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Dear friends,

For most people Epiphany means Twelfth Night, 6 January, the last day of Christmas, when the decorations go back in the box and the Christmas tree is taken down for another year. But for others, including me, Epiphany is not just one day but a Season that goes from the Feast of the Epiphany to the Feast of Candlemas, and the Crib stays in place and the tree lights keep shining until 2 February.

Revealing

Epiphany means 'revealing,' the revealing of Christ for all people, and the Season is the enactment of the journey of revealing that begins with the Magi following the star, continues with the baptism by John, continues with the calling of the disciples, and ends at Candlemas with the recognition in the Temple by Simeon and Anna. Epiphany is the continuing of the Christmas journey, a time to reflect on the meaning of these events, the Epiphanies that reveal who Jesus is. And as we make the Epiphany journey year after year, the revealing is different because we are different, the world is different.

For the Diocese of Argyll and The Isles this Epiphany will include the revealing of a new ministry, as the Electoral Synod meets on 23 and 30 January to elect a new Bishop of the Diocese. Please pray for the discernment of the Diocese, the Electors, and the Candidates, this month.

The journey through Epiphany this year includes another journey, our continuing struggle with Coronavirus. Tragically, the journey has revealed inequalities and loss, and untold suffering. More than 100,000 in the UK have lost their lives, and more than 2 million worldwide. In Scotland, with a second period of Lockdown for most and ongoing restrictions for some, it is likely that greater restrictions may yet be needed. Vaccines and treatments are signs of journey's end, but we still have some way to go.

Worship

As this journey moves on, we have to keep on acting *positively* as churches. That does not mean exhausting ourselves (or our Clergy, Lay ministers and Vestry members) with anxious activism, even at a distance. It does mean attending to worship and witness in whatever ways are possible.

Some strident voices have been heard demanding that the Government should allow churches to stay open for worship. Attending worship and attending to wellbeing are closely related, they argue, and rightly. But does that mean privileging places of worship over concert halls or sports grounds? All contribute to wellbeing, but all could potentially lead to transmission of the virus.

Christmas and Epiphany celebrate the Incarnation, God with us as a human being among human beings. I think this means that the Church, the Body of Christ, is called to identify with the precautions demanded by Lockdown, not seek to stand above them. In this second Lockdown, as in the first, we have to offer witness and service to society by having to worship and minister in a different way.

We have gained much experience which gives us confidence for the task. We have learned that 'Stay at Home' need not mean 'Stay away from Church.' We have discovered how to do on-line and on-paper worship, and to try and include everyone. The SEC has developed and continues to offer online Eucharistic worship at 11.00am on Sundays, available via www.scotland.anglican.org. A number of churches also offer local worship online, listed at www.scotland.anglican.org/broadcast-sunday-worship/online-worship-from-around-the-scottish-episcopal-church/. And many clergy or ministry teams have found that people really value receiving weekly readings, reflections, and prayers on paper, use them at home

For personal prayer and devotion there are many resources available online, but I particularly recommend one which gives space for reflection and prayer based on a Scripture reading, and which I have been using every day. "Pray as You Go," found at <https://pray-as-you-go.org>.

Witness

We also have gained experience of keeping in touch with each other and offering pastoral support. We have come to understand that by joining in on-line or on-paper worship with the Church, by keeping in contact and offering support when it's needed, and by continuing to contribute actively, financially and prayerfully, we can each play our part in the praying People of God.

In its long history the Church has continued its witness through wars, persecutions, and pandemics. And now it is our turn to witness in hardship. As has often been said, our church buildings may be closed but the Church itself remains open. It is important for this to be known in the community, and for the Church to be understood not only for looking after its members but for continuing to serve the whole community, especially in its witness of prayer.

God of compassion,
be close to those who are ill, afraid or in isolation.
In their loneliness, be their consolation;
in their anxiety, be their hope;
in their darkness, be their light;
through him who is the Light of the nations
and the Glory of your people,
Jesus Christ our Lord.

On this Epiphany journey, may God gladden our hearts with the good news of his kingdom.

