

LINK PLUS++++

December 2020 – January 2021

Dear Friends

We now know that the government has placed this area in Tier 2 and that we have permission to reopen our church buildings for worship if we so wish. We are, however, back to pre Second Lockdown rules of fresh air, facemasks, and no singing. The conversation now becomes not whether we can reopen, but whether we ought to when we are in the depth of winter and so close to receiving vaccinations. Each church family has/will be making their decisions this weekend.

In the meantime the Zoom services will continue and I am planning a Zoom Christmas Carol Service on Sunday 20th December at 6pm, and a Christmas Day Service at 9.30am on Zoom. Even if you don't normally join in with Zoom services, please feel free to get in touch with one of your church stewards to whom I will be sending the Zoom invitations. If you want to know how to do it, the church is now full of Zoomers (is that a word?) who can help you.

During Advent we prepare ourselves for the coming of Jesus, and look with hope to all God will do in 2021. I am hoping for a better year for us all as we receive vaccinations and can finally meet in person once again. One thing is certain, that, just as the country will take time to recover from COVID-19, so will the church. Many things we took for granted in 2019 will be things we will have to work hard to sustain in the years ahead. This tough time provides us too with the opportunity to try new things, and to make changes. We will not do these things for the sake of it, but for the sake of God's kingdom; as we pray "Thy

kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as in heaven". May we help this to be so in our own fellowships in 2021.

God's blessing upon you this New Year.

Steve

Brean

Happy Christmas to everybody.

Joyce shared a cartoon on her Facebook page last week. Just a hoarding on a fence round a field. The message on the board said:

IF YOU THINK
CHRISTMAS HAS BEEN CANCELLED,
YOU HAVE NO IDEA
WHAT CHRISTMAS MEANS

That same evening I shared in a Zoom session with a dozen Christians from a mix of denominations across the UK and including one man now resident in New Zealand. One of the group, a retired vicar from Sheffield, was asked how he used to prepare for Christmas. It was interesting. He is not a traditionalist. He talked about how, as a priest, he looked forward to the different seasons and dates on the Church calendar because they offered a variety to his routines in his daily worshipping ministry. Advent gave him the chance to see the meaning of the nativity in different ways, as light in the darkness of the year, as God's love for the poor, of hope, of the travails of the traveller, and so on, taken week by week during the Advent season.

He then focussed on worship around Christmas day, highlighting both midnight mass and the Christmas morning 'jamboree' where children and their presents provide the theme of the day. The group wondered what value there was in the jamboree but then seemed to agree that we were not evangelicals in that sense. Others preferred the Midnight mass and its sense of mystery.

I'm not a midnight person, I prefer my nice cosy bed, but I appreciate the sense of mystery and wonder in our faith and recognise how much

we neglect that in our worship life. We don't have to have the same idea of meaning about Christmas as each other, but if God's love is at the heart of our understanding then Christmas cannot be cancelled, surely. And there is light, even in the depth of night, even in the middle of winter. Opening our hearts and minds to the mystery of the Christmas story gives us new understanding of the love that is God with us.

Light for us, even when Covid finally brings us into closing our church for worship. Lockdown has caused us at Brean to forego our worship in this last month and with winter now upon us, we have decided it is best not to open the church for Sunday worship for the foreseeable future. Current rules insist that if we do, we maintain full ventilation. With doors open at front and back and windows open along both sides, we cannot ask people to suffer the resulting cold conditions even for half an hour.

So there will be no Sunday services at Brean for the time being. The carol service this year is also abandoned. It is possible that we shall hold something to commemorate Christmas such as singing carols around the tree that shines light in the darkness outside the front door but even if we do, we aren't allowed to assemble in a group of more than six people.

So it will be Zoom services from now on. The advantage of those of course is that you can sing away to your heart's content. It was good to be together as a Circuit when we shared in worship for Advent Sunday which the Circuit Staff led for us. There were nearly 70 screens being used and by the time that you add the 'doubles', there must have been about 90 people worshipping together. And it was especially good to see familiar faces from across the Circuit present in fellowship ('and are we yet alive to see each other's face')

Having been closed through much of November there is little of news coming out of Brean this month. All of us seem to be in reasonably good health and remain cheerful, so we look forward and onward. Have a good Christmas everybody however you will celebrate it. From

us all, be at peace with one another; and, as best we can, be at peace with the world in which we live.

Harvey Allen

Brent Knoll

There is not much in the way of "news" from us here at Brent Knoll Methodist Church, as you can imagine. Our Chapel has been closed since the initial lockdown back in March and at the time of writing, we're in the middle of the second. We have made the decision to remain closed until next year but we will, of course, let you know as soon as we will be re-opening.

