

**Christmas Message of The Most Reverend Malcolm McMahon OP,
Archbishop of Liverpool**

Christmas is a special time, and at the heart of our celebrations is the fact that God became man for us. Two thousand years ago there wasn't a feast of Christmas yet there was still expectation as people longed for the coming of the Messiah to transform their lives. We don't always get what we expect at Christmas and two thousand years ago people didn't expect that the Messiah would be born in poverty, to a refugee family forced to leave their home to take part in a census for an occupying power. Homeless, with nowhere to stay they found refuge in a cold, dark stable with only the farm animals for company. Yet lives were about to be transformed.

I am sure celebrations were far from the minds of shepherds on a cold, bleak hillside and yet suddenly the angel of the Lord appeared to them, there was light, and glory shone around them – no wonder they were terrified. The first words of the angel to them were 'Do not be afraid...' as they went full of joy to Bethlehem to greet the new born king. So many of us need those words of the angel today: 'Do not be afraid...' Weighed down with the cares of life we fear for the future, but Christmas gives us hope as we know that Christ is with us. The Prince of Peace comes to us to bring his peace and healing and to give us hope.

Christmas is a time for precious memories too. Memories of Christmases past - maybe recent or long ago. Memories of loved ones, just by thinking of them we are saying, 'we love you...you are still with us in our hearts...' There may be tears too, 'Do not be afraid' of them, they are fine because they are a sign of love.

The message of peace and goodwill means it is a time for us to reach out to others, especially to those in need. So many people work in the weeks before Christmas to help those in greatest need. We see people giving up their time to feed the hungry, and to provide a place of refuge for those who are lonely. Those who work in our essential services are there for us too. During the pandemic we have renewed our spirit of care and generosity – we have reached out to others and offered them hope and readily give thanks to those who care.

For Christians the joy of Christmas is found in the Eucharist and the crib. We give thanks to God for the gift of his Son who cried out from the manger to remind us of the continuing plight of the homeless, refugees and those escaping terror. When we gather as far as restrictions allow us, we remember what it is to be a family no matter how few we are or how distant we are from each other. The Holy Family was only three people yet proved to be the source of a great love which has overflowed into our lives two millennia later. May our families have the child Jesus at their centre as a source of love and a true source of strength.

May this Christmas time be happy, blessed and peaceful.

The Most Reverend Malcolm McMahon OP
Archbishop of Liverpool

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