

## CORONA VIRUS REFLECTIONS

I have recently been told the ancient Indian story of the blind men and the elephant. A group of blind men are led to an elephant and are asked to explore the part of it nearest to them with their hands, and then describe to the others what they think this animal looks like. The man at the tail end describes a rope like tail, the man near a leg describes something the size and shape of a tree trunk. The man near to the ear describes a large fan, and the man near to the trunk describes it as a hose pipe. Between them and the small bits they can feel and describe, they cannot put together a picture of this strange creature, it just seems too preposterous.

Covid is the elephant in all our rooms at the moment, yet for everyone the only bit of this disease and its impact we can understand is that which is directly in our experience. We can read of other peoples experiences of the disease and its effects, and we can build up a picture, but frankly a lot of the pictures do not seem to lock together to make a complete picture that we can understand. As with the descriptions of the elephant there are many parts of this story which are currently out of our grasp, and will not be seen or told for many years yet.

The beginning of the first lockdown produced an immediate reaction in the hospital as patients were transferred out and the wards emptied to take the expected Covid cases, which in the case of Bristol did not really come in the numbers expected. There were several weeks when the hospital was eerily quiet as we waited with baited breath for the rush to happen. Even before we realised that the expected numbers of people with Covid were not going to come, we wondered where all our patients were. I cannot imagine that the A&E Department missed the drunks and the fight victims who haunt the place on a regular Friday and Saturday night, but where were the frail elderly with their multiple co-morbidities, where were the cancer patients, where were the Heart Institute patients?

As with all places of worship our Sanctuaries (Chapels) closed immediately, and we spent a lot of time discussing how we could reopen them for private prayer in a sensitive and safe manner. In particular in the BRI, where we are providing a prayer space for different faiths, who have

different requirements for praying, from the Christian chair to the Muslim mat via the Buddhist cushion we came up with socially distanced spots on the floor. As long as people are on spots with whatever their prayer arrangements are, then they are the required 2m apart.



We have had time in the Chaplaincy office over the last few months to discuss and share our experiences, both of the churches we are linked to, and what is happening within the hospital. One big question has been 'What is a gathered community?'. It is a really big issue for our Imam that the brothers are not gathering together on a Friday for Friday Prayers. They are a religious obligation for all Muslim brothers. For our Roman Catholic Deacon the struggle has been that the Catholic church mandates that every Catholic should attend Mass weekly to be a good Catholic. In all religious communities people have been gathering on line. It is all we have been allowed to do, but is this a gathering of the people? I had a conversation with a senior clergyman for whom an on line service is an anathema. The congregation is not gathered in the building that is dedicated to God, they are not raising up their praises to heaven together in one place, they are not meeting together and supporting each other. I did suggest that meeting on line was meeting, that by live streaming they were probably reaching more people than would set aside time to come to the building. He countered by saying that they had no idea how many people were actually staying for the whole service and were getting the

full experience. I thought that any time spent with God was good, particularly if it was more than they would spend otherwise, and perhaps we needed to make each moment of each on line service count. For some patients in hospital during these last few months, the on line services have been a God send, literally, allowing them to see their friends and their churches and remain as part of the gathering of the people in their own churches.

The other question that has been exercising the Christian Chaplains mostly is how does God work through technology. There is no theology of celebrating the Eucharist over the internet. If the service is live streamed and someone at home has bread and wine in front of them does it become for them the body and blood of Jesus via the words spoken on Zoom or whatever platform is being used? What if someone watches on YouTube later? What if someone watches from the far side of the globe as opposed to within the parish? The church authorities have allowed Zoom services to happen, but there is no agreed theological principle. It does appear that the on line services are meeting a need and that they are places where God is working.

For Chaplains providing a telephone only service outside of hours for much of these last few months, we have not only been talking supportively with patients over the phone, but praying with them as well, and commending them to God at the time of their deaths. The Trust still does not allow ministers of any faith to come into the hospital. Even outside of specific lockdown periods, patients have only been allowed one nominated visitor with a booked appointment. The rites and rituals of death have been severely curtailed. I regularly tell our Nursing Assistants as I teach them about Chaplaincy and caring for people of faith, that people only die once; we have only one chance to get it right for them. By all that our faiths hold holy we are failing, yet we are where we are, and we cannot do anything else.

Only time will tell the impact that Covid has had, on the planet, on the global population, on the individuals who have suffered, on those who have died and those they have left behind. For every individual there is a story, an experience, every individual is contributing to our picture of the elephant in the room, but it will be a long time, if ever, before we can look at it squarely and see it for what it fully is.

Jillianne Norman

## WARMLEY WARBLINGS

At this special time of the year we remember those who need our prayers at this time, especially we think of John Eames, Lil and Mervyn Little, Eileen Salt, Lydia Hughes, Martin Pullin and any other members of our church family known to us.

We remember all those living in care homes who have found these times particularly challenging, we think of Grace Watson, Marjorie Cox and Eileen Penny and send them and their families our love and prayers.

We are very sad to hear that Janet St. John widow of Michael St. John has passed away recently, we send our love, sympathy and prayers to all of her family and friends especially her daughter Charlotte. Janet was well known locally and used to live in Poplar Road and a member of the Nomine choir for several years.

The last year is one that we will probably never forget, a year like no other. Covid19 has left so many people without loved ones and our sympathy, thoughts and prayers are with them. The strain on our NHS has been considerable and unrelenting, but, they have responded as they always do, with bravery, courage, professionalism and determination, we are proud of them all. With the arrival of a vaccine, there is some light at the end of the tunnel, we enter 2021 with a degree of hope and expectation. Maybe, just maybe, the worst is behind us but, this virus has also brought out the best in so many people. Despite all of the media stories, Christmas is not 'cancelled', to Christians it is a sign of hope and joy. The best gift we can have is not in material goods or presents but in the love we have for the things that really matter in life, our family and friends. The joy of helping people less fortunate than ourselves, those phone calls to the lonely, help with shopping, a friendly voice on the end of a phone, the assurance to people that help is on hand when they need it. We can all do something, we all know people who need support. Lets make our New Year's resolution to do more in 2021 and be good neighbours, I wish you all the best Christmas you can have and all the very best for the year to come, stay safe and well,

Brian Draper

## CORONA VIRUS BY ELIZABETH OWEN

C is for the Crisis into which we have been hurled,  
O is for the Ordeal we all face around the world,  
R is for the Rate at which the virus can infect,  
O is for the Onward search for a jab that will protect,  
N is for the Nurses who have worked both day and night,  
A is for the Ache of loved ones lost from sight,

