

Christmas Day & S John the Evangelist 2020 - Light in the Darkness

25 th December Christmas Day	8.00 Holy Communion Halling 9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton	Hebrews 1 vv 1-12 p1201 John 1 vv 1-14 p1063
27 th December St John the Evangelist	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling	I John 1 vv 1-10 p1225 John 21 vv 19-25 p1090

The Collect.

ALMIGHTY God, who hast given us thy only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure Virgin; Grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit, ever one God, world without end. *Amen.*

The Collect.

MERCIFUL Lord, we beseech thee to cast thy bright beams of light upon thy Church, that it being enlightened by the doctrine of thy blessed Apostle and Evangelist Saint John may so walk in the light of thy truth, that it may at length attain to the light of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

In 1635, King Charles I made the royal postal service available to the general public – for a fee. Hence the Royal Mail. Just over two hundred years later, Rowland Hill completely reorganised the service and the General Post Office astonishingly rapidly became an amazingly effective and efficient communications network. The Victorians soon started sending one another Christmas cards. Later there were picture postcards sent from holiday destinations, and plain postcards, which, in the days of six to eight daily collections and deliveries, could function like modern email – message sent, replied to, reply replied to, acknowledgment of final receipt, all in the space of a few hours. Telegrams followed soon after the establishment of the universal postal service. The technology goes back to the 1830s, believe it or not. Then there were telephones, mobile telephones, texting and the internet, bringing with it emails and an ever increasing number of means of keeping in touch. These have been a tremendous boon in lockdown. But not only, on account of COVID, communications have transformed our lives. Remember the story which is said to have originally inspired Rowland Hill. He saw a woman receive a letter and hand it back to the person who delivered it unopened. When asked why, she explained that she couldn't afford to pay for the letter. (In those days you paid when the letter arrived, not when you sent it.) Her brother, however, would from time to time send a blank sheet of paper so that she would know he was still alive. We've come a very long way since those days!

As the old BT advert had it, *It's good to talk*. It is good to talk to our families and friends and to all sorts of other people and to hear what they have to say to us – teachers and bank managers, employers, doctors, entertainers and raconteurs, shopkeepers and people we meet in the street, tour guides, instructors and station announcers. The list of people we might be in conversation with can't really be endless, but it must be very long indeed.

But surely the Person we'd most like to hear from, the One we most need to hear from, is God. He is, after all, the One ultimately in charge. He is the explanation for everything. He

is the One on Whom we depend for our very existence. Only He can save us. It is God with Whom we need to communicate more than anything. And do you know? I have never received a letter from God, nor a parcel, nor a telegram. He's never rung me up. I've never had a text from Him, nor an email. I talk to Him, but does He hear me? How do I know that He is listening to me?

Well, as our Christmas reading from Hebrews points out, God has spoken to the human race in many ways. He communicates with us *at sundry times and in divers manners*. I would never dare to put a limit on the number of ways in which God both speaks to us and makes Himself known to us. One very significant way in which he communicates with us is as He *spoke unto the fathers by the prophets* – the divine Word recorded in Scripture. When you think about it, it is astounding that God speaks to us at all, yet He does in so many wonderful ways. He really cares about us. It is because I know that He really cares about me that I know that He hears my prayers, that He listens to my prayers and answers them. He loves me. He loves you. He reaches out to you to communicate with you, to speak to your heart and to hear your prayers. He listens to you when you speak to Him. He answers your prayers. Indeed, He listens to you and responds even when you don't know what to say to Him. This is all more than astounding.

But we read on, *God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last day spoken unto us by his Son.*

And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. It's been really hard this Christmas to weigh the risks of COVID infection against the desire to be together. We'd much rather hear Granny's real live voice, see her with our own eyes and hold her in our arms, than receive a card from her, speak to her on the telephone or hold a Zoom conversation with her. Maybe, because of COVID, we decide to play safe this year. Maybe we think the joy of being together is worth the risk. I'm not judging, but it does make the point that it is really important to be together in the flesh. John, the apostle and evangelist, writes of that which was from the beginning (Jesus): *which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life.* He shares these experiences in a letter to the faithful, *These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.* Jesus told Thomas that all those who believed in the apostles' testimony of the Word would share fully in the blessing – that our joy may be full.

I do love reading the Christmas Gospel at our Christmas services, the way it draws out the meaning, the consequences of the Word of God being made flesh, of God speaking unto us by His Son. The World is His by right. There would be nothing, no life at all, without Him. Yet the world and its people, the people He created to be His own, have rejected Him. The world has become a dark place, having turned its back on the Word spoken at the beginning of creation by God Himself, *Let there be light.* Now, however, comes Jesus, the Word of God, the Light of the world. The darkness of the world cannot comprehend the Light. It neither understands the Light nor can it overcome the Light. Those who receive the Light of Christ into their hearts, those who believe in Him, are the children of God. Like our brother John, we can and must truly testify to these things, to the Light Who shines in the darkness and to the joy which He offers to all who approach Him in faith.