



Churches across the country have displayed illuminated stars at the culmination of a campaign by the Church of England aimed at encouraging people to attend services this Christmas.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, launched the Church of England's Night of the Stars outside Canterbury Cathedral where a spectacular light show was projected onto the south side of the cathedral.

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At Durham Cathedral, the Bishop of Durham, Paul Butler, was present for a light show beamed onto the north transept of the Cathedral. Both events will be supported by robed clergy and the cathedral's choirs, leading hundreds of people in carol singing.

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The light shows formed a part of special services of Evensong, with the two ancient cathedrals, both World Heritage Sites, the first in England to use this technology as part of a service of worship, aiming to bring the beauty of a cathedral service to a wider audience outside.

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The events were the culmination of the Church of England's [#FollowTheStar](#) campaign which has so far included video advertising, a [celebrity recipe](#) from Great British Bake Off star Martha Collison and a [specially-created app](#) with reflections from Christmas Eve to Epiphany.

A giant illuminated star has been placed on the Gatehouse of Bishopthorpe Palace, the official residence of the Archbishop of York, as part of the campaign.

Churches and their wider communities across the country have mounted illuminated stars on towers, walls and advertising hoardings and produced a range of star-themed items from T shirts to beer mats to promote the campaign.

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The Dean of Canterbury, Robert Willis, said: "Pilgrims have travelled to worship at this holy place of pilgrimage over the centuries and to explore aspects of their own journey of faith."

"We are delighted to have hosted this wonderful event which takes our evening worship outside the Cathedral at this time of preparation for Christmas."

The Dean of Durham, Andrew Tremlett, said: "Taking part in the #FollowTheStar campaign is a brilliant opportunity for Durham Cathedral to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ, the child at the heart of all Christmas celebrations, across the region and beyond."

"With the tradition of pilgrimage deeply ingrained in the history of the Cathedral, we have been delighted to welcome a large number to join us in witnessing our magnificent building illuminated with stars, offering people a way to connect afresh with God this festive period."

Launching the campaign, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, said: "Wherever you are this Christmas, you are invited to follow the star and to be with Jesus."

"#FollowTheStar doesn't ask you to be perfect. It says: come just as you are to take the life-changing Christmas journey. You are welcome. You are deeply known and truly loved."

The light show used a piece of music by contemporary composer, Cecilia McDowall, *O Oriens*, sung by the Chapel Choir of Merton College Oxford, for whom the piece was commissioned. The text is the antiphon for 21 December: "*Morning Star, splendour of light eternal and sun of righteousness: Come and enlighten those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.*"

The services used a special liturgy devised by Simon Jones, who is Chaplain of Merton College and a member of the Church of England's Liturgical Commission.

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