



Diocesan News

December 2023



Bishop Arun's Advent book is a fresh guide through the coming season



'Stick With Love', the thought-provoking Advent book by Bishop Arun, will help guide people through the fast-coming season with readings and rich reminders of the love of Christ that unites every tongue, tribe and nation in our diverse global church.

Written for the Archbishop of York for 2023, it is packed with reflections on the lives of Christians from St John of the Cross to Stormzy; George Floyd to St Lucy of Syracuse, 'Stick With Love' spans the centuries and countries of the world telling the stories of the everyday saints, martyrs and mystics who light our advent way.

Combining memoir and accessible theology, the book concludes with a Christmas Eve reflection on Martin Luther King who once famously declared: "I must stick with love... hate is too great a burden to bear."

The Rt Revd Arun Arora, it steers through many of the anxieties and pressures of the season, with reflections that keep eyes fixed on Jesus, and offer hope, comfort and joy.

"The theme of waiting for light is one Lent shares with Advent, as each week, candles are lit to anticipate the coming of Christ into the world", writes Bishop Arun.

"The invitation to each of us is not to ignore the reality of the darkness, but to acknowledge it, to confront it with the light that shines in.

"At Advent, the dark night gives way to the cry of the child in the manger; it is burned away by the light of Christ coming into the world."

Stephen Cottrell, Archbishop of York, said: "In the stories of saints found in the pages of this book, we encounter men and women whose lives echo the love of God and the beautiful vision, found in Revelation, of the gathering of all tribes, peoples and nations before Him.

"May you discover a renewed appetite for the transforming love of God and the full meaning of what it is to be a disciple committed to responding to that love."

Church of England offers its first real Advent Calendar

The Church of England has released its first ever printed Advent Calendar, inviting people to put the birth of Jesus at the heart of their Christmas preparations.

And the Follow The Star Advent Calendar goes beyond the conventional countdown, offering a creative and interactive experience focused on the Nativity. It is available online and in bookshops.

Children and adults are challenged to find the right sticker for each of the 24 days of Advent and then add it to an overall scene. They are then invited to go further with short story episode for each day, and free themed activities including a 'scratch' nativity play script.

Featuring a fold-out, stand up crib scene and a rhyming Nativity story sheet, it tells the story of how – and why – Jesus came to be born in Bethlehem.



Inextinguishable Light Bishop Nick

You can imagine my surprise when I saw on a billboard the following headline: 'Satan's Coming to Town'. I always thought he had more important bad things to do.

Of course, I had mis-read it. It actually said that the story was about 'Santa'. Far less exciting, but probably more appropriate to the season of Christmas.

But, it did make me think also about why my mind replaced Santa with Satan. Just an anagram? Or something deeper and darker?

Santa, of course, is the benevolent Billy Bunter who is always full of cheer and gets everything wrong in such a way as to end up loved anyway. Satan is the figure who, according to tradition, spend his time trying to seduce us into thinking we are little gods around whom the universe revolves.

Both Santa and Satan are frauds. The darkness of winter might be illuminated by the light of hope, yet the boundless cheerfulness of the red-robed fat man seems unreal when set against the reality of a dark world. Satan, on the other hand, lives a lie and sows the seeds of deception and fantasy that hide us from that same reality.

Christmas shines an inextinguishable light on both of these lies. The baby born in Bethlehem will not turn out to



be yet another false messiah, promising what he can never deliver - drugging people into a life of neutered passivity. No, this baby will grow into a man who brings life and hope and healing to people who have had enough of being ground down by the conflicts of the world. Yet, rather than pretending that this is an easy route to love, joy and peace, will tell his followers that following him will involve carrying a cross.

No fantasy. No seduction. No pretence. No lies. No little gods. Rather, an invitation to incarnate commitment - plunging into the heart of a challenging world, but learning that the God who comes among us as one of us knows how we are and will never abandon us.

Many people - including Christians like us - will spend this Christmas in exile, under persecution, maybe wondering where God is. Our brothers and sisters in Sudan, for example. And as we celebrate with carols and cake, we can pray for them - looking through their eyes and finding in their hope the reason for this season: God among us, saying "I am for you."

Happy Christmas (when we get there)!

Churches across diocese give people a Warm Welcome this winter

Churches across the Diocese of Leeds are opening their doors this winter as part of the "Warm Welcome" campaign which aims to address the issues of the cost of living crisis, as well as countering loneliness and isolation.

In 2022, around 500 warm spaces were registered across the area including in over 70 diocesan churches, and the contribution of the church was recognised both locally and nationally.

The national "Warm Welcome" campaign aims to turn poverty and isolation into warm and local connection, with the aim to see everyone be able to "access a warm and welcoming space in their local community, to connect with others, make new friends, and feel part of your community".

Within the diocese many of those opening their doors are part of the Places of Welcome network, coordinated by Wellsprings Together.

One example of a church opening as a Place of Welcome and joining the Warm Welcome campaign is St Richard's Church in Seacroft in the Leeds Episcopal Area.

The Revd Canon Anne Russell, Team Rector and Area Dean of East Leeds said: "Our Place of Welcome has given our church families the opportunity to minister to our wonderful community.

"Together we share good food, conversation and laughter."



