

SUNDAY 20TH DECEMBER ADVENT 4

Thought for the week: Advent -

"Love is in the air."

So went the John Paul Young song by the same name recorded in 1978. I know, where does the time go, getting on for fifty years ago when "Christmas Top of the Pops" was prime time TV viewing.

The lyrics of the opening verse state:

Love is in the air, everywhere I look around
Love is in the air, every sight and every sound
And I don't know if I'm being foolish
Don't know if I'm being wise
But it's something that I must believe in

And it's there when I look in your eyes. (If you want to play the rest of the song, follow the link: [\(106\) John Paul Young - Love Is In The Air \(1978\) - YouTube](#) (simply press "CTRL" and left click of the mouse over the link)

Of course, Paul Young is more than likely talking about finding love of a romantic nature but the same idea can be true on a spiritual level too.



One of the things I notice from modern culture is not so much that people don't know the Christmas story – if you asked them most people would probably be able to tell you that Christmas has something to do with the birth of Jesus, in a stable, and probably something to do with shepherds and animals, especially a donkey. No, it's not so much that they don't know the story it's that it passes them by, or to be more precise, we pass it by like passing by a loving-crafted display in the front window of a shop in the Shopping Mall at break neck speed on our way to get what we think 'we really want' somewhere else.

The irony would almost prompt frustration and laughter from a Panto, echoing the great lines often shouted by the audience, "look behind you" if it weren't so painful and hugely important. Even in the Church, we can do something of the same. We busy ourselves with many things, getting all the logistics and carols and these days, Powerpoints sorted for however many services (this year online as well as physically), yet in the process also miss the point of why and for whom we are doing it all.

But for those who come across the Nativity scene in either place, and pause a while, who join with Mary and Joseph in gazing longingly into the eyes of the Christ child and allowing the Christ child to gaze longingly into theirs, they get it and we can get it too way beyond what we can be able to put into any words or any song.

Love can and is found in the strangest of places amongst the straw not just two thousand years ago but right here in these days. Love, quite literally, is "in the air, in every sight and every sound. And I don't know if I'm being foolish, I don't know if I'm being wise, but it's something I must believe in, and it's there when I look into your eyes."

Funny that. Timeless. Epic. Eternal.



Postscript:

One can continue the analogy of the Nativity Shop Window display in the Shopping Mall. Of course, its one thing to discover the wonder and love at the heart of Christmas for oneself. But will we take the next step of venturing across the threshold and enter the shop to see what's inside this unusual shop marked "Love" and which at its most basic is meant to be "the story of God."

It can be scary. We don't know if we will fit in or if we will find a 'welcome.' We pass the rails of clothes of other people's lives and strangely we recognise there are many with shapes and sizes just like our own. We discover the Bible is full of them, all witnesses who have gone before us, to this testimony to love.



That's where productions like the "The Chosen" come in and can be such a help to us, to realise we are not alone with feelings, hopes and dreams, and even worries and nightmares. "The Chosen" (see the separate item below for further details of how to access it) gives space and time not only for us to discover the characters and characteristics of so many of those that were around at the time of Jesus, it enables us to realise they are just like us and we are just like them, captured and captivated by the emegmatic smile of the baby turned Messiah.

Why not then take the time to watch "The Chosen" this Christmas.

Matt Thomson

Funny:



Continuing the theme of Shop Windows, came across a picture of this "Henry" Nativity – obviously not one to gather dust...

Matt Thomson



What is happening Church wise over the Christmas and into the New Year:

Plans for Christmas:

Following on from the announcements last weekend:

Christmas Eve – 24th Dec – Christingle Service 4.00pm – ONLINE ONLY via Livestream – This is perhaps the most popular service of the year in both churches and in both villages. This year, we are Livestreaming the service from Congresbury as we hope to dedicate the replacement Nativity Set following the old one being stolen at the beginning of Lockdown.

Packs to (DIY) "Make Your Own" Christingle will be available from both Churches as from the 19th to pick up throughout the week, enabling social distancing, with the Churches open each day leading up to Christmas. All you will need to complete your Christingle will be an orange.

Details of how to join the Livestream will be included in the packs.

Christmas "Midnight Mass" – 24th Dec – 11.30pm – will be in Banwell and will also be Livestreamed. Being the larger of the two churches, we will be able to take greater numbers. As part of the service there will be an Agape Meal (something we have shared before) to welcome the Christ child, "Immanuel" amongst us. For the service you will need a Candle, some bread, some wine/grape juice or water, and some fruit.



Christmas Day 25th Dec – 10.30am – IN A CHANGE TO OUR ORIGINAL PLANS - there WILL NOW BE A **JOINT SERVICE** in **Congresbury**, with the service also being Livestreamed.

The reason for this is that at the beginning of the week we had a very moving email from our friend Pastor Nihad Salman at Immanuel Church, in Bethlehem explaining some of the severe challenges they have been facing as a Christian community during the time of this Pandemic – loss of economic earnings because of the collapse of the tourist trade, which the Christian community in Bethlehem relies upon, increased tension, graffiti and violence from a small group of Muslim fundamentalists, and, of course, coping with the Virus itself with a healthcare system that gets only a tenth of the grant from the state that the rest of Israel receives.



