

In the Christmas edition of the [Radio Times](#) The Archbishop writes that following Jesus will be the best choice we can make this Christmas.

When I was a boy, I always looked forward to the Christmas edition of the Radio Times. I think it was because in those days daytime television didn't really exist. If you were at a loose end during the day and switched on the telly, you only had the test card for company.

Christmas was different. For a few days, there were things on every day. I remember poring over the schedules – even if they only told me what was on the BBC – and deciding what I would watch on Christmas Eve and Boxing Day (in my family television on Christmas Day itself was frowned upon: we only watched the Queen at 3 pm).

I still look forward to the Christmas Radio Times, especially as it now contains choices and channels I could never have dreamed of as a boy. And I still prefer looking at the TV schedules on bits of paper; I'm not alone, as so do a million and a half of you who have bought this Christmas edition.

The choice that I marvelled at as a boy, is now commonplace throughout the year, and has multiplied and expanded in ways most of us could have never imagined: literally hundreds of channels, pouring out endless hours of content all day, all night, and all through the year. And that's before you've turned to the cornucopia of content that is iPlayer, BritBox, Netflix and Prime. Indeed, it is now such a bewildering deluge of choice that many of us spend a large part of the evening just flicking from channel to channel.

That is, unless you are someone who has no choice: like a homeless person curled up in the doorway of a shop; or an almost homeless family hopping from sofa to sofa or crammed into inadequate rented accommodation; or those on zero hours contracts; or suffering because the £20 rise in universal credit was taken away, those whose children are on free school meals and can't afford the licence fee, let alone the Netflix subscription; or those who will be working at Christmas and upon whose labour we depend and whose low pay only just keeps their heads above the waterline of poverty.

Choice, we discover, is the gift of wealth. Lack of choice, the scourge of poverty. Moreover, the gap between the two is getting wider. Take life expectancy, for example. A boy born in Blackpool has a healthy life expectancy - that is the years one can hope to live with good health - of 53 years. In Richmond upon Thames, it is 71. That's a gap of 18 years. What's worse is that ten years ago the gap was 13. This isn't levelling up, but widening out.

Poor health and low life expectancy are the consequence of low income, no income, poor housing, lack of opportunity and inadequate education. Though let me be clear: those who do work in these areas – teachers, social workers, clergy and many others – are doing an amazing job and without them things would be even worse.

On the first Christmas day, Mary and Joseph had no choice. Political expedience required them to travel to Bethlehem. Lack of agency, meagre resources pressed them into the hands of strangers. Jesus was born in an outhouse at the back of a pub. Hubris and tyranny sped them into exile.

The story of Christmas is the story of God born among the poor and alongside those who have no choice. To be true to Christmas we must all strive to level up our society and give everyone the choices some of us enjoy.

Our government has made levelling up one of its key objectives. However, we need immediate action not just long-term aspiration. We need to invest in those areas where choices are few.

Christmas unites us. So do these things. Successive polls demonstrate that most of us want this levelling up to happen. After all, we see the effects of poverty around us. Certainly here on my doorstep – but also right across the north – I see the effects every day.

But we also need something and someone to follow; someone who can help us make the right choices - for ourselves, for our nation, for our world and for the common good.

As a Christian I believe following Jesus will be the best choice we can make this Christmas. But whatever choice you make, let us all remember those who have little or no choice in Britain today.

The bumper Christmas edition of the Radio Times is available to buy now

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