



St Martin-in-the-Fields church in central London is to broadcast a national online service to mark the start of Advent this weekend as the nation prepares for a Christmas 'like no other' amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The service for Advent Sunday will be the first in a series of pre-recorded 'worship at home' national online Church of England Advent and Christmas services with the theme of Comfort and Joy.

This weekend's service will be broadcast from 9am on Sunday on the Church of England's [YouTube](#) and [Facebook](#) accounts. It will include Advent hymns from the Choral Scholars of St Martin-in-the-Fields and a sermon delivered by the Vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields, Revd Dr Sam Wells.

Revd Richard Carter, Associate Vicar for Mission at St Martin-in-the-Fields, will welcome viewers at the start of the service.

"Advent is the time where we wait – we wait for the coming of Christ but we wait in hope for the one who is going to set us free – and don't we need that hope at this present time and don't we need that setting free in this time of lockdown?" he will say.

The start of Advent coincides with the final weekend of lockdown in England with public worship in churches and cathedrals due to resume from December 2.

A number of the online services are being broadcast in collaboration with charities such as The Children's Society, Marie Curie and Christian Aid.

Other services planned include Midnight Mass with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, and the Bishop of Dover, Rose Hudson-Wilkin, and a New Year's Eve online service led by the Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell.

Recordings of the services will also be available on Daily Hope, the free 24-hour phone line offering Church of England services, prayers and reflections since the start of the pandemic.

The national online services will be broadcast in addition to digital services provided by cathedrals and churches, alongside public worship, during the Advent and Christmas season.

Churches have already downloaded pre-recorded Advent carols and hymns provided through the AChurchNearYou website more than 100,000 times for use in digital and in person services, with these expected to be heard by millions of people throughout December.

The Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell, said: "We hope that these services, with a theme of Comfort and Joy, will help bring joy and celebration after a uniquely difficult year. We also acknowledge that for those who have lost a loved one or livelihood, or who cannot be with someone they love, our role may be to provide consolation and hope.

"Online worship has created new communities of faith since the pandemic, attracting large numbers of people who have never been to church or attend very infrequently. We know that many will return to public worship after the lockdown is lifted but for others, online services will remain a key part of the new 'mixed ecology' of worship."

Notes to editors

Daily Hope is available on 0800 804 8044, 24 hours a day

The Church of England's national online services have received more than three million views so far this year. Up to one in five people watching go to church infrequently or have never been before and up to one third of viewers are under the age of 34.

Explore the full range of Comfort and Joy resources produced by the Church of England.

The schedule for the Church's Advent and Christmas online services is as follows:

- **29 November 9:00am** - Worship at Home for the First Sunday of Advent with St Martin-in-the-Fields
- **6 December 9:00am** - Worship at Home for the Second Sunday of Advent with HOPE Together
- **13 December 9:00am** - Worship at Home for the Third Sunday of Advent. A Christingle service with The Children's Society
- **20 December 9:00am** - Worship at Home for the Fourth Sunday of Advent with Marie Curie
- **22 December 9:00am** - Worship at Home: A service of Lessons and Carols with Christian Aid
- **24 December 11:30pm** - Worship at Home: Midnight Mass with the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Dover
- **27 December 9:00am** - Worship at Home for the First Sunday of Christmas with Church Army
- **31 December 9:00am** - Worship at Home: A service with the Archbishop of York on New Year's Eve
- **3 January 9:00am** - Worship at Home for Epiphany with Embrace the Middle East.

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