third Sunday of Advent led by The Revd Jane Atkinson. It can be viewed from 9am onwards on the [Diocesan YouTube channel](#).

Alternatively the Cathedral is also broadcasting an act of worship from 9am on Sunday. This will be on [the Cathedral website](#).

## **Coronavirus Email Address**

Don't forget that if you have questions or problems you can get in touch with the Task Group by emailing: [coronavirus@blackburn.anglican.org](mailto:coronavirus@blackburn.anglican.org). It is important that clergy who are self-isolating send us a note to this address.

Loving God,  
at this time of crisis  
when so many are suffering,  
we pray for our nation and our world.  
    Give our leaders wisdom,  
    our Health Service strength,  
    our people hope.  
Lead us through these parched and difficult days  
to the fresh springs of joy and comfort  
that we find in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen