



St. Stephen's Parish Church  
St. Stephen's Road  
Hightown  
L38 0BL

- *integral to community life*
- *welcoming and joyful in worship*
- *inspiring and loving in our ministry to children*

Dear All,

Life can go swimmingly along and then suddenly there's a jolt and a reminder of how vulnerable we are, how quickly life can move from being happy and stable to being precarious.

The Christmas story revolves around God choosing to become human and then being born in unsuitable circumstances - stables are not ideal for birthing and tiny babies. Yet, God choose to come to be with us, as one of us, wanting to be in relationship with us.



I timetabled myself to write this letter this afternoon when I wouldn't be disturbed. But it's not turned out like that. I'll explain why. I knew my granddaughter Maisy had a bad cold and was having a few days off University - she's a student in Manchester. A couple of days ago we chatted and she sounded tired. But an hour ago, I had a phone call from Maisy's mum saying this morning Maisy was struggling to breathe and is in Oldham Hospital with low oxygen levels.

As I'm writing this letter I'm also listening out for messages hopefully telling me she's fine and breathing again properly. This isn't covid, just a bad chest infection, the doctor said.

So sorry if you were expecting a happy Christmas vicar's letter! But the worry about Maisy has brought to mind how Christmas celebrates God coming to us. I think about God being safe and secure and yet wanting to communicate with us, wanting to love us and to bring us back to God and so risking coming to be one of us with all the ups and downs of humanity this would involve. Christmas time is a celebration of this decision and this birth.

I've just checked my phone. Still no messages. No news is good news I always tell myself. And I pray for Maisy and pray she will get better. This afternoon I know God loves me and God loves Maisy and I think of Jesus being that baby in a hostile world and I'm grateful God came so we can have that relationship with our Lord, our Saviour, our creator.

I also know Maisy is a fit 20 year old and no doubt will learn to not ignore chest infections from now on!

I've just had a call to say they're sending Maisy home and my daughter is revving herself up to give Maisy a lecture about not burning candles at both ends! I'm glad I'm not there to hear this - interestingly enough, I remember giving a similar lecture to Maisy's mum when she was at Uni!

Christmas will be a time to celebrate Jesus' birth and I'll be glad this year that we can do this with a bit more freedom than last. Thank you God that you came to earth and were born in Bethlehem. Thank you that you took the risk. And God bless our students!

Happy Christmas to you and your loved ones.

Jan - Revd Jan Ashton