



THE ARCHBISHOP
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In today's [York Press](#) the Archbishop writes about the importance of comfort and peace. The article follows in full...

The chorus of the well-known Christmas Carol, *God rest you Merry Gentlemen*, promises tidings of comfort and joy.

I think we all know what the word joy means. Even though it's been sadly lacking this year!

Most of us will have had significant birthdays, weddings, or the birth of a new family member and not been able to celebrate in the ways we would wish. This has been hard. At least at Christmas we may be able to get together with some of our family members in person or online, and hopefully these will be joyful occasions. But we still need to be careful. The vaccine is being rolled out. But Covid19 has not yet gone away.

Which brings me to the word comfort. It is a slightly trickier word than joy, and easier to misunderstand. Comfort is rather more than tea and sympathy. The literal meaning of the word is 'to strengthen greatly.' It is about building resilience and persevering through difficult times even when there is no joy, and even when there is little of the comfort that we think this word might mean. Here in York this year people have been remarkably positive, sensible and courageous in the way that they have faced coronavirus and looked out for one another. Although Covid19 has been horrific, some good has come out of it in the way we have cared for one another and learned a greater appreciation of one another, especially those who work in our health, emergency and other essential services. At the same time, we must recognise the way our poorer communities suffer more than others and make sure we look out for them. Especially at Christmas. Supporting your local food bank or homelessness shelter has never been more important.

And we need this spirit to continue. We are going to need this sort of strengthening comfort for the months to come. We need to give comfort to each other, by encouraging each other to persevere, by not letting our guard down, by keeping our masks on until we really are the other side of Covid19.

But we will need it in other ways as well. As I write this, it appears that we may get to the end of the year without the trade deal with the European Union that we were told would be so easy to deliver. It no longer really matters which way any of us voted about Brexit, or what we thought about the different versions of the UK in or out of Europe. We are all in the same boat. However, I think very few of us voted for what seems is about to be unfolding. I really hope I'm wrong. And I really hope by the time you read this, things will have changed. But even so, we need to comfort each other because there are even bigger challenges ahead.

On the first Christmas night, the angels sang of peace on earth. We usually think of this peace in human terms: peace between each other, an absence of war. But beyond Covid and beyond Brexit we need to find a way of living in peace with the planet itself. This is going to require a whole different way of living, a different, greener economy, and a greater determination to make painful and difficult lifestyle changes. We are going to need to comfort each other.

So let's have a safe, happy Christmas. Let's be especially aware of our neighbours who may be isolated and who are in need. But this Christmas, let's expand our definition of peace to include peace with all created things and especially with our fragile and beautiful earth. This might bring lasting joy and considerable comfort.

The Church of England's campaign on Comfort and Joy offers free reflections available on audio, smart speaker and email formats with accompanying prayer activities for children and families. The reflections for each day from Christmas Day to 2 January feature contributions from Kate Bottley, Jonathan Bryan, Bob Chilcott, Martha Collison, Stephen Cottrell, Guli Francis-Dehqani, Chine McDonald, Sally Phillips and Justin Welby. Find out more at: <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/preparing-advent-christmas-2020-comfort-and-joy>

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