Of course, "next year", isn't that far away and when this Link comes out, we will be in Advent. A very different Advent, I'm sure, for Christians of all denominations, as we look forward to what will be a very different Christmas. Advent is a time when Christians take stock and reflect during the period leading up to the joy of Christmas day, when we remember the birth of Christ. A time of darkness culminating in the arrival of the light of the world.

And this has indeed been, for many, a dark year. For many it's been one filled with fear and uncertainty and for some, loss. It's been a year, the like of which, none of us has experienced before.

But Advent is also a time of great hope. And as we look back to where we were in March of this year to where we are now, there is, indeed, much to be hopeful about. Treatments for this wretched virus have been improving and are proving more effective. Vaccines are being developed. No, we're not as far along as we had hoped we'd be but we're heading in the right direction. The hope of Advent ends with the coming of that great light which is Jesus Christ. Born in poverty, far from home, hounded from his country and forced into exile with his family due to the paranoia of a tyrant King, things couldn't have looked more bleak for this tiny helpless baby. But this child, born into a world in which everything seemed to be against him became the most extraordinary man ever born. A man who emerged undefeated, even from death itself.

From all of us here at Brent Knoll Methodist Church, we are continuing to hold you and each other tightly in our prayers. And may the hope of Advent and the true joy of Christmas sustain us all through these difficult times as we look forward to a brighter future and a happier New year. Always remembering that "this too shall pass".

We wish you every blessing that this season promises. God bless
Rosemary Krull

Burnham

I don't know about you, but I am learning to love ZOOM. From a participant's point of view it is so easy to join a meeting or get together and it is a joy to see so many faces all together (and if you are very nosey like me it is fun to look at the pictures on other people's walls). Of course all this is having to replace face to face interaction because of COVID-19 and this year of 2020 has meant that our lives have had to change in ways that none of us could have imagined this time last year. I can only speak for myself, but I have found the time from the first lockdown to now as we live through the second lockdown quite difficult. Friends who I have talked to and myself found the start of the March lockdown almost liberating, suddenly having little work to do and having the time to take on household chores which had been on our list of " things to do" for ages or taking up new hobbies. Even having to spend so much time alone, as so many people have had to do, was quite pleasant (if you like you own company – as I do). Of course, all this "alone" time becomes very lowering and I understand how this could develop into serious mental health issues.

I am not ashamed to say that I had a fairly short period during the first lockdown when I became aware that I was starting to slide into the dark pit of depression, which was not helped by having to say goodbye to my lovely dog companion. I was fortunate that I knew what was happening to me and had the strategies to be able to pull myself back to a more "normal" me (whatever that is!). All this makes me very aware of the mental wellbeing of people during this time, and I fear for

those whose mental health has been broken by what is going on in the world around us. All healthcare issues have gone onto the back burner whilst COVID-19 has taken over our lives and I think we must all be saddened by those who have had treatment postponed, cancelled and left in fear of what their future may be. I know that mental health disorders grow in times of confusion and uncertainty. I feel useless that there is little I can do to help. I pray, but I wonder sometimes if that is enough!

Except for Christmas Day, we have decided not to reopen the church until 3rd January. Those of us who have been going to Sunday services in church are missing the fellowship that actually being with other people brings. Even though we are socially distanced just having others around is a blessing, although we can't see each other smiling behind the masks. By the way, when we are able to return to church, please wear your thermals, warm coats, scarves, gloves and hats as the church will not be heated- you have been warned.

All being well Christmas will take place this year – in church with a service at 11am + a Zoom service at 9.30am. There will be a Zoom service on Christmas Eve at 11.30pm. On Sunday 20th December there will be a Zoom Carol Service at 6.00pm.

From the 3rd January Burnham will be starting Zoom evening services.

So..I think that's enough from me. But from me and all the rest of the stewarding team have an enjoyable and very safe Christmas (and may our faith be strong in the coming days and months ahead. We are blessed to have the loving God with us.)

Ann Hall

PS. I have new doggie companion now. Joy of Joys!!

East Brent

Well, as I write this, I think we are in the same position as everybody else and just hoping that we will be able to go back to Church on 6th December. It will be good to meet in person again.

We know that Christmas is going to be different this year. At East Brent we have had to accept that we are a small building and will be unable to 'socially distance' for our usual Carols by Candlelight service or our Christmas morning service so those of us who are able will be zooming.

Since this year was destined to be different, we put our heads together and have decided to have a Christmas Tree outside the Church. I have found some solar lights (hope there's enough light to power them), Gordon is organising a sturdy pot, there will be chocolates on the tree for children and a box under the tree, containing a selection of items which we will invite people to help themselves to if they are in need. We know a lot of people are struggling and this might be a way for those of us who are lucky enough to have plenty to be able to offer a little help to those in our local community.

With the current situation in mind I found the following short poem which I thought appropriate. You might also enjoy 'Room at the Inn.'

Best wishes to you all, Happy Christmas however you find yourselves spending it and let's hope 2021 will be a big improvement on 2020.

