Link Magazine Christmas 2020

St Ninian's Stonehouse

Wondering

Do you ever wonder how people don't know something that you thought everyone knew?

I ask because I met three people last week who didn't know something I thought everyone would know. They all thought that because the church building was closed that we had stopped doing everything, when the opposite is true. We have now had almost 40 services online, all available as a video on the website, facebook, youtube and as a podcast on Spotify, Amazon, Google and Apple podcasts as well as by telephone.

But it seems that not everyone knows that.

Around 300 people join with us for worship each week across all of these platforms. That's almost 3 times more than a normal Sunday morning. So, when the church reopens, online services will continue, not as a replacement, but as another way for people to join together in worship.

Who have you told? Have you shared our services? Invited any of your friends?

All this made me wonder...

Do we assume that everyone knows what Advent and Christmas are all about?

And do we also assume that we know all there is to know about it?

What is it that each of us hear as we journey through Advent towards the celebration of the birth of Jesus? We can all tell the story with angels and Mary and Joseph and a stable and shepherds and wise men visiting a baby. We say that it is good news. But do we really stop and think what the news is, or what it means for us?

Advent is an opportunity to pause.

To wait with intention.

To look forward to a moment when we know that things will change, or at least have the chance to.

2020 has been a year that none of us will ever forget. A year of lockdown, separation and grief, as well as generosity, community spirit and innovation. We have probably all discovered things about ourselves. Some of us have enjoyed the break from a busy schedule while others have worked around the clock. Some have lost jobs and others have found new things to occupy their time.

Although we are all journeying through the same pandemic each of us has a very different experience of it. Perhaps the one thing we share is the hope that it will get better. That things will change.

Early on, as we got used to masks and being 2 metres apart, there was a lot of talk about the 'new normal', that when this was all over things would be profoundly different. I'm not so sure of that now. I have a dread that instead of leaving behind some things that we don't need anymore, we will pick up everything in our rush to re-establish our lives.

As we approach the birth of Jesus perhaps this year, more than any other, we might take the time to think about the implications, not just of a baby being born, but of God entering into our world. Moving into the neighbourhood. To be with us. All of us. Always.

With every blessing, Stewart



Hi Folks

Well, what can I say? This is the strangest of times. When I wrote my letter for the March magazine, little did I think life would change so much. It has been a difficult time for some and a relaxing time for others and, I must say, at the beginning of lockdown I was quit enjoying the peace and quiet, working in the garden in the lovely sunshine but missing my family and friends; the phone was red hot!

Things seemed to calm down for a wee while then back comes the virus in full flow and I think second time around is going to be harder to deal with as we approach the winter months.

All our usual activities have had to be cancelled and I am still holding money for the sale of tickets for the Fashion Sale in April. So, if you bought one I hope you have held on to it as we will book one first chance we get. I'm sure you will all e desperate to stock up your wardrobe. Isn't it amazing how long we can go without buying any new clothes and still have more than enough to wear, or am I the only one?

I hope you have had access to the Sunday services online. Stewart has tried his hardest to ensure folks get to listen to the service one way or another. Over than above this, he has been conducting funeral services for folks in the village and surrounding areas.

Sadly, we have lost some of our faithful members and they will be sadly missed. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of: Billy Roy, Marion Clark, Elizabeth Watt, Janet Sorbie, Catherine Steel, Tom Nicol, Jean Cooper, Isabel Hamilton, Pearl Foster, Pat Thornton, Bill Cassells, and Mima Kennedy. Pearl, Pat, Bill and Mima were faithful and hardworking elders who went beyond the call of duty spending many hours working for the church. Our thoughts are also with out folks in the village who have lost loved ones.

Funeral services have been very strange, with numbers limited due to the virus and I think we have all been left feeling sad that we have been unable to say a proper goodbye. I personally would like to thank Stewart as I know he has been a comfort and help to all the families in the way he has conducted services as best he can under the difficult circumstances.

Some good news! A warm welcome to our church family is extended to some new members: Mr Peter and Mrs Elizabeth Buchan and Grace Raugh.

The thing I have missed most over the last 8 months is the personal contact with everyone; the chats over coffee and cake, the laughter and companionship. I do hope it's not too long before we can meet together.

I hope some of you have been able to wanter around the church grounds taking in the prayer walk. Thanks to Douglas and Anne Thompson for setting it all up. I know it has been a comfort to many.

I know there are a number of you who have been thinking about our treasurer, Bill Storrie, who had a serious accident in July. Bill is an inspiration to us all. Please continue to keep Bill and Jillian in your prayers.

Our hope was to open the church in September but, just as the Kirk Session made the decision, we were put into local lockdown and we had to call a quick meeting when the Session agreed it was not appropriate to open at this time. Our main concern is for the safety of all our members which we are you will understand.

I have not listed streets to pray for as, at this time, I would encourage you to pray for the whole village; for patience, for health, for those alone and feeling they can't cope, for the bereaved and the housebound. Remember God is with us in our sadness and in our laughter. When we are struggling to make sense of it all, all that is happening to us and around us, God is there.