Vicar of Oxenhope to be our new Archdeacon of Pontefract



The diocese is delighted to announce that Revd Canon Cat Thatcher, currently Vicar of Oxenhope, will be the new Archdeacon of Pontefract.

Revd Cat will join Bishop Tony in serving our Wakefield Episcopal Area next Spring after five years working in the parish at the end of the famous Keighley and Worth Valley Railway where she has also been the Clergy Development Officer for the Bradford Episcopal Area.

"I have loved living in and serving Oxenhope, and will miss this beautiful place and these beautiful people," said Revd Cat.

"I'll also miss the toot-toot of the steam trains from the station at the bottom of the hill. I'm really looking forward to getting to know and serving the people and parishes of the Wakefield area, and pleased that my role will continue to include Initial Ministerial Education (IME) for the Wakefield area curates, so that I will continue to work with the diocese's wonderful Clergy

Development Team."

The Rt Revd Nick Baines, Bishop of Leeds congratulated Revd Cat: "Cat brings to her new role wide experience and a strong working knowledge of our diocese. Her pre-ordination work informs her current and future ministry as an archdeacon – her ministry in cathedral, parish and diocese have been hugely appreciated.

"I'm sure her enthusiasm and skills will be warmly welcomed across the diocese, but particularly in the Wakefield Episcopal Area."

Revd Cat grew up in Manchester and moved to London after gaining a history degree at Emmanuel College Cambridge.

She worked in various roles across the national church and the public sector in London, until 2003 when she returned north to become Head of Primary Care and then Deputy Director of Primary Care in NHS Bradford and Airedale.

In 2012 she left the NHS to train for ordination at Westcott House, Cambridge, and in 2014 returned to Bradford to serve her curacy at Bradford Cathedral. Since 2018 she has been working on a Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology at Chester University.

Revd Cat will be installed as the Archdeacon of Pontefract at Wakefield Cathedral on Sunday, May 5, 2024 at 3.30pm.

Children's Commissioner for England praises our school leaders

Children's Commissioner for England, Dame Rachel de Souza and renowned Christian broadcaster John Bell were among key note speakers who have praised the work of our diocesan school leaders at a special conference.

Organised by the diocesan Education Team, delegates from our 237 schools gathered at the Queen's Hotel, Leeds for a day of thought-provoking presentations and discussions on the theme of "Flourishing People, Flourishing Places".

With more than 30 years of high level teaching experience, Dame Rachel de Souza became the Children's Commissioner in 2021 and has completed the largest ever survey of children "The Big Ask" with over half a million responses.

Among her many concerns and priorities, she highlighted the impact of Covid in creating a continuing drop in school attendance and the ensuing mental health and wellbeing issues which teachers have to cope with, meaning schools provide, in her words: "the fourth emergency service."

She said how the goal of enabling children to flourish also meant extra resources were needed for dispossessed children who arrive in this country, often without family support.



Waiting this Advent

Revd Eve Ridgeway
Associate Rector, St. George's
Church, Leeds

The Advent season is one of waiting. How do you wait? Be honest - do you ever wait in the hope of escaping our reality, or in despair watching the world around us in conflict?

Earlier this year another season of waiting occurred - waiting for the much anticipated pink, dance routine-filled Barbie and its brooding counterpart Oppenheimer's opening weekend at the cinema. In Barbie, the 'Real World' (Hollywood doesn't have the patience for subtlety) collides with Barbieland as Barbie loses her naivety, meets her creator and finds new purpose and hope in the messy world of humans. In Oppenheimer, we're confronted with humanity's capacity to play God, and what it feels like to have 'near zero' chances of destroying the world. Globally, we waited in anticipation to spend over half a billion dollars to go and watch a film either about how our world nearly ended, or to escape to an alternative one. I enjoyed both films on the big screen, and the experience has left me pondering for many months since.

In Barbie, the only way in which the world could be understood as something good and to be



enjoyed was by thinking of something that was entirely separate and removed, other. In Oppenheimer, we were shown the reality of this world but in a way that made us wish we could escape to another one.

In Advent, we are invited to wait, not for escape or in despair, but in confident hope of a world renewed and restored. Our 'Real World' collided with God's kingdom in the Christ Child, Emmanuel, God with us, after centuries of anticipation from God's people. 'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.' (John 1:14) We are waiting in the real, messy world for Christ's return, but we don't wait in vain. This advent hope shapes how we wait, love and serve the real world. We wait, serve and love with boldness, perseverance, resilience and defiant hope in Jesus.

We don't need another world to escape to, like Barbie, and we don't need to despair over this world, like Oppenheimer. We wait as people of confident hope.

How will you wait this Advent?

First Gold Eco Church award for church in diocese celebrated

St Mary's Church, Emsbay with Eastby, welcomed the Bishop of Leeds, the Rt Revd Nick Baines, to a special celebratory service on Sunday, November 5.

In the service, Bishop Nick presented the congregation with their Eco Church Gold Award plaque.

The church is the first in the Diocese of Leeds to have gained the Gold Eco Church Award.

In order to achieve this, the church and congregation had to address 5 different areas: Worship, Lifestyle, Buildings, Land and Global and Community Engagement.

During the service, three wall hangings were presented, containing over 50 individual panels showcasing the various eco actions which the church congregation have sustained in their own lifestyles and in reaching out to include the involvement of the local community.