Margaret

Keeping Christmas

How will your Christmas keep?
Feasting, fasting, or asleep?
Will you laugh or will you pray,
Or will you forget the day?
Be it kept with joy or prayer,
Keep of either some to spare;
Whatsoever brings the day,
Do not keep but give away.

Eleanor Farjeon

Room at the Inn

Draughty, husband, that stable.
She looked ... warm, though.
Almost at home.
And you know, husband, I swear
it's not one mite as dark in there
as you'd have thought.
And that child – so still, so quiet.
Perhaps they'll need more straw?
It won't get any warmer, early hours.
Maybe we should bring them in?
Husband, you're not listening!

There is our bed ...
but then with breakfast early
and so many travellers ...
Well, they won't go tomorrow, surely?
Husband, did you see ...?
Husband!
Oh well, old man, dream on!
Some day we've had,
and then those two arriving,
with every nook and cranny gone!

Funny how those moths
circled the old lantern,
husband. Almost like ...
almost as if those three ...
but no, it couldn't be!
And the light,
you should have seen the light!
Oh, it flickered, but
So bright, so bright,
And night so still.
Draughty it is, that stable,
husband.

Judith Nicholls

West Huntspill

Do you want a Project? We will be celebrating the 170th Anniversary of our building next year.

In anticipation of being able to Celebrate this we are looking ahead and plan a display of knitted scenes based on the life of Jesus. Including miracles and parables. We have a pattern for basic figures knitted on double knitting yarn, these are about 8" (20cm) tall. If you are not a knitter there will be other ways to be involved, e.g. backdrops, scenes, and other props to enhance the chosen story.

If you, your family, your Church or your group are inspired to support us in this venture, or would like more details, please contact Christine Thomas on 01278 256771 and let her know which scene you would like to depict, so that we do not duplicate stories. Thank you.

Janet Johnson

PS: You may remember our knitted Christmas tree in 2012 made up of green knitted squares, the squares were sewn together to make blankets and given to various charities.

PLUS +++ POEMS, PRAYERS and OTHER MESSAGES

Gifts

There's sunshine that's dapples 'neath tall stately trees
There's hoar frost on holly and a cool Summer breeze
There's a call from a friend, and a baby's first smile
These are memories to cherish when we rest for a while.

Now all senses tell us that free gifts abound
When we look do we see them; do we listen for sounds?
Do we touch the red rose, do we smell the sweet scent?
Are we receptive to gifts that have been freely sent?
So love came at Christmas, in a poor cattle stall
The most precious gift given so freely for all
Do we fall on our knees and thank God above
For His gifts to us all of peace, joy, and unbounded love?

Margaret Harris – Burnham

More Questions

“How do you know it’s Autumn?”

“Oh! The Fair came to Bridgwater
It stayed for a while, then it went.

The bonfires glowed and burnt
And fireworks were soon spent.

Carnival carts passed by
We lined the streets to watch.”

“How do you know it’s Winter?”

“Well, the shops are full of people

All buying what they can,
Presents, decorations, cards
Oh don’t forget the food.

Canned Carol music clamours to be heard,
But the shoppers hurry on.”

“And what do you know about Christmas?”

“God sent his only Son

To be the Saviour of our world.

He came a little baby thing,

But when he grew to be a man

He showed us how we should live.

That’s why we celebrate his birth.

Angels spoke to shepherds that first Christmas Day.”

“Shepherds?” “Yes, shepherds, the lowest of the low

They heard of a baby born in a stable,

They heard of the unexpected yet did as they were told.
They saw the baby Jesus lying in the hay.
Wise Man gazed in wonder at a star
They were open to suggestion,
As it compelled them to journey Westward
To a place they knew not.
They found little Jesus
And humbly offered gifts
They worshipped and adored him
Before God bade them flee.

The fair came and went!
The Carnival passed by!
Bonfire night is spent
But don't let Christmas pass you by.
Remember Jesus came to stay
And Christmas can be with us
This and every day."

Supplied by Christine Thomas (written by Alison when she was 13)

Why there is No Nativity this Year!!

No Nativity this year because the 3 Wise Men face a travel ban.
The Shepherds have been furloughed.

The Inn Keeper has shut under tier 3 regulations and had a slump in bookings.

Santa won't be working as he would break the rule of 6 with Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Donner and Blitzen.

As for Rudolph, with that red nose, he should be isolating and taking a test!



Christmas

The sound of shoppers and the bustle seems to fill the humid air,
There are tired and anxious faces always brushing here and there,
The screech of brakes and anger seem to permeate the scene
I feel the sadness and regret of what it might have been.