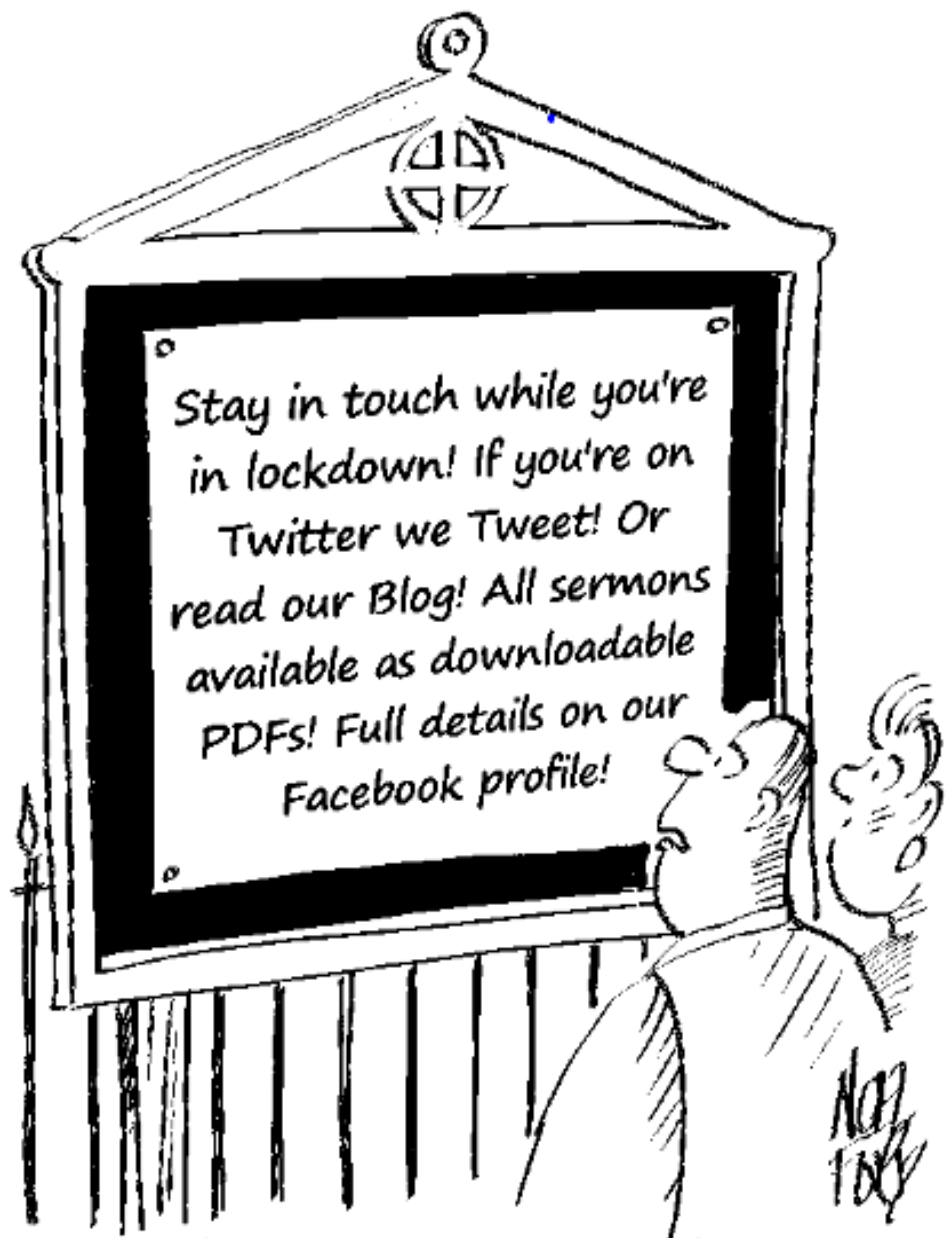
V is for the Valiant way that neighbours played their part,  
I is for the Income lost through lockdown from the start,  
R is for the Risk that some unthinking people take,  
U is for the Ultra care for the oldies sake,  
S is for the Stranger who lends a helping hand,  
So that as we work together this will be a better land.

but

C is for Christ who came to earth for you and me,  
O is the Offering of Himself upon the tree,  
R is for the Resurrection to His reign above,  
O is for Our answer to his constant call of love,  
N is for the Need to tell the world of saving grace,  
A is for the Ageless One who loves the human race,

V is for the Voice of God who whispers in our ear,  
I is for the Impact of our words on those who hear,  
R is for the Radiant glory of the Father's Son,  
U is for the Unity that Jesus Christ has won,  
S is for the Sovereign Lord who's in control of all,  
He knows what we are made of and He will not let us fall.

Alleluia



"...and we used to grumble about not understanding archaic church language!"

## ALL IN THE MONTH OF JANUARY

It was:

500 years ago, on 3rd January 1521 that German Protestant reformer Martin Luther was excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church by Pope Leo X after he refused to recant his writings. A few weeks later, on 23<sup>rd</sup> January, the Diet of Worms was called by the Holy Roman Empire and ran until 25th May. This imperial assembly culminated in the Edict of the Diet of Worms, which branded Martin Luther as a heretic, and banned his writings.

150 years ago, on 26th January 1871 that the Rugby Football Union (RFU) was founded in England.

125 years ago, on 28th January 1896 that Walter Arnold of Kent became the first person in the world to be convicted of speeding. The speed limit was 2 mph and a person carrying a red flag had to walk in front of the vehicle. But Arnold drove at 8 mph without a flag bearer. He was chased by a policeman on a bicycle, arrested, and fined one shilling.