As we move forward to Christmas, things are all a bit up in the air! We will keep you updated with any changed. I with you all a peaceful and healthy Christmas and New Year which may be a wee bit different than normal but, as long as we are safe, that's all that really matters.

God bless you all, Margaret

Church Diaries

I want to reassure everyone that I am hoping to take delivery of church diaries in early to mid-December this year. Diaries can be collected from me at 2 Argyle Street or I can deliver to you if you'd like to contact me on 01698 793591.

Wishing you all that is good this Christmas. Keep well.

Anne Law

Light in the Darkness

For many people Christmas can be a time that brings sadness with the memories of people now gone from our lives, for whatever reason. Being surrounded by people preparing to celebrate leaves little space to acknowledge these feelings and to value them.

Light in the Darkness has become a time when all of us who have those feelings of loss and sadness come together to spend time giving thanks for what has been and finding hope and comfort in words and music.

This year we are unable to come together in church but Light in the Darkness will take place online at 3pm on Sunday 13th December. Please visit **st-ninians-stonehouse.org.uk** to find out more.





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WHO MIGHT FIND
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LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

3PM SUNDAY 13TH DECEMBER ONLINE AT

ST-NINIANS-STONEHOUSE.ORG.UK

Sunday School

Wow! I can't believe it's been 8 months since we were all in church together, signing, praying, learning and having fun!

The good news is the praying, learning and having fun hasn't stopped for our Sunday School! We continue to meet on a Sunday morning, but not in the church or hall. We use Zoom which is video calling app. We use Zoom so we can all see each other and talk to each other, unless Stewart "mutes" us, (which he likes to do from time to time when we get too noisy!)

We usually start our get-togethers by sharing our news and telling each other about what we have been doing through the week. Then Stewart teaches us about a bible story, we discuss the meaning and message. Following the story, we get creative and have made various items, like palm crosses, remembrance poppies and sheep bookmarks. My personal favourite was when we painted stones and then gave them to people in the community. We also enjoy playing games, which is more difficult on Zoom than when we are in the church hall, but fun nevertheless. We all love it when Stewart tells us we are playing "Bring Me A...." This is when Stewart asks us to find a random object in our homes or gardens....we always have a good laugh seeing what everyone finds, especially when he asks for something old! (I brought my Mum to the laptop!)

On a couple of occasions, the children have enjoyed leading the Sunday School session, we each are given a role. The last time I read the story while Cameron arranged the craft.

A few weeks ago, we were joined by Matt Baines, the Youth Development Officer from the United Reformed Church. Matt told us about the Synod and what they do to encourage the young people in the congregations. Before Matt's visit I didn't know much about the Synod and I enjoyed hearing and learning about the charity work that they do and hope that St Ninians can get involved in fundraising.

If you think our Sunday School sounds interesting and would like to join us, or know of anyone you think would enjoy it, please ask them to contact Stewart, who will give them the login details.

I hope until we are back together you keep well and stay safe. Be kind to each other!

Church Flowers

As you will know by now, Margaret Patrick and myself have taken over leading the committee from the indefatigable, Ann Anderson, who is now taking a back seat but very much still involved and giving sage advice and encouragement. I am sure Margaret will agree with me that she has been a wonderful influence on us both to becoming involved in the flower committee. This is an important part of ministry and we should never underestimate the positive effects delivering flowers to people can have. I am sure the loyal band of distributors will have their own wee special stories that have touched them over the years. What a beautiful way to spread a little of God's love and blessing to people in the community.

Having said that, we live in strange times and that initially resulted in a halt to distributing flowers during lockdown. Instead we prioritised sending cards to people who were ill or bereaved. Since lockdown eased a little, and following the guidelines, we manage to distribute flowers and cards to all the housebound in our worshipping community. Nearly fifty homes received a card detailing how to access the church serve online or by phone. I am grateful to all the distributors for their help and donations. We continue to prioritise the sick and bereaved but we will be guided by the Scottish Government advice going forward

We are forever grateful to everyone for their ongoing donations.

Please let me know if you would like to donate to the flower fund for a particular date in 2021. If you donated in 2020 we will automatically add you to the 2021 list unless you wish to change any of the dates. Please let me know by contacting me by:

Telephone 01698 792002 or email dthmpsn641@aol.com

Stay safe. Stay well. Stay blessed.

Anne T Thompson



Stonehouse Online Book Group

In April, a few weeks into lockdown, the Stonehouse Book Group launched its very first online meeting, discussing *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald via Zoom. Holding meetings virtually has enabled invitations to extend beyond the local community, and the group has been regularly attended by friends from Blantyre, and as far away as Plymouth. In June we were even joined by author John Ironmonger when we met to discuss his novel *Not Forgetting the Whale*.

We have continued to meet monthly throughout the year to discuss a variety of different reads. For many of us, reading has offered relief from the anxiety and uncertainty of the situation at hand, and so meeting virtually with others to share the reading experience has been very enjoyable.

We are currently taking a break during the Christmas period, but we usually meet every 3rd Sunday of the month from 7.30-9pm. Please contact Stewart or Kathryn for further details, or link up to the Stonehouse Book Group Facebook page.

