

Vicar's Letter – December 2018
Advent Sunday - 'The Light in the Darkness'

Dear friends

We welcome the season of Advent as a timely reminder of where our hope lies and in whom we place our trust. Although the switching on of the Christmas lights in Tewkesbury last Sunday might be for many simply an annual tradition in the run up to Christmas, for us, it is a prophetic symbol of the coming of Him who is the Light of the World.

He is, **'The true light that gives light to every person' (John 1:9).**

This stands in stark contrast to the deep darkness that exists in the hearts of the few that has the ability to terrorise the lives of so many. Such is the state of our world that we can be led to think the darkness is stronger than the light. Yet it is the flickering candles that symbolise the power of love over hatred.

St Paul reminds us: **'Do not be overcome by evil; but overcome evil with good'** (Romans 12:21)

The hope and light of Jesus Christ transforms the darkness. This month of Christmas lights and candles reminds us of our need to seek the light of Christ, to be those who carry the light of Christ and let it shine through us in our daily lives (Matthew 5:14). I love to hear the stories of how members of our fellowship are letting the light of Christ shine through them in the care we give to one another and the love we show to the poor and needy in our community. Sometimes you are being Jesus as you go out with the intention of seeking to bless others (with bags of blessing for the homeless or as Street Pastors or through the foodbank etc) and sometimes this happens as you see opportunity through the course of your daily lives. You are sacrificing your own comfort and self interest to transform the darkness through acts of love which can sometimes be quite costly not just financially but in time. It is wonderful to hear these stories that simply bubble up from around our congregation.

As we enter this season of Advent let us pursue the way of love and continue to let the light of Christ work through us to transform the dark places around us.

The invitation

Advent is also a season in which we express God's invitation to participate in the celebrations of the birth of Jesus. Just as God has invited us, we too want to invite others. Please, please do take some of the invitation leaflets and help us distribute them around our parish. We want everyone to know of God's love for them, that they are included and invited to participate in the celebrations of His love.

Blessing our Extended Family – our Mission Partners

Why not consider sending a Christmas Card to our mission partners and expressing our love to them at this time of year when they are serving the Lord away from home, family and friends in a foreign culture? They would be so blessed by this simply act of love. (Contact details on the Mission Board).

Gift Day Blessing

As a result of the tremendous sum given at our Gift Day on Pentecost Sunday for the purchase of the Old Mission Hall, the PCC felt we should give away an equivalent 10% (a tithe) of what was given to support a building project overseas. Having made that decision, we very soon learnt that our mission partners Chris and Suzy Wilson in Gambella, Ethiopia, desperately needed to build a new dormitory for their students at their Theological College as the one they currently live in is subject to repeated flooding. Of course for many in our church remembering the floods of 2007 that affected so many, this is a concern close to our hearts. When we learnt that the sum they needed matched the sum we had earmarked to give away, it was an easy decision. So it is with great joy that £15,000 has now been received by them for their project. Do read Chris and Suzy's newsletters. They are inspirational and deeply challenging as they seek to bring the light of Christ into the ever threatening darkness of that part of the world.

We live in a world impacted by 'darkness'. We desperately need the light and love of Christ. That transformation will only happen when the church is on her knees. As we prepare to celebrate Christmas and welcome the community to share the joy with us, let us pray for his transforming presence to touch the hearts of all people. Let us pray that his Light will dispel the dark places within us and may the gift of His love overcome all fear.

'In the dark streets shineth the everlasting Light'

**In Christ,
Stephen**