

Nothing can 'cancel' the message of hope and new life at the heart of Christmas even if some celebrations are smaller this year, bishops have said in their Christmas messages.

In their annual Christmas messages, bishops of the Church of England speak of the end of 2021 as a time of uncertainty and anxiety but say the message of the Christmas story is needed more than ever.

The [Bishop of Lichfield, Dr Michael Ipgrave](#), refers to weeks of uncertainty about whether some Christmas celebrations should go ahead amid concerns about spreading covid-19, at the end of "another unsettling year for the human race, and us as individuals".

But he adds: "Every Christmas we tell again the story of ... God, who loves our world so much that he chooses to come among us – not because he is obliged to, not because we have asked him to, but simply out of grace.

"We always begin with grace, and we always come back to grace, shown in the sign of Emmanuel, God with us in Jesus Christ, born as a baby among us.

"No law, no government, no power on earth can cancel the wonder of that birth."

In his message, the [Bishop of Coventry, Dr Christopher Cocksworth](#), takes up the theme.

He asks: "If Christmas is about hope breaking into a hopeless world, why are we so quick to speak of Christmas being 'cancelled' under the threat of things such as a new variant?"

"Nothing can cancel Christmas, even if circumstances mean that our celebrations are imperfect.

"Jesus's birth, after all, was messy – an unexpected pregnancy, a young family on the move, a makeshift birthplace.

"What matters is that our Christmas celebrations this year – and I pray they'll be easier than the last – tell us of the constant, unchanging reality that God is with us in every situation."

The Bishop of Gloucester, Rachel Treweek, speaks about how recent events – whether refugees travelling to seek safety or the pandemic restrictions which affected where everyone could or could not go at different times – have shown the power of “place”.

The same thing is reflected most powerfully of all in the Christmas story, she explains.

“Over 2,000 years ago, God chose to come to earth in human flesh and live among us,” she says.

“I love the translation of John’s Gospel which says, ‘The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood’.”

She adds: “Wherever you are, whatever your story, God knows you by name and loves you, and Jesus Christ is present to be encountered in the places where you are.

“This Christmas may each of us be open to the hope and love and life of Jesus Christ in all the different places of our lives. God with us.”

The Bishop of Burnley Philip North, reflects that Jesus was born in the midst of great uncertainty.

“This will be an odd Christmas,” he says.

“I hope you enjoy yourselves and have a good time, but we are going to be anxious, it is an uncertain year.

“We’ll be watching the news and wondering what new restrictions are going to be imposed on our lives.

“So, in the midst of it all why not take some time to gaze into the manger, to look at Mary’s child, because in that baby we find the One in whom we can place all our trust.”

The **Bishop of Chelmsford, Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani**, speaks about the power of silence and reflection – and the challenge of finding it amid the background noise of the modern world.

“In the busyness and noise of this Christmas season, my hope and prayer for us all is that we can find at least a few moments of peace and quiet to pause and reflect on the true heart of Christmas – and perhaps even hear the angels sing once more at the birth of the Saviour,” she says.

And the **Bishop of Worcester, Dr John Inge**, reflects on the impact of wars and crises, climate change and the “curse of Covid 19”, adding that the Christmas theme of peace on Earth is “a message the world desperately needs to hear now more than ever”.

But, speaking from the diocese’s cathedral, he adds: “Worcester Cathedral has stood firm for over a thousand years.

“Over the centuries God’s people have felt the peace of Christmas there whilst living through times far worse than our own.

“During the Black Death, the Plague, famine, civil and world wars the Cathedral has been a sanctuary of God’s peace, and still is.

“Jesus tells us that no one can add an hour to their life by being anxious. My prayer for you and for me – and for everyone – this Christmas is that we shall feel the Peace of God of which the angels sang, that we shall be enfolded by it and given strength to spread peace and good will to others.”

Meanwhile the **Bishop of Dover, Rose Hudson-Wilkin** speaks about giving - and issues a challenge.

“Christmas is about love and at the heart of loving is giving,” she says.

“What we are often not prepared for, is to reach for the heights and depths of this love.

“Without true love, there can be no real giving, generosity is missing, and that is why we often give from our left overs, we give things that we don’t want, things that carry no significant meaning to us – and it therefore means without true love, there can be no real generosity.”

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