100 years ago, on 28th January 1921 that the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was installed beneath the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. It honours those who died in WWI (and later also WWII) who were never identified.

80 years ago, on 5th January 1941 that Amy Johnson, pioneering British aviator, drowned in the Thames Estuary, aged 37. She had bailed out after her plane ran out of fuel and crashed in adverse weather conditions.

75 years ago, on 3rd January 1946 that William Joyce ('Lord Haw Haw'), British fascist politician who broadcast Nazi propaganda from Germany during WWII, was hanged for treason.

70 years ago, on 9th January 1951 that the United Nations moved into its present headquarters in New York City. It is a 39-floor building in the Turtle Bay area of Manhattan, overlooking the East River.

65 years ago, on 27th January 1956, that Elvis Presley's hit song 'Heartbreak Hotel' was released. It topped the US charts in April and became his first UK hit in May of that year.

60 years ago, on 20th January 1961 that John F Kennedy was inaugurated as the 35<sup>th</sup> President of the United States.

50 years ago, on 25th January 1971 that Idi Amin became President of Uganda after deposing Milton Obote in a coup.

40 years ago, on 2nd January 1981 that British serial killer Peter Sutcliffe (the 'Yorkshire Ripper') was arrested in Sheffield, South Yorkshire. He was charged with murdering 13 women. He died of Covid-19 in November 2020.

30 years ago, 17th January to 28<sup>th</sup> February, that the Gulf War's 'Operation Desert Storm' took place. Invading Iraqi forces were expelled from Kuwait and the Kuwaiti monarchy was restored. It was a decisive coalition victory.

25 years ago, on 27th January 1996 that the first Holocaust Remembrance Day was observed in Germany. It became International Holocaust Day in 2005 when it was adopted by the United Nations. It marks the day (27th January 1945) when the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration/death camp was liberated.

20 years ago, on 31st January 2001 that a Scottish court in the Netherlands convicted Abdelbaset al-Megrahi of the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie in 1988. He was the head of airport security for Libyan Arab Airlines and a suspected Libyan intelligence officer. He was sentenced to life imprisonment but released on medical grounds in 2009 and died in 2012.

10 years ago, on 4th January 2011 that Gerry Rafferty, Scottish rock singer and songwriter, died. Best known for his solo hit 'Baker Street'.



## FIVE THINGS I WOULD LIKE TO SEE IN 2021

I keep hearing people say that 2020 was a ‘year like no other.’ Friends have been writing a special journal recording the year, so they can pass it on to their grandchildren. Others just want to leave 2020 behind and look to a happier new year.

Both reactions are completely understandable. But I’ve been looking ahead to 2021 and thinking about the five top things I’d like to see in the year ahead. I wonder if you’ll agree with them or not? Maybe you could put together your own list.

***Let’s make sure the vaccines are distributed fairly and speedily.*** Those who need the vaccine most urgently should receive it first, with a fair system for ensuring everyone else can be vaccinated quickly and efficiently. We need to ensure that everyone receives the vaccine wherever they live in the world – from the poorest to the richest. Especially, in those parts of the world where there is war, and people are living as refugees.

***Let’s learn the lessons of the pandemic*** – not just going back to how life was, as quickly as possible. Many of us learnt to appreciate our family so very much more – especially when we could not be with them for months on end. We learnt lessons about how important our neighbours and local businesses are, how precious our NHS, medical researchers, care providers and other frontline workers are. Let’s not forget them.

***Let’s value nature.*** Those of us with gardens, or with parks or fields nearby, have been massively blessed. I’ve learnt to pay attention to birdsong, to the changing colours of the trees, and how unexpected plants have taken root in our garden. Pets have played a major part in helping us endure the lockdowns, especially for people who live alone. May we all learn to value the natural world on our doorsteps in the year ahead and beyond.

***Let’s bless technology.*** Without the use of the internet, meeting people ‘online’ or keeping in touch via email, Facetime or other

technologies, 2020 would have been a whole lot tougher. Churches across the country moved their Sunday services online, and soon adapted to a different way of worshipping – not the same, but still helping us to worship together and see familiar faces. Let's continue to give thanks for the science that made that contact possible in 2020.

