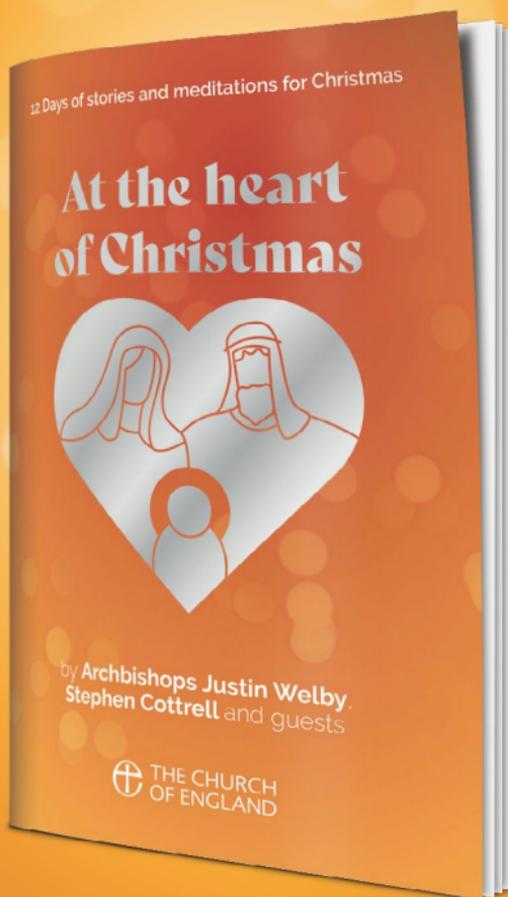


Preview the all-new
At the Heart of Christmas
booklet for 2021



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CHRISTMAS DAY

Feast

by Archbishop Stephen Cottrell

Christmas is what the church calls a feast day. Consequently, my favourite bits of Christmas are all to do with eating and drinking.

I love Midnight Mass. It feels right to be celebrating the birth of Christ in the dark of the night. But Holy Communion also feels like the right way to celebrate Christmas, breaking bread and sharing wine in remembrance not just of Jesus' birth, but of his whole life, ministry, death and resurrection.

Then I love Christmas dinner the next day. I love the theatre of the table beautifully set, of food lovingly prepared, and of fine wine being drunk. I love the traditions that accompany the food; so if I have my way we'll eat a goose, there will be a flaming figgy pudding, Christmas crackers will be pulled, paper hats worn and silly jokes told. Best of all, those I love the best will – I hope and pray – be with me round the table.



Reading Psalm 63.5-6

*I will bless you as long as I live
and lift up my hands in your name.
My soul shall be satisfied, as with marrow and fatness,
and my mouth shall praise you with joyful lips ...*

Reflection

As I think back over all the Christmas Eucharists I've attended and the many Christmas dinners I've eaten, two things stand out. First, I remember Holy Communion shared with those in difficult circumstances, such as Christmas visits to prison, or visiting people in hospital, or taking Communion to someone who was sick or housebound or alone.

Then I also remember the year I spent Christmas with my brother when his super-expensive, very free-range turkey that was supposed to be delivered on Christmas Eve never arrived. We made do with sausages and stuffing and roast potatoes and still had ourselves a feast.

It turned out that what really mattered was what we brought to the feast ourselves, not what was on the table in front of us. Therefore, it is me and you coming with empty hands to the altar rail on Christmas night to receive bread from heaven; and then gathered with those we love and gathering in those who have no one to love them, that is the heartbeat and meaning of our Christmas feasting.

Whom do you know who might be alone at Christmas?
What could you do to reach out to them?

Could you make some festive food to share with others
in your community?

#AtTheHeartOfChristmas is the Church of England's Christmas theme for 2021.

The full booklet is an invitation to everyone to ponder, what the extraordinary events of the first Christmas might mean for us now and in the years ahead.

Starting on Christmas Eve and continuing daily until the Epiphany, Archbishops Justin Welby, Stephen Cottrell and guests share what lies close to the heart of Christmas for them, through stories, Bible readings and reflections.

The booklet is complemented by a range of prayer cards for individuals and families, bookmarks and more via **chpublishing.co.uk/christmas**

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