



THE ARCHBISHOP
OF YORK

The Archbishop today led a national service for local BBC Radio. His reflection is available to read [here](#)

There is always some point in the build up to Christmas when I find my thoughts turning to the fearful anxiety of the Holy Family as they trudged the streets of Bethlehem on that first Christmas night trying to find somewhere to stay.

I suppose that's why I liked the design on the Christmas Card that Laila made. It is of the Holy Family on the move. And in the dark.

Sometimes I think of this on a particularly cold night as I dash from the car to the front door and am gathered into the warmth of a centrally heated house. Or when I see a homeless person on the street, or hear about the fears of the unemployed, or learn of a house re-possession and a family moving into temporary accommodation.

I have never known this sort of anxiety myself. I have had troubles in life. But I have never really doubted where my next meal was coming from, or where I would sleep at night. But it was these basic fears that gripped Joseph as he shepherded Mary around Bethlehem, drawn there by the unsympathetic requirements of an unfair tax. And these thoughts make the build up to Christmas so real.

When the angel Gabriel came to Mary, she was full of fear. Who wouldn't be! She was taking on so much. This is true of every pregnancy. There is tremendous hope. But there is also great fearfulness. But it does mean that the story of this pregnancy speaks to our story and our experience; that this God we follow knows about the sorrows and the challenges of human life. And this year in this Covid Christmas, those fears are greater than ever. And our longing for hope and meaning more heartfelt than ever.

Therefore, the challenge of this story today, and inspired by Mary's incredible yes to God, is that we can show the same faithfulness and the same trust in God's empowering Spirit amidst the sorrows, trials, inequalities and injustices of today's world. It means caring about those who suffer disproportionately because of Covid, especially those in our poorest communities; those without a job, or without a home. It means trying to build a better world. It means providing jobs and homes and meals. The Church is in the forefront of providing this care. But we must also, with Mary who sung about God's justice, do all we can to ensure that we build a world where people have jobs and homes and meals for life.

None of this will be easy. But the biggest danger of all is starting to believe that nothing can change and that our own contribution makes no difference. It does. Things can change. And if the Christian faith teaches us anything, it is that one person can make a difference. Mary's yes to God made a difference. Joseph's faithfulness to Mary made a difference. Her son, Jesus Christ makes a whole world of difference, bring heaven down to earth. What he brings is what the world so desperately needs; a different way of living; a different set of values; a new commitment to each other. And he begins that life in solidarity with the poorest of the poor, his mother walking the streets of Bethlehem, trying to find somewhere to stay. Waiting to be invited in.

We must listen to him. First of all, it will be a cry of need. But soon it will be a way of life.

