



Wednesday, December 23rd 2020

Dear Friends,

You will all be aware of the lockdown at Alert Level 4 which was imposed at short notice by the Welsh Government at the weekend due to increasing Coronavirus infection rates. We have also been made aware that there is now a new strain of the virus in circulation in Wales which is passed on more easily than the previous mutation. Experts have stated that this, in itself, is likely to result in increased cases and, regrettably, increased deaths.

In response, The Church in Wales issued updated guidance on Monday, December 21st. Whilst places of worship are not required to close, they have nevertheless been asked to carefully review the services which they plan to hold over the coming weeks.

Commenting on this guidance, Bishop Cherry has written as follows:

I am also mindful of a growing anxiety about holding Christmas services at all this year. Whilst places of worship do not need to close for services and worship, I would strongly urge clergy and PCCs to review very carefully the services that they have planned to offer. Many, I know, have gone the extra mile to ensure that all the regulations are strictly adhered to and I am extremely grateful for that. However, meeting at all is a risk in these circumstances and whilst maintaining a social distance of 2m might be relatively easy to monitor inside a church building, it is not so easy outside. 2m is a lot further than most of us think and, even with the best will in the world, we naturally gravitate towards one another.

It is OK not to hold Christmas services in our churches this year. It is OK not to attend public worship in a church building this Christmas. Far better to stay safe and to keep one another safe. Far better to live-stream with a minimum of people present, if that is possible. We can always read the Christmas story to ourselves and have some time of prayer in our own homes. We can even sing carols there – and with gusto! And there will be plenty services live-streamed and others on the television that we can tune into.

Assistant Priest: Reverend Jeff Pearse

St. Mary's Priory – Christchurch – Holy Trinity – St. Peter's

 St. Mary's Priory Church, Monk Street, Abergavenny, NP7 5ND

 07985 241700  jeff.pearse@hotmail.co.uk



This has been a hard and challenging year and it is going to be some while before we are back to anything like 'normal'. Please do keep yourself and others safe this Christmas. There will be time to meet together again, to worship and celebrate together again, when it is safe to do so.

May God richly bless each and every one of you this Christmastide.

In view of Bishop Cherry's advice, the Wardens at all the four Churches in the Benefice and I have re-considered the services that were scheduled to take place over the next few weeks, including those on Christmas Day. As a result, it has been decided to close our churches for worship with immediate effect. This, regrettably, will include services due to be held on Christmas Day. The situation will be reviewed periodically and our churches will re-open for worship when it is felt appropriate. The Area Dean, Fr. Julian Gray has been fully informed during our discussions and is supportive of our decision.

We will broadcast services on the AACT Facebook site throughout the period of closure, including on Christmas Day and Sunday next, the Feast of John, Apostle and Evangelist.

I realise that this decision will be a great disappointment, and can assure you that it has not been taken lightly – and indeed has been taken with heavy hearts. However, it is felt that it is an action which is necessary considering the current phase of the pandemic.

It may seem that, at the moment, we are receiving one piece of bad news after another. We may wish to hold before us these words from the Archbishop of Canterbury: *"That's how God gets involved in this world. He comes right into the dirtiest, nastiest, most difficult parts of it and is utterly with us - Emmanuel, God with us. Not God at us or God looking down on us, but God with us. Keep to that message."*

With my sincerest wishes for a Happy and Blessed Christmas,

Jeff

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