

Dear friends,

Happy New Year to you all!

I wonder how it feels to be at the start of a New Year? I know that many people are joining with the church tradition of keeping the decorations up for the whole Christmas season ending with Candlemas on 1st February. The idea of keeping the cheerful lights on throughout the January months certainly seems very appealing. The idea of the light which shines in the darkness is a powerful one, especially this Sunday as we remember Jesus' baptism in the river Jordan. This is a good opportunity for us to reflect on our own baptism, and I would invite you **to have a candle ready on Sunday** so we can all light them together. (If you still have your baptismal candle, why not light that one?)

New Year is a good time for New Resolutions - and I wonder if any of you have made a renewed commitment to your prayer life? I wonder if you feel a little daunted by the idea of daily prayer, not quite knowing where to start or what different ways there are to meet with God? I wonder if sometimes the traditional ways to pray feel a little cumbersome, or a little 'wordy'?

If so, you might like to join me in a short **(10-15 minutes) daily online prayer, practicing contemplative ways to pray**, I will be live at 8.30 am Monday to Thursday, and after that the recordings will be available at any time. You can join me on our website, on Youtube, and on our Facebook page. I will be basing this on the Contemplative Toolkit, developed by Oxford Diocese. We will have a very short verse of scripture, a prayer for the day and include a simple prayer practices, with a weekly pattern to help us keep a rhythm:

Monday - Stilling

Tuesday Noticing

Wednesday - Dwelling

Thursday - Mending

The final practice is Blessing, which will be something for us to practice between sessions.

Please do let me know what you find helpful, I would love you to join me so we may grow in our prayer life together.

One of the things that many people are looking forward to is receiving the COVID vaccination - and I am delighted that several of you have appointments. Hopefully it won't be long before many more people have received their vaccinations. However, while we wait for this to be rolled out, we must be extra vigilant as there are people who are trying to trick people into paying for appointments which do not exist. This scam begins with a

text claiming to be from the NHS, saying you are eligible for a vaccination and asks for your bank details. **Please remember COVID vaccinations will be arranged through your GP and you are not required to pay anything or to give your bank details.**

Finally, you may have noticed that we have been experimenting with the best way to play music during our services. One change which we have made is to use the recordings specially made by the choir at St Martin in the Fields for churches to play at their live streaming services. This is at no cost to us, as the recordings are free for us to download, and include a word document with lyrics as well. This is a very generous act, and one which is really helpful, as it overcomes all copyright issues, and is very simple for us to use - no more hours trawling through Youtube to find suitable recordings - and we will all get the same copy of the words! They seem to include a mixture of styles, traditional and modern, and we may begin to be introduced to new hymns as well. I do hope that this will enhance our ability to worship together, and we are one of many churches who are incredibly grateful to St Martin in the Fields for this wonderful gift.

And a final date for your diary, the Churches together in Reading are holding a service for the **Week of Prayer for Christian Unity**. Please note that we will not be holding our evening prayer that week so that as many people as possible can attend. Representatives from many denominations will be there including our own Bishop Olivia. This will take place at 6.30 p.m. on Sunday 17th January 2021 and the Zoom link is

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83546265111?wd=0dXdGIQVkk0TXZBWnU0NmE0dDdpUT09>

Yours in Christ,

April