Kathryn Epps

January to March 2021 books for reading

Sun 17th January *The Salt Path* by Raynor Winn Sun 21st February *The Conclave* by Robert Harris Sun 21st March *The Boy in the Striped Pyjama*s by John Boyne



Weekly Freewill Offering (WFO) Envelopes

We are living in very strange times and none of us know where or when it will end. I doubt we will be able to go back to what we know as normal anytime soon. That makes my job of organising our offering envelopes for 2021 very difficult.

Some folks have generously been giving regularly to our church by setting up standing orders while others have continued to use their envelopes or cheques and handing them to Stewart or an office bearer - thank you. As I mentioned in a previous Link issue, each set of envelopes costs £5.00 so if I can save a few pounds (or a few hundred!) it would make sense to do that!

Our counting teams disregard dates on envelopes and we only need the number and how much is inside each one. Whether it's a large or small amount we are grateful and say thank you. So, I propose to save some money by using this years (2020) unused envelopes. I will still purchase some new ones but for people who have some of this year's left don't destroy them as they can be used as and when regardless of date. This is obviously more applicable to folks who don't attend every week. Regular attenders would get a new complete set.

I would appreciate if folks could contact me (in confidence) on 01698 793591, speak to me personally at 2 Argyle Street, or email me at annerlaw@gmail.com with their thoughts, opinions, or to discuss my proposals. Otherwise you'll leave me to decide on the best course of action.

God bless and stay safe.

Anne Law

At the beginning of lockdown, I wrote a poem which I would like to share with you; just my thoughts at the time and I hope you enjoy reading it.

A New Way of Church

On a Sunday at eleven To St Ninian's we go To join in Sunday worship and meet friends we know We welcome one another and visitors who come We shake a hand and give a hug and share a lunch with some

Then comes along a virus which closes churches down
Our life as we have known it completely closes down
Our hospitals are crowded and the staff are rightly praised
Our nurses, doctors, and cleaners work hard and are so brave

All frontline workers are relied upon to keep our country going Our governments have had to think and change a way of living To keep our friends and families safe we have to keep away And folks all stay at home and try to pass their day

Some families are broken, with illness and death too You cannot visit the bereaved, there seems not much to do But the church has left the building and to the community it goes Technology is wonderful and keeps us on our toes

Our services are now online with Zoom, Facebook and the web We can join in services and prayers and still stay in our bed! Church without walls was a thing of the past But now, due to the virus, is being practiced at last

We have our Sunday services and communion in our homes With many joining in by listening on their phones Our problems they're all man-made through greed and selfishness Our planet is being ruined and we're to blame, alas

Some people ask where's God in this? It seems just like a riddle But those with faith will tell you that He's right there in the middle So when you're feeling low and sad, remember God is here He's all around with arms outstretched and He will hold you near

A Saving Grace by Cameron Monie

2020 has been a bad year
It doesn't seem to bring us any cheer
We sleep in the morning
And are awake in the night
2020 is giving us all a fright

We are like an apple just rotting away
No person would ever want it that way
We have lost track of time and communication
We are busy making charts and using tabulation

We are all lions living in our den My lockdown experience God help me, Amen With crashing and banging and crying plus tears Some parents are drinking lots of gin and beers

Our homes are a prison and i really can't bear We go to the window and do nothing but stare With TV, x-box and phones galore We couldn't really ask for anything more

But there is still some hope, we've mentioned nothing positive! We need to work together and be more causative There's the family time and playing outside But remember the rules that we need to abide

There's art and cooking and things creative We can dress up as tribes and can be native Don't go out when you're not allowed Stay home, be safe and make Britain proud

We can watch movies on our comfy seats And listen to our catchy beats There's cards and chess and draughts, even Scrabble We can fight and argue, it's a bit of a rabble

The NHS are doing amazingly well The shopkeepers are struggling and planning too sell Covid-19 has a grinning face We all just need a Saving Grace

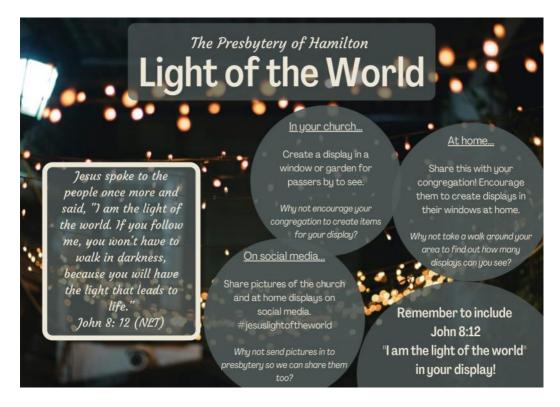


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After Ecclesiastes

For everything
There is a time and a season

A time to breathe deeply And a time to exhale quietly

A time to embrace words And a time to hug silence

A time to open one's eyes And a time to blink in wonder A time to stride out And a time to walk gently

A time to reach out And a time to withdraw

The constant call

To be mindful of our time

Aware of the seasons of the soul
To respond to the stirrings of the spirit to
live life in all its fullness

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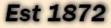
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