

You are invited to join us in Advent.
Our 4 weeks of online sessions start on
Wednesday 25th November at 7pm.



During Advent, if you look to the southwestern horizon on a clear evening soon after sunset, you should see two bright lights – the planets Jupiter and Saturn. Just before Christmas, Jupiter will pass in front of Saturn: what astronomers call a 'Great Conjunction'. On the longest, darkest night of the year, the two will seem to merge into a single light that shines with truly exceptional brightness!

Our four discussion sessions are based around four words that have become so familiar to us in 2020!

DISTANCE • SAFE • TRUST • NORMAL

As we look back and reflect on an extraordinary year we shall also look forward, exploring what God is saying to us in

Receiving – Walking and Reflecting the Light of Christ as we prepare for Christmas and the New Year to come.

Please email contact@wybertonandframpton.org to register for the zoom link.

A 4-part Advent course helping us to reflect, at the darkest time of the year, on our calling to be 'Lights for Christ'. Before each session please read the following introductions and bible passages:

Light in the Darkness. Session 1 - **Distance**

The Covid-19 crisis of 2020 has forced us to become aware of distance. We've each had to create physical distance between our self and most other people, while working out how to keep up vital social contact: by phone, online, chatting over the garden fence, etc. Sometimes at work or in the shops we've felt a bit like individual planets, circling around each other, trying to avoid collisions! Often, it's felt really hard to resist that basic human 'gravitational pull' towards physical contact: we miss the emotional nourishment of those handshakes and hugs. Loving our neighbour now involves keeping this distance from them. We feel bewildered and a kind of grief, lamenting the loss of human contact which we perhaps used to take for granted.

Receive the Light. What is God saying to us through Scripture?

Imagine the scene. As darkness falls, it's time to leave the open road and find somewhere to spend the night. No safe lodging to be found here; the only option is a night spent under the stars. Home feels far behind – although memories linger of its warmth, familiarity and security, its tension and simmering anger. The road ahead leads to unknown, distant relatives: will they turn out to be welcoming, or not? A lot for a lone traveller to mull over in the evening hours...

Read Genesis 28:10-22

Light in the Darkness. Session 2 - Safe

'Stay safe' has been another recurring phrase during the Covid-19 crisis: heard in conversations, used in signing off emails from friends and colleagues, urged on us by government ministers and health officials. Meanwhile our news media bring us images of people fleeing dangerous places, risking their lives in flimsy boats to reach countries such as ours, where they hope to be safe.

We're all prone to anxiety about safety; it's part of our self-preservation instinct, to help us avoid danger. Unusual lights in night sky, such as comets, have prompted anxiety down the centuries – and still do. Expectation about the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn this December is producing some ingenious, elaborate speculation online that it will herald the end of the age and the arrival of the Antichrist! Handling our anxieties and our natural desire to stay safe remains as much a challenge today as ever. Perhaps this is especially so in Western cultures, where protecting ourselves from any threat or harm sometimes seems to have become an obsession.

Receive the Light. What is God saying to us through Scripture?

How safe can we be? How safe do we really want to be? These have always been challenging questions

Read Acts 11:19-30

Light in the Darkness. Session 3 - Trust

Another big issue in 2020 – less obvious, but widespread – has been about trust. Surveying the vast galaxy of the internet, we wonder where to find trustworthy information. Do we trust our politicians and their advisors as they handle the challenges of the pandemic and Brexit? Shall we rely on computers and their clever algorithms to influence our life chances, not least young people's exam grades? What about trusting our neighbours: if we've been getting to know them better during lockdown, are we now supposed to inform on each other if too many guests come to visit? The church also faces an ongoing challenge, with recent horrific reports about child abuse undermining trust in clergy.

Yet we find that we cannot live without trust. Some people choose to look to the stars and planets, putting their trust in horoscopes to help them make sense of their lives. Christian understanding and faith teaches a very different way of navigating life and learning where to place our trust.

Receive the Light. What is God saying to us through Scripture?

A network of trusting relationships runs through this passage: see how many you can spot!

Read 2 Tim 1:8-2:2

Light in the Darkness. Session 4 - Normal

When will we be able to get back to normal? That question has been asked for much of this year, as we've thought about the ongoing disruption to our home life, church life, work life, travel, recreation.... Yet much of that disruption continues; life still feels far from normal. What does 'normal' actually look like? It depends who you are and where you stand. For some people, experiencing prejudice because of their skin colour is their 'normal' experience. For millions across the world today, an unsafe supply of drinking water is still 'normal'. Millions more struggle to breathe because air quality is always so poor. Farmers face unpredictable weather – a pattern of instability which is now becoming a regular experience. Do we really want our life to 'get back to normal'?

The special 'Christmas star' in our night sky this December will not be normal; it will be something exceptional, extraordinary. That might be a fitting symbol of the strange year we have just been through. Could it also give us a better aspiration for the new year that lies ahead? What kind of new and better 'normal' can we imagine, dream of – then strive for and help to fashion?

Receive the Light. What is God saying to us through Scripture?

Read Psalm 146

Imagine a life in which prayer and praise to God has the first word and the last word (verses 1, 10). A life in which a positive, daily relationship with God becomes the norm year by year, providing consistency and security in all the bewildering changes that may arise (verse 2). Imagine a world in which we all acknowledge our human limitations, agreeing that even the powerful and influential are limited in their power, fallible and mortal, just like the rest of us – and yet still find we can have hope by trusting in someone far greater, whose help is reliable (verses 3-6). How would this perspective shape our normal life?

Imagine a society where truth is treasured and justice is enacted for those who have been denied it; where food is available for those who most need it, where the most vulnerable are supported, empowered, liberated, where goodness is valued and corruption firmly resisted (verses 6-9). The kind of society Jesus depicted when he read from the visions of Isaiah at the launch of his own ministry (Luke 4:16-21). What would our world look like if all this was normal practice?

Also...

After Glow

A final thought and prayer

Read Genesis 15:1, 5-6

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, 'Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.' 5 He brought him outside and said, 'Look towards heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' 6 And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.

When Abram looked up at the night sky, did he ever see a conjunction of the great planets? Quite possibly – their movements were as regular then as they are today. God used those familiar lights in the night sky to help build his hope for the future; he was learning to trust in God's promises, despite the obvious obstacles which sometimes seemed overwhelming and impossible to overcome

God promised blessing to Abraham's family and through them to all the peoples of the earth. As Christians, we see this focused and amplified above all in the coming of Jesus Christ, 'God with us'. We believe and celebrate that Christ is still the light that shines in the darkness, which the darkness has not grasped (understood/overcome). Here we find hope for today and tomorrow.

A prayer

Our gracious God,
thank you for bringing us to the end of this year.
Thank you for what we have learned and how we have grown.
Thank you for those we have loved and lost;
thank you for those we have encountered and valued
and for those with whom we have laughed, cried and persevered.
In the days that lie ahead,
please give us renewed grace and wisdom
in handling distance and being 'safe',
in building trust and finding a better 'normal';
so that in and through us, Christ will be seen,
the light that shines in the darkness.

Amen.