

Cudham and Downe parish magazine article – January 2020

As 2020 and therefore a new decade begins, I wonder why it is we give names to them – there was the swinging 60's – with the saying that 'if you remember it, you weren't there', or that those born in the year 2000 are millennials – is that really 20 years ago?

What name will be given to the 2020's, I wonder? It's something you can only do looking back, but as 2020 is also associated with (perfect) vision – here are some visionary thoughts – in the context of a well-known carol 'It came upon a midnight clear'. You might have thought the time for carols was over, but the Christmas and Epiphany season in church lasts till February 2nd!

Though the words of the carol feel contemporary it was actually written in 1849; the time of the American Civil war. The first verse looks back to the first Christmas, and the angelic hosts promise of 'peace on earth, goodwill to all on whom God's favour rests'. Verse two reflects that the angels are singing the same message still, but the noise of human conflict and disagreement is drowning out the angelic song. This theme is continued in verse 3...

*Yet with the woes of sin and strife the world has suffered long;
Beneath the angel-strain have rolled two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man, hears not the love-song which they bring;
O hush the noise, ye men of strife, and hear the angels sing.*

What will it take for people causing strife, politely told to 'hush the noise' – more prosaically, to shut up and listen – listen out for that angelic voice of peace, and become peacemakers – to be agents of reconciliation, so much needed in the world, in our country, and often in our families too?

The churches at Cudham and Downe are looking at positive ways we can serve our communities better, offering that sense of peace in the noise – Jesus called them 'signs of the Kingdom of God' – seeing how we can work with everyone in our villages to help those who are disadvantaged, lonely, or simply forgotten.

The carol ends by reminding us that time is a human invention, and that the Bible says time will one day come to an end! Between now and then, I wonder if the 2020's might be the decade that brings about lasting change for good – that's my prayer as we begin it, and I hope it's yours too! Happy New Decade, John