***Let's value our church family.*** Imperfect we may be, like any family. But the months without being physically able to worship with them, share communion with them, sing alongside them have been hard. I value so much how many churches have risen to the pandemic challenge and sought to serve their communities in all kinds of ways. May we take all this experience into 2021 and build upon it.

Whatever 2021 holds for you and all those that you love, I pray that you may know the love of God in your life, and be able to pass it on to others.

*The Revd Peter Crumpler, a Church of England priest in St Albans, Hertfordshire and a former communications director for the Church of England*

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## **FOOD, GLORIOUS FOOD**

Did you eat too much over Christmas? Or is that your lifestyle choice, year-round?

Almost half of the world's population will be overweight by 2050, if current eating trends continue, according to recent research. That means that more than four billion people could be overweight in just 30 years' time, with 1.5 billion of them obese.

The research was done by the Germany-based Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research. The authors warn of a looming health and also environmental crisis, due to the surge in global food demand, which would push the environment past sustainable levels. Food production already takes up three quarters of the world's fresh water, a third of its land, and it accounts for up to a third of greenhouse gas emissions.

## WHERE DID THE WISE MEN COME FROM?

Magi from the East – it isn't a lot to go on. The Magi had originally been a religious caste among the Persians. Their devotion to astrology, divination and the interpretation of dreams led to an extension in the meaning of the word, and by the first century the Magi in Matthew's gospel could have been astrologers from outside of Persia. Some scholars believe they might have come from what was then Arabia Felix, or as we would say today, southern Arabia.

It is true that in the first century astrology was practised there, and it was the region where the Queen of Sheba had lived. She of course had visited Solomon and would have heard the prophecies about how one day a Messiah would be born to the Israelites and become their king.

Matthew's gospel (chapter 2) is clear that the Magi asked Herod: 'Where is the One who has been born king of the Jews? We saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.' So it is possible that in southern Arabia the Queen of Sheba's story of how a Messiah would one day be sent to the Israelites had survived. Certainly, there are a number of other early legends that connect southern Arabia with Solomon's Israel.

To many people this makes sense: that the ancient stories of a Messiah, linked to later astrological study, prompted these alert and god-fearing men to the realisation that something very stupendous was happening in Israel. They realised that after all these centuries, the King of the Jews, the Messiah, was about to be born.

One more interesting thing that gives weight to the theory that the Magi came from southern Arabia is this: if you study any map of Palestine as it was during biblical times, you will find that the old Arabian caravan routes all entered Palestine 'from the East'.

## WHAT ABOUT THE GIFTS OF GOLD, FRANKINCENSE AND MYRRH?

The story of the coming of the Magi grew in the telling. By the 6<sup>th</sup> century they had acquired names: Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar. By medieval times they were considered to be kings. Whoever they were, we do know from Matthew that they brought three gifts to Jesus. What about their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh? While we cannot know for sure what was in the minds of first century Magi, one Victorian scholar has offered a possible explanation as to the significance of their gifts. He was the Rev John Henry Hopkins, an American Episcopalian minister, who in 1857 wrote his much-loved Christmas carol, 'We Three Kings of Orient Are'.

Gold, said John Henry Hopkins, was a gift that would have been given to a king. Frankincense had traditionally been brought by priests as they worshipped God in the Temple. Myrrh was a spice that the ancients used in preparing bodies for burial.

If that is true, then you could say that the Wise Men, in choosing their gifts for this infant, honoured Jesus with gold because He was King of the Jews, with frankincense because He was to be worshipped as divine, and with myrrh, because He would also become a sacrifice and die for His people.

The Wise Men were the very first gentiles ever to worship Jesus. What faith they had! They travelled for months over difficult terrain, they never saw any evidence of Jesus' kingship, His divinity or His sacrificial death. They worshipped Him through faith in God's promises about Him. Isaiah foresaw this response to Jesus: 'Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.' The Magi's eyes of faith saw clearly and far into the future.

Compare that with the High Priest and religious leaders whom the Wise Men saw in Jerusalem when they first arrived. These head priests knew all about the prophecies of their own coming Messiah, but NOT ONE Jewish religious leader travelled to look for Him in Bethlehem. And it is only six miles down the road!

