



In their Christmas messages, Bishops of the Church of England urge people to revisit the stark reality of the Christmas story to find hope in unlikely places.

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In her message, the Bishop of Newcastle, Christine Hardman, highlights the "shocking" dimension of the Christmas story.

She points to a sculpture by Anthony Gormley of his daughter when she was just a few days old, curled up asleep, illustrating the total powerlessness of a newborn baby.

“Utterly vulnerable, utterly defenceless, this is how Jesus came into our world,” she says.

“It was shocking - Mary came within a hair’s breadth of giving birth on the street and it seems that no one had the compassion to give up their bed for a young woman so that she could give birth in warmth and safety.

“Completely understandably the wise men, who were following the star looking for a child who was to become a king, looked for him in a palace. But, of course, he wasn’t there. They found him in a cold dirty stable.

“This is the astonishing way God in Jesus Christ came into our world bringing hope and transformation.”

In his Christmas message the Bishop of St Albans, Alan Smith, urges people to look beyond the “sentimentalised” depictions of the Christmas story.

He remarks: “The real-life events of the first Christmas are as dramatic and colourful as any contemporary soap opera: a teenage pregnancy, homelessness, and a deranged leader who commits murder, causing people to seek asylum.

“Our Christmas carols and cards often sentimentalise the events which took place 2000 years ago but in reality, they were pretty brutal.”

In his Christmas Day sermon, he is expected to speak about contemporary challenges including homelessness and the refugee crisis, drawing parallels with the Christmas story.

He will add: "Then there is the slaughter of the Innocents when King Herod, in a fit of rage and fear, has all the young male infants under the age of two killed in and around Bethlehem. Such wanton slaughter is not far away from the plight of the millions of Uighur people in the Xinjiang Province of China who are being forcibly detained and ‘re-educated’. So this Christmas we remember them and pray for them and support them."

In her message the Bishop of Lancaster, Jill Duff, remarks: "The Christmas story can seem remarkably chaotic. There was no room at the Inn; well, it's always busy at Christmas.

"Surely God should have booked ahead? A nice warm delivery suite at the Bethlehem women’s hospital? Not a 60-mile trip on a donkey when Mary was eight months pregnant to deliver her baby in a stable.

"Surely all her visions about having a special baby were a figment of her imagination? It's all in her head.

"But in my experience that is precisely how God works. It often seems that chaos reigns...But it's when chaos is at its height, when hopes are dashed, that is precisely when God turns up."

The Bishop of Durham, Paul Butler uses his Christmas message to highlight the sacrifices people make in everyday life.

Recounting how people often remark about this being 'the busiest time of year' for clergy, he remarks: "This is also true of very many people who work extremely hard in the lead up to Christmas, and indeed over the whole festive period! I think of shop workers, health and social care workers, those who keep our power running, our streets safe etc.

"Work still matters through Christmas. Farmers still have to get up early to milk their cows; planes still fly even if trains and buses do not run."

He goes on: "The Christmas story in some ways affirms work and working.

"Here I do not simply think of work as that for which people are paid. Many people work extremely hard without being paid for their work. Mary, Jesus's mother, almost certainly falls into this category as have and do so many mothers raising children, running households, caring for families – often now also working in a paid role on top."

Meanwhile, the Bishop of Warwick, John Stroyan, writes of "the signs of hope, of light, of love, of compassion and public service" which we see in society.

The Bishop of Coventry, Christopher Cocksworth said: "Christmas is about life. The life of a newborn baby. The life of Jesus – 'the Son of the Most High', his mother called him; the life of God in human life; the life that shows us how to live; the life that transforms lives."

In his message, The Bishop of Lichfield, Michael Ipgrave reminds us "we need to learn how to build bridges across difference, to meet and greet one another in all this bewildering variety."



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