How did this stress and melancholy seep into our world today?
How did this world's fripperies become its valuables and here to stay?
That first Christmas was so simple just a mother and her child
The hillsides and the shepherds and God's son so meek and mild
The message of the angels spoke of peace and love to all.
All embodied in a baby sleeping in a cattle stall.
If only we could feel that peace,
God's miracle of love
A priceless gift, a holy birth sent freely from above
The message of the angels tries to speak to us today,
Why does this clamour of our selfish world keep getting in the way?

Margaret Harris – Burnham

Once and Always

Once, in Royal David's city -
But not in some palace high on a hill
Full of fragrance and servants and welcomes
And fanfares in rich marbled halls –
No, not cradled in luxury's lap
But quietly once in royal David's city he came
As planned from sin's first need to love's great gift:
God with us - Immanuel.

Angels from the Realms of Glory
split the eardrums, dazzled eyes –
but not of most of the folk all around
so busy they overlooked a heavenly host and frowned
on smelly shepherds gabbling Saviours in a darken world
while angels from the realms of glory trumpeted hope,
as planned from sins first need to love's great gift:
God on earth with us - Immanuel.

That silent night, away in a manger
Amid grain husks and dust and snuffling beasts
With a still crumpled face and blood stained eyes
Barely open yet already full of his world and it's need,
An out of place child lay, so nearly ignored
That silent night there in a manger
As planned from sin's first need to love's great gift:
God made flesh, on earth with us – Immanuel.

So, in a bleak midwinter, if you're wondering what this means,
Come close: see Bethlehem's baby, fully grown
And beckoning with outstretched arms.
Read your name and mine engraved deep in his psalms
With a love stronger than death: his death, our life.
For in our bleak midwinter Jesus comes
As planned from sin's first need to love's great gift:
God's only Son made flesh, on earth with us – Immanuel
Our Lord, Immanuel.

Written by Alison Fuggle
From Christian Music Ministries

Everyone at West Huntspill wish you all a Happy peaceful Christmas
and we all look forward to a better 2021! **Maureen**

Christmas Bells

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!
And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along

The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to all!
Till ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime,
A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to All!
And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said;
"For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to All!"
Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The Wrong shall fail,
The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to All.

(as supplied by Judy Allen)

**The Craft Teacup Creative Centre
57b Victoria Street Burnham On Sea**

Free Hot Food Every Tuesday until February 2021

**Delicious home cooked food for individuals and families who
need a hot nutritious meal (bring a takeaway container)**

Please share and spread the word

A biblical cake for Christmas

(found by Judy Allen among papers left by her grandmother who died in 1962)

2 cups of flour - 1 Kings 4.22

1 cup butter – Judges 5.25

1 cup sweet cane sugar – Jeremiah 6.20

2 cups raisins – 1 Samuel 30.12

2 cups ripe figs – Nathum 3.12

2 cups chopped almonds – Numbers 17.8

2 teaspoons honey (though we wonder whether this should be 2 tablespoons) – Proverbs 24.13

2 teaspoons yeast – Amos 4.5 uses the term ‘leaven’; you might prefer 1 Corinthians 5.6 if you want to use ‘yeast’ though the recipe is all from the Hebrew scripture otherwise)

½ cup milk – Judges 4.19

pinch of salt – Leviticus 2.13

6 eggs – Deuteronomy 22.6

Spice to taste – 2 Chronicles 9.9

Judy suggests you use the usual creaming method and a slow bake.

Christmas & New Year Wishes

'Wishing all my friends peace and joy this Christmas and a happier healthier New Year

Love Kathy Davies, Brean

Do you know someone who is going to be on their own this Christmas Day and would welcome a meal?

Would you be prepared to offer a meal to someone on Christmas Day?

If you can answer ‘Yes’ to either of these questions, please give Liz Bennett a ring to see how we can help each other this Christmas time.



**A SPECTACULAR
ONLINE FESTIVE
PRODUCTION on the 5
th & 6th December at
7:00pm (repeated each
night)**

South West Carols

Something really special is taking place on 5th & 6th December, 7pm each night! Thousands will tune into South West Carols which sets to be the biggest festive carols and nativity event in the South West. We all know 2020 has been WAY different than anyone imagined but there's one thing we can all look forward to - Christmas! Our first ever South West Carols event will be a celebration of all the GOOD things that take place at this wonderful time of the year as we remember the reason for the season. With regional and headline musical performances including from London Community Gospel Choir, Wildwood Kin, Lucy Grumble, Exeter Cathedral Choir, South West Musicians, and more. Plus, the South West's biggest ever nativity with participants from schools all over the region.

Watch LIVE at www.southwestcarols also Facebook and YouTube.

This will also be our evening service for the 6th December - we will watch together via ZOOM (God and technology willing). Contact Chris for an invitation to the ZOOM party (starting at 6:30pm) - regular Sunday ZOOMers will get the invitation anyway.

The deadline for the February Link Plus is 29th January 2021

***God's Blessing be upon you for Christmas and the New
Year!***