

Dear Friends,

*“Like the sun in the morning sky,
the Saviour of the world will dawn.
Like rain upon the meadows
the Christ will come down upon us.”*

2020 has been the hardest year many of us have ever experienced and as it draws to its close we still find ourselves living with anxiety and with difficult personal decisions.

The strange and qualified relaxation of regulations over Christmas will have left many of you with challenging ethical decisions of what to do over Christmas, and this of course comes on top of the endless altering of arrangements you have had to make for Christmas worship, something which has not been helped by regulations being inconsistently applied in different parts of the county.

But then of course it was in the midst of chaos, confusion and political wavering that the Christ came to be born two thousand years ago. As Christians we find our security and our identity not in the contingencies of an ever-changing world, but in the God who comes to us as a child in order to set us free for all eternity.

In this strangest of Christmases, when so many will be fearful, preach the hope of the Incarnation like never before; with confidence, with joy and with conviction. The deeper the darkness, the more brilliant will be the radiant glory of the sun of righteousness, Christ the Lord.

As we come to the end of the year, we want to say a huge, gold-plated THANK YOU for all you have done to lead your churches and live the Gospel in the most testing of circumstances.

The responsiveness, faithfulness and intelligence of the priests and lay leaders of the Diocese of Blackburn has been completely outstanding and a constant inspiration. May each of you this Christmas know deep in your hearts the peace that the Christ-child brings.

The Briefing and the Email over Christmas and New Year

Unless there are dramatic developments this will be the final briefing until the New Year. HOWEVER the coronavirus email address will continue to function and will be regularly monitored so please do get in touch with issues or problems.

Lancashire in Tier 3

It was announced today that the whole of Lancashire will remain under Tier 3 restrictions at least until the next review on December 30th. Across the county infection rates remain fairly stable though there is a worrying increase in Burnley (at least there is one league we're top of!) It is good though to hear the growing optimism about the impact of the vaccination programme.

Outdoor Carol Services

This has been so confusing and has caused some stress to many of you! Here is our best attempt at some coherent advice on the latest situation.

- **For Carol Services on church grounds** you can go ahead with numbers appropriate to the size of the area available. It would be wise to inform local Police, for example your neighbourhood policing team or PCSO. But if you do so, you will need to point out the regulations and demonstrate that the event is risk-assessed.
- **For Carol Services on property that the church does not own** the situation is much more complex. You will need to liaise with the local authority and the Police and adhere to the number restrictions that they give. These vary from borough to borough across the county.

Video messages

- **This week's message** is from Archdeacon Mark and [can be seen here](#).
- All three Bishops have recorded **Christmas messages** which will be available from next Monday on [the Diocesan YouTube channel](#) and the Diocesan website (where the text of each will also be available for download). More information about the messages in next week's Parish Update ebulletin.
- On YouTube in new year week please also look out for a **New Year message** from Bishop Julian.

Online Worship over Christmas and New Year

- The **Blue Christmas** reflection [is now available](#); providing comfort to people who may be struggling at this time of year for a variety of reasons, including bereavement and loneliness.
- The more relaxed '**Christmas Free for All**' service [is also now available](#). This upbeat production includes a 'sleigh ride' to visit a parish, primary school and hospital chaplaincy; some fun and comedy; children's activity; carols and a Christmas message.
- Listen this Sunday to BBC Radio Lancashire at 9.10am, when Bishop Jill will be talking about Blue Christmas and the Christmas Free For All.
- Our Sunday service this week is **Nine Lessons and Carols** which will be from the Cathedral on Sunday 20th December at 4pm. Social media links for the service can be found [via the Cathedral website](#) (including links top right of homepage).
- On Christmas Eve, BBC Radio Lancashire is also broadcasting another Nine Lessons and Carols service using archive music recordings combined with contemporary readings. You can [listen live here](#) on the night, or the programme will be available on BBC Sounds [after broadcast here](#)
- Returning to the Cathedral, there will be services available for **Christmas Day, December 27 and January 3** again [via the Cathedral website](#).
- Over on [the Diocesan YouTube channel](#) on **Sunday, December 27** our service will be led by the Revd Damian Platt from Christ Church Thornton while on **Sunday,**

January 3 the first service of 2021 will be another of our multilingual services, again led by the Revd Sarah Gill and with the Revd Nick McKee preaching.

Lancashire Sings Christmas

Tune in to BBC Radio Lancashire at 7pm tonight for Lancashire Sings Christmas. [More information here.](#)

HSE Spot Checks

There have been many more reports of spot-checks on churches by the Health and Safety Executive. We are proud to say that every single one has gone well, but Churches are obviously in the spotlight, so don't let standards slip when it comes to measures such as face coverings, hand washing and distancing.

Post-Christmas Leave

Please do your very best to have some time off after Christmas! The world will not end if you take a break.

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. It is important that clergy who are self-isolating send us a note to this address.

Eternal God,

in the stillness of night

you sent your almighty Word

to pierce the world's darkness with the light of salvation:

give to the earth the peace that we long for

and fill our hearts with the joy of heaven

through our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Amen