

Light up the Advent Candles!

This morning I have been in to St Mary's Church in Lynton to light the first of the Advent Candles on our wreath on this Advent Sunday. It is a very strange feeling to begin this preparation for Christmas in an empty church, with as yet no full clarity about how we will be able to celebrate the feast of Jesus' birth. And yet, there is something of the Advent message in that strangeness too. During Advent we tell the stories of the ancient longing of the peoples of God for all kinds of deliverance. This Sunday reminds of Abraham and Sarah who set out on a perilous journey to a new and unknown land because they felt the stirring of God calling to something they longed for – a land and descendants. Next Sunday the focus is on the prophets who sought God's presence through persecution and exile, longing for home and wellbeing. Then we hear of John the Baptist whose message was to a people longing for liberation from the occupying Romans. On the fourth Sunday we meet Mary, a young woman carrying her first baby awaiting his birth.

Right now, perhaps we share a particularly clear sense of the things that we long for – from the hope of gathering with family members to celebrate Christmas, the recovery of some business across the festive period to tide communities through the winter, deliverance from the fear and grief the Covid 19 is causing, and the individual challenges known only to ourselves that we want to overcome, or live with more contentedly.

This year then, as I light each candle, I will do so, not just as traditionally, to remember the longings of the past fulfilled at Jesus' birth, but also to offer the longings of our time to God in the hope and expectancy that the growing strength of more and more light in the darkness brings. God bless!