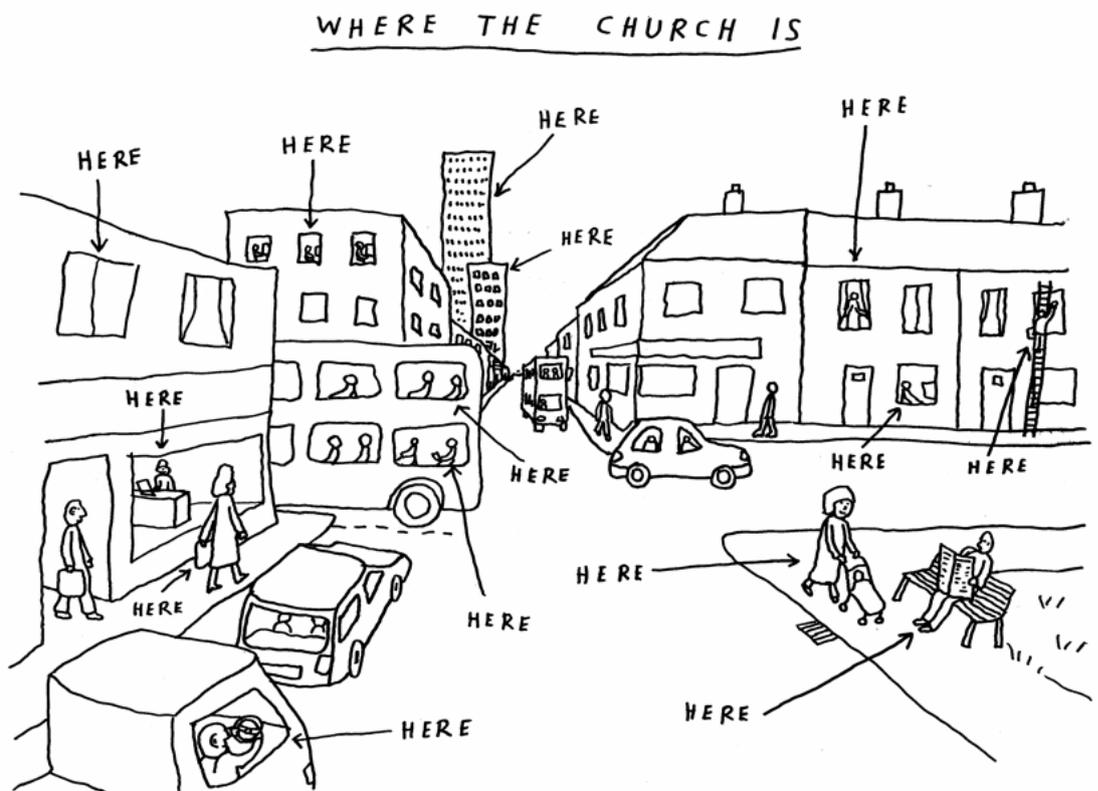


Being the messenger

After weeks of uncertainty, we are finally able to gather in all of our thoughts, prayers and resources and begin to prepare in earnest for our Advent and Christmas services. It's been a heady few weeks as we have patiently (and sometimes not so patiently!) waited for the new government guidelines to be confirmed amidst all the speculation.

But here we are! A clearer picture of what will be possible over the Christmas season. And so we are cracking on in prayer and in care.

All this time of considering what will be possible (let's never focus on the "what's not"!) has led me to reflect a little on the nature of church – if we are not able to gather regularly as before to worship, what does this mean? We have not been able to come together for other social events such as coffee mornings, fetes and music events for some time now – so where does that leave us as a church community offering support far beyond the walls of the building? One of our popular phrases we have been using since March has been: "together though apart" and it reminds me of a cartoon I saw during the early weeks of first lockdown – church is everywhere!



That's all very well, but what does that mean for us as Christians at Christmas? The one time in the year that we get the opportunity to really engage with those around us – singing carols in our residential homes or at the local supermarket to cheer up the shoppers and get everyone into “the Christmas spirit”, sending cards and gifts to those we love, or opening the church doors for extra services such as Christingle that means so much to our young families. “Christmas doesn't start until Christingle,” we've heard it said.

So what does it mean to us? Where is Church at this time of restrictions and complicated tier systems?

We get to be the messengers even more than ever! We get to be the ones dropping off food parcels to vulnerable families, bringing messages of encouragement and hope to friends and neighbours even though we can't drop in for a cuppa and chat, but instead with doorstep carols.

We get to be the point of contact on the other end of the phone to those who are lonely and isolated and a long way from family or who may not be able to bubble with those they love because of the numbers or because they are shielding.

We get to offer support in whatever way we can do so safely to anyone who is in need. We get to reflect the light of Jesus into the world around us.

Jesus was born into this world to bring a living, breathing, incarnational love to each and every one of us. By incarnational we mean that he was and is and always shall be present with us in every community and in every way. And his invitation to us as his followers is to participate as much as we can in that incarnational love. To commit to be living part of that real message of hope at his birth.

We get to bring the message of that hope to our community.

Through this pandemic we have had to redefine what it means to be a community of Christ. But the message of God's steadfast and faithful love is as strong as ever.

This Advent we need this message to get out further and wider than before. We need this time of waiting with expectation to be filled with a hope we have never yet experienced, a hope that like the light in the Gospel of John, is not overcome by the darkness, but instead fills the space with the hope of Jesus Christ – so that we may all believe it – in our hearts.

So, whoever you are in this story about the birth of Jesus; whether you are a shepherd or an angel, a Wise Man or a humble donkey, we are all in this story because it is our story. It is the greatest story ever told and the joy and hope it brings to us in our hearts is the greatest gift we could ever give.