## A LITTLE HUMOUR

### **The cat**

A vicar and his wife were going out for the evening, and carefully set the security lights and put the cat out. But when they opened the door to go to the taxi, the cat slipped back in and disappeared upstairs.

Irritated, the vicar followed it.

The wife waited with the taxi driver. Not wanting him to know that they were leaving the parsonage empty, she said: "My husband is just upstairs for a quick word with my mother."

A few minutes later, the husband arrived, breathless. "Sorry I took so long" he said, "but she put up a fight! Stupid old thing was hiding under the bed and I had to poke her with a coat hanger and grab her by the scruff of the neck to get her out."

### **Fire?**

The team at the local fire station had assembled to hear their training officer discuss the behaviours of various kinds of fire. He began: "You pull up to a house and notice puffs of smoke coming from the eaves. But the windows are blackened out and there is little or no visible flame. What does this tell you?" he asked.

Hoping the men recognised signs of a possible 'back draft', a condition very dangerous to fire fighters, he heard instead: "It tells me I've got the right house."

### **Church**

My grandson, Justin, watched a live streaming service with his dad one Sunday morning. His mum wanted to know how it went. He said, "The music was nice, but the commercial was too long."

### **Numbers**

When the minister announced the first hymn on Zoom, "Ten thousand times ten thousand!" the little boy turned anxiously to his father. "Does he want us to work that out?"

### **Not comfortable**

The vicar was praying for the sick and said: "We must remember Mrs Goodwin in our prayers. She recently had all her teeth taken out and a new gas stove put in."

## **Order**

Happy to visit his local pub before it closed again, a man found himself near two nuns. Eager to talk to anyone after weeks in Tier 3, he ventured: "What is your order?" (Meaning their religious community.) The nuns happily replied: "Sausage and chips."

## **Left behind**

Shortly after the funeral of a local wealthy man, two friends were discussing the Will. "How much did he leave?" wondered one. His friend thought a moment, and ventured: "Well, I suppose, everything!"

## **Films adapted for Wales**

It is said that the Welsh film industry has spent lockdown planning to remake numerous well-known films, but this time with a Welsh flavour. The following have been suggested as sure winners:

- \* 9½ Leeks
- \* The Lost Boyos
- \* Dai Hard
- \* The Eagle has Llandudno
- \* The Magnificent Severn
- \* Haverfordwest Was Won
- \* Austin Powys
- \* Independence Dai
- \* The Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlllantysiliogogoch That Time Forgot
- \* The Bridge on the River Wye
- \* The Welsh Patient
- \* Look You Back in Bangor
- \* Evans Can Wait
- \* A Fishguard Called Rhondda
- \* Where Eagles Aberdare
- \* Dial M For Merthyr

## A THANKYOU FROM UGANDA

In Uganda a nationwide lockdown has been in place since March with all churches, schools, bible colleges and universities closed. The Ugandan government does not have the means to provide a furlough scheme and as clergy are paid purely from what their congregation donate on a Sunday many who have no land to fall back on are struggling to eat. Bible Colleges have struggled to support their staff.

One report from the President suggested that hospitals were unable to cope with coronavirus cases though there have been no recent reports so hopefully the spread has been contained. Corrie Verduyn, who was Bitton's mission link at Kijoko Hospital until a year ago, reports that due to lockdown it is currently very difficult for patients to travel to the hospital. In addition the situation in Uganda is exacerbated by political riots in advance of next year's Presidential election.

Each year the Deanery invite parishes to contribute 0.25% of parish income to the Deanery's Uganda Fund and this we did in October.

In normal times the Fund is used to support students and to enable Ugandans from our twinned diocese to visit the Deanery. This year this has not been possible but the Link did want to help at a time of crisis and sent donations totalling £2,750 to help two small Bible Colleges to provide some pay for their staff. Both colleges have asked that their thanks be passed on to you all. Please continue to remember both the pandemic and political situations in Uganda as you pray.

Ken Gibson  
Benefice representative, Deanery Uganda Link