



The Aldershot and North Camp Anchor

Issue 36: Sunday 10th January 2021



Dear Friends,

Greetings to you all at the start of 2021. I selected the image above for this New Year edition of 'The Anchor' because it spoke to me about the message of Christmas – a time when we celebrate the light of Jesus shining in a darkened world. The image of the shining sun reminds us that the light of Jesus, the Son of God, continues to shine on us, to guide us and to comfort us even as we walk through difficult days.

One of the powerful messages of the Bible is that the 'heroes of the faith' that it describes, are not shown as having perfect or trouble-free lives. Time and time again we see that God chooses imperfect men and women to serve Him in making His plans and purposes known to others. These imperfect people are used by God, but it is also clear that, as they serve God, they continue to face trials and difficulties. The fact that they have responded to God's call doesn't guarantee them trouble-free or easy lives.

Saint Paul was a powerful leader in the early years of the Christian Church, but his background was as an opponent of the believers of Jesus and, after his conversion on the road to Damascus, he faced many troubles as he travelled from place to place telling others about Jesus. In 2 Corinthians chapter 11 verses 23 to 27, Paul lists some of these difficult experiences including having been in prison, having been flogged, stoned and beaten, having been shipwrecked three times and having known hunger and thirst.

We may not have to face exactly the same challenges as Paul faced, but, as we read about Paul's experiences, we are reminded of two important truths at the start of 2021.

The first is that, despite our imperfections and failures, God still wants to use us to make the love of Jesus known to others; and the second is that God is with us even as we continue to face a series of challenges individually and collectively. Being a follower of Jesus doesn't guarantee that we will have an easy life – but we can trust in the promise of the risen Jesus, given at the very end of Matthew's Gospel, that whatever challenges we face in this New Year, Jesus will be with us always, "to the very end of the age".

These important truths are a 'Message of Hope' for us all at the start of 2021.

Yours in His service

Worship Reflection for the First Sunday after Epiphany

Hymn (StF 224)

As with gladness men of old,
Did the guiding star behold,
As with joy they hailed its light,
Leading onward, beaming bright;
So, most gracious Lord, may we
Evermore be led to Thee!



Prayer: Thank you Lord for your light, guiding to Bethlehem, shining in the mountain, pouring from the empty tomb and lighting up our hearts. Thank you for the knowledge that, whatever life brings, you will give light to our path, this and every day. Amen.

Bible Reading (Matthew 2 v selected verses)

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.' When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: "And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel."'

..... When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that

the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Reflection

You will know the old joke about a primary school nativity play. The play reached the moment when the three wise travellers were about to offer the gifts they had brought. 'Here is gold' said the first, 'Here is myrrh' said the second. There was then a pause while the third child struggled to remember his line before he moved forward and proclaimed in a loud voice, 'And Frank sent this'.

The three gifts presented to the young Jesus all have symbolic significance. Gold is for a King, frankincense represents the worship of the divine, while myrrh carries with it hints of suffering and death. Each of those symbolic gifts tells us something significant about the baby of Bethlehem.

What is perhaps even more important however, are the gifts that each one of us is invited to bring. In the words of the final verse of Christina Rossetti's hymn 'In the bleak mid-winter'

What can I give Him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man, I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give Him, give my heart.

These may be familiar words – but they challenge us all at the start of 2021.

Prayers of Intercession

This week let us pray especially:

- For the efficient distribution of the newly approved vaccines
- For all who feel particularly anxious at the start of this new year.

Gracious God, we ask these prayers through Jesus Christ, our risen Lord and Saviour. Amen

Hymn (StF 227 v 1 and 4)

Brightest and best of the sons of the morning,
Dawn on our darkness and lend us thine aid;
Star of the East, the horizon adorning,
Guide where our infant Redeemer is laid.

Final Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, Light of the world, shine on us, shine in us, shine through us, and so bring honour to your name. Amen.

**Thank
You**

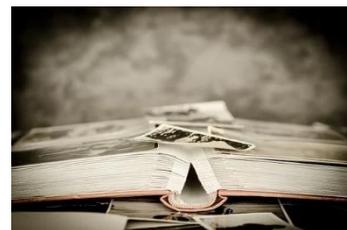
Thank you to everyone who contributed to our on-line Christmas services by sharing in the Bible readings or by sending a contribution to the 'Digital Christmas Cards'. Over 50 different people were involved, and, at the time of writing, the two Carol Services and the combined Christmas Day Service have been viewed over 360 times! Thank you all for being willing to get involved.

Keeping in Contact



In the light of the new Covid-19 restrictions, the Church Stewards at Aldershot and at North Camp have decided to close our buildings for gathered worship throughout January. In both Churches this decision will be kept under review, but our buildings are unlikely to reopen before there is a significant improvement in the Covid-19 situation.

We plan to continue to produce the 'Anchor' and the weekly video reflections so that we can keep in contact with each other. In both churches our teams of Pastoral Visitors will continue to seek to support those in particular need, but if you would like to talk with Rev Chris Blake do please ring him on 01252 548215.



Precious Memories

I hope that next week's edition will start the 'Precious Memories' series of articles. Perhaps you would like to write about a family member or friend who was an example to you of what it means to follow Jesus – or perhaps you might write about a memory of a special place where you have sensed God's presence – or perhaps about someone who stood by you at a difficult time. If you can find a photograph to go with your article that would be good - but if not, articles without photographs will be accepted. So why not look out those old photograph albums and get writing!