

With a focus on food banks, warm spaces, community, the war in Ukraine, and migration, bishops across England have shared messages of hope this Christmas, at the end of a turbulent year.

In his Christmas message, the Bishop of Lichfield, Michael Ipgrave, was one of several highlighting how many churches will be open this Christmas not only for services but as a warm, heated space for those who who need it.

“The instinct to welcome people into our own space is deep within us as human beings - and this has everything to do with Christmas,” he said.

“For Christians, this great festival is a celebration of the wondrous story of our God coming among us to share our life, with all its challenges and hardships.

“The welcome, or lack of welcome, that different people gave to this little God who came to visit our cold, dark, and needy world says so much about the society of Jesus’ time.

“And the welcome we give, or fail to give, to people who are cold, hungry, struggling with finances today says so much about our own society.

“I hope all of goodwill can find the best ever Christmas through giving a warm welcome to those who need it most.”

The Bishop of Worcester, John Inge, took up the same theme and spoke about power – of all kinds.

“The recent cold spell has meant the power we need to heat our homes has been in the news, as has the worry of paying for it,” he said.

“Across the globe many people don’t have that power: particularly Ukraine, where people are suffering colder temperatures than we’ve experienced here. And then there’s the power of President Putin who caused all the difficulties.

“But the greatest power in the universe is not violence but love. At Christmas, we see the truth of that revealed once again when we celebrate the birth of Jesus. It is by love that we shall be saved, not by the power of any world leader, good or evil, or any power of our own.”

The Bishop of Dover, Rose Hudson-Wilkin, spoke about a year of upheaval and “of seismic proportions ...the loss of our beloved late Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II”.

“The shadow of Covid-19 remained with us and we heard stories of the lasting impact of the pandemic, especially through Long Covid, [and] the effects of lockdown on children’s and adults’ mental well-being,” she added.

“But we have also seen compassion in action as thousands of families offered to share their homes with those Ukrainian families who have been lucky enough to get visas. We also saw our churches working with many charities to offer support by way of warm community spaces; assisting with language lessons; providing clothing and food.

“Indeed, the words of our Lord came into their own: ‘I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me a drink, naked and you clothed me, sick and in prison and you visited me.’ Thank you for your part in this.

“And this is at the heart of the story at Christmas. It is about love and forgiveness; goodness, compassion and kindness.”

The Bishop of Dudley, Martin Gorick, also drew on the cost-of-living crisis.

“It will be a bleak midwinter for many this Christmas, even as our foodbanks, warm spaces and other fabulous volunteer groups do all they can to bring food, warmth and friendship to all who are in need,” he said.

“At Christmas we celebrate God’s gift of himself to us in Jesus. Costing nothing, but worth everything.”

In his Christmas message, the Bishop of Norwich, Graham Usher, reminded all that “there is a light on in a church near you this Christmas.”

“It’s a light that guides you to a place of companionship; guides you to place of warmth in the cold; guides you to a place of hope even in the face of the fears around war and climate change and the cost of living.”

The Bishop of Peterborough, Donald Allister, offered a “double-barrelled” Christmas message:

“To Christians and Churches I say: Rejoice in Jesus, all that he is and means, and seek to find new ways of sharing him with those around you.

“To the majority of people, who don’t associate with Christianity and Church: I encourage you, not just to celebrate Christmas, but to let your local church, or a Christian friend, share with you more of its wonderful deeper meaning.”

The Bishop of Chelmsford, Guli Francis-Dehqani, said in her message: “As we begin another year with all the uncertainty that continues raging around us, and with continued worries about the cost of living and the changing nature of the church, it’s perhaps worth remembering that the same Christ child who drew kings and magi to his crib is the one who invites us to follow him still today.”

The Bishop of Chichester, Martin Warner, spoke about evil - both at the time of Jesus's birth and today.

"The slaughter of children when Jesus was born is described in the Bible as the policy of an insecure, heartless ruler," he said.

"This description still brings judgement on those who perpetrate that crime. We see it in Ukraine and in every form of war and conflict.

"In the minds of Christian people, Jesus Christ, as a defenceless baby, sits on his mother's lap as judgement against those who murder the young and innocent. And the Christmas star shines a light on these criminal acts to reveal them for what they are."

Sheffield's Bishop Pete Wilcox challenged people to "strip away the tinsel we so easily drape over the Christmas story" in light of such a troubling year.

"December has felt especially dark and cold. Most of us are watching our fuel bills closely," he said. "And commuters and schoolchildren may well leave home before sunrise and return after sunset.

"But this year has also felt very dark with the war in Ukraine, with rampant inflation and now with increasingly disruptive strikes.

"The Bible tells us that Jesus was born outside marriage to a young woman whose pregnancy was such a disgrace that her fiancé almost severed their relationship; he was born away from home in an unfamiliar town so crowded that Mary and Joseph struggled to find accommodation, and soon after the birth they had to flee the country to escape the murderous intentions of a tyrannical king.

"It is in the birth of that Jesus that we find Emmanuel – God with us. Christians believe that the God who came to us in Jesus is with us still in the cold and darkness; to bring laughter and light, love and liberty."

In his Christmas message, the Bishop of Exeter, Robert Atwell, explained that through Jesus's coming at Christmas, God bridges the gap between us and him.

"God does not expect us to come onto his territory. Instead, God steps into our world, our mess, our weakness and sin, our midwinter, our struggles for justice, our yearning for peace."

He continued: "As many face a bleak midwinter with escalating fuel bills and increased mortgage payments, we need to keep loving our neighbour by offering a warm welcome and closing the gaps in our society."

The Bishop of Carlisle, James Newcome, recorded his Christmas message in a warm spot drop-in centre in Keswick, Cumbria.

"Warmth is an important theme in the Bible," he explained.

"Warmth lies at the heart of the familiar Christmas story, in which we see God's extraordinary 'love for the world' expressed in the birth of a child.

"Warm centres like this gladden God's heart; as do food banks and organisations that provide affordable housing and people who house refugees from Ukraine and Syria, and the work of Crisis at Christmas and other charities – and so on.

"Thankfully, it's a long list – and in all of it we see the warmth of God's love reflected in human beings. Of course, it would be better if none of those things were needed; but they are, and we are so grateful for them."

The Bishop of Bath and Wells, Michael Beasley, said in his Christmas message: "Lots of the voices around us are angry and violent. We hear the cries of our brothers and sisters caught up in the conflict in Ukraine. We hear the shouts of those who stand on the picket lines."

He asks: "In all this, who are we tuned in to hear this Christmas? The raised voices around us? Or the song of the angels with their message of peace?"

Rochester's Bishop Jonathan Gibbs reminded all in his Christmas message that as Christians, we know that the war in Ukraine, the cost of living crisis, health crises and more are not the whole or even the main story.

"Our headline news is the birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ and the promise he brings to our world, that God is with us," he said.

"In the words of John's Gospel, 'the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.'"

Bishop Rachel Treweek of Gloucester drew parallels between the time of Jesus's birth and now, and spoke about times of crisis.

"God with us in our celebrations and in pain and anxiety, and crises," she said.

“God with us even beyond death.

“No crisis today can undo that birth of unchanging hope. God’s love is here to stay.

“A church near you wants to share this hope-filled adventure. Happy Christmas!”

Find out where you could celebrate this Christmas at [AChurchNearYou.com](https://www.churchnearyou.com).

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