



EMMANUEL ADVENT DEVOTION – TUESDAY 23RD FEBRUARY 2021



Create a peaceful space to pause, and allow yourself to feel God's presence alongside you, as near to you as your own breath. In following the reflection below, as a church we will draw closer to God and to one another as we grow in faith and deepen our sense of belonging to God.

Hebrews 13: 1-2 'Faith Hospitality'

¹ Let mutual love continue. ² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.



“Go away! This is a church not an art gallery!” A tearful local primary school teacher was thus rebuffed as she arrived at church with her school's artwork. As part of a neighbourhood festival our recently opened new church in Manchester had agreed to host an exhibition. Some diplomacy was needed to put matters right. In the end our church premises were festooned with children's colourful paintings to the delight of many visitors, especially parents and grandparents. It is easy to become over protective and possessive of our church buildings, especially if they are newly built. Thankfully there is now a general recognition that church premises can be a valued home for many varied community activities as well as for worship.

As I write, Covid vaccinations are being administered in seemingly unlikely venues such as temples, cathedrals, mosques, and synagogues. This reminds me of how the medieval monasteries were not only beacons for worship and prayer but centres for healing and learning. They also acted as foodbanks for the needy of their day. Likewise, the Sikh Gurdwara in Gravesend has cooked hundreds of much appreciated meals for NHS staff.

Luncheon clubs, dance classes, yoga and Pilates and space for AA meetings are some activities I experienced in London churches. A 'drop-in' for people with addiction issues provided a useful meeting area to offer hot food and drinks, a hairdresser, consultations with a doctor and a drugs worker. Another pioneering project worked with the perpetrators of domestic violence. The latter is an issue that sadly has become all too prevalent during lockdowns. This variety of activities were a means of helping so many people and acted as a bridge between the church and the neighbourhood.

Eastbourne churches offer a similar spectrum of support to the community. At Emmanuel, the Jenny Wren Nursery provides high quality childcare for local families. At Central Church the table tennis club has not only provided a health-giving exercise activity for the over 60s, but has been a meeting place for members (many living on their own) to share joys and concerns and generally have fun. All Souls Church, serving a transient, multicultural neighbourhood provides English language classes. 'Matthew 25', working with the homeless, is based at Christ Church. Pre-pandemic, many of us enjoyed musical concerts, art classes and coffee mornings – and so much more in our local churches. These varied activities, post-pandemic, may well be even more valued. In such secular provision sacred moments abound. Close friendships can develop again. Groups using our premises can be the milieu for the numinous to be experienced. In being hospitable we meet – not only with mythical winged angels, but rather with unique real people of quality, depth, character and humour... angels in disguise!

Prayer: Lord, as you welcomed a variety of people, so may we exercise hospitality in our homes and churches. Help us to be flexible, open-minded and sensitive to the needs of those around us. May we know the joy of open doors and be slow to close them. Amen.