So as a desire to show compassion and love to a Church community many from our two churches have met personally we are going to make a short video of encouragement and love to send to Bethlehem during the service itself and we will be making possible a “retiring collection” to send a “gift offering” out to the Church there if anyone would like to contribute.

Again, there will be an Agape Meal as part of the service so everyone can join in sharing welcoming Jesus into our midst on this Christmas day after what has been such a difficult year. Please join us.

PLEASE NOTE: There will NOT therefore be a service in Banwell on this day, but we would encourage everyone to come to Congresbury for the service and/or to join us ONLINE.

N.B: If numbers are too great at any of the Hybrid services, we may need to defer to worshipping outside at short notice. We would rather do this and include everyone rather than go down the ‘ticketing’ route. So, if you are attending physically, PLEASE “layer up” and come willing to wrap up and go outside if necessary. Seating will be provided. All services will aim to be under an hour.

Sunday 27th Dec – will be from Banwell as the 1st Sunday after Christmas:

Please join us either physically or online. We will be continuing to share in the Carols and continuing the Christmas spirit.

New year’s Day - Friday 1st Jan 12.00 (noon) from Congresbury:

We will be meeting physically and online with a short service to pray over so much that has happened this year, to offer people and situations back to God and also to look to the future and pray God’s blessing on 2021. Important to mark the turning of the year, especially this year.

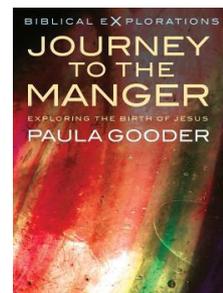
You can access all of our services online **LIVE** via the “New Creation Facebook Page” :

<https://www.facebook.com/NewCreationChurches/> or catch up later via the New Creation website:

<http://www.newcreationchurches.org.uk/> or New Creation YouTube Channel :

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXn34qIXIXBeOAmO1M1KbBw/>

Daily Blog – What’s happening this week? This week we will be looking at the Story of Christmas in greater depth by exploring a recent book by Paula Gooder called, “Journey to the Manger.” Some of you may remember Paula as someone who came and led a most successful Church weekend at Brunel Manor, in Devon a few years ago. Paula is now at St Paul’s Cathedral in London. She is a very engaging writer and speaker, and we look forward to sharing the Christmas story through her eyes and through Scripture.



If you would like to follow the Daily Blog as part of your journey of faith, you can access via the “New Creation Facebook Page” : <https://www.facebook.com/NewCreationChurches/>, via the New Creation website: <http://www.newcreationchurches.org.uk/> or New Creation YouTube Channel : <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXn34qIXIXBeOAmO1M1KbBw/>

Also NEW for After Christmas – the “Living Faith” Group will start meeting again Online on a Monday Evening (beginning Monday 11th Jan at 7.30pm for an hour) looking at “The Chosen” – the NEW STORY of Jesus:

We will be looking at the new ‘phenomenon’ which is the world crowd funded TV adaptation of the Life of Jesus called “The Chosen.” Series 1 has already been released and funding for Series 2 is just about complete and due to be released over the Christmas period.



“The Chosen” can be obtained for free, either via YouTube (simply type in “The Chosen” or via an App, which can be downloaded to your Smartphone or Tablet.

There is also a “Christmas Special” with a much modern contemporary artists endorsing the project and leading up to a screening of “The Shepherds” – the Story of Christmas, a short film the director made which started the whole Project off.

The “Living Faith” group is a great opportunity for anyone who perhaps wishes to explore faith for the first time or who would like to revisit the foundations of their faith to join in, ask questions, or who simply wants to listen as we share what this remarkable piece of Christian television can say to us about the person of Jesus at the centre of our faith.

Its all very exciting. Details of how to join the group will be forthcoming next week and we will post these on the website and Facebook pages. See our website: <http://www.newcreationchurches.org.uk/> or our Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/NewCreationChurches/>



DIY CHRISTINGLE PACKS for Christmas Eve: These are available to collect in BOTH Churches as from Wednesday 16th December. On all our behlaves, I would like to thank the teams in each Church who gave up their Saturday mornings to help put them all together.

With nearly a 1000 Christingle packs going out this Christmas, please pray for each one to find a ‘home’ and pray for each household that the life and Light of Jesus may be theirs and ours this Christmas.

Please think about who you could collect and give a “DIY Christingle Pack” to this Christmas.

Matt Thomson

Please continue to pray for Bishop Peter Hancock and for his family:

As Christmas approaches, please continue to keep Bishop Peter and his family in your thoughts and prayers. Bishop Peter was diagnosed with a particularly aggressive form of Leukaemia during the Pandemic and has been undergoing treatment in hospital. He has stepped back from his role as figurehead of the Diocese for some time and so please pray also for Bishop Ruth, for Howard and their family as she continues on in this role in his stead.