

The Archbishop joined the Revd Kate Bottley on BBC Radio 2's Good Morning Christmas this morning. His reflection follows...

We're all waking up to a very different sort of Christmas Day than the one we imagined even a week ago. Many of us are on our own, and even those of us who do have company are painfully aware of friends and family members that we're not going to see and who will find today a struggle. Round our Christmas tree there are presents that are not going to be opened.

All this is hard. But it might make the story of the first Christmas more relevant than ever.

The story of Christmas is the story of God coming close to us. But in an unexpected way. Through a person. God doesn't send us a message, but a messenger; not a manifesto, but a man. Not a set of instructions, but a child. And through this child God's life is joined to ours.

I don't know whether it's true or not, but one of my favourite Christmas stories is about Francis of Assisi attending midnight mass. It was late and cold. The bishop was preaching and the sermon went on and on. Eventually Francis could stand it no longer. He cried out: 'Bishop, please be quiet, we can't hear the baby crying.'

Even if you're on your own today – or, perhaps, especially if you're on your own, I hope and pray you will not feel alone. I hope that a phone call or a video chat or social media contact from someone you love will bring you comfort and support. I pray that the telly and the radio might put a smile on your face and bring you some Christmas joy. I also hope that those of us who can meet with others today, will reach out to those who can't.

Most of all, I hope that on this rather different Christmas day all of us might turn being on our own into a blessing and find a space in our lives for some quiet reflection, give thanks for those we love but do not see, and in our hearts and imaginations go to Bethlehem and bend beneath the lintel of the stable door, and see Mary and Joseph in their fear and isolation, but also their great joy, and hear the baby crying. For the cry of that child is the assurance that God comes close to us, that God knows what it's like to be human and is reaching out to us. In fact, the Christmas story means this. None of us is really alone today.

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