



THE ARCHBISHOP  
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*The Archbishop writes in today's [Yorkshire Post](#) challenging us to recognise the need to receive the hope that Jesus brings. The article follows in full*

In Luke's account of the birth of Jesus, we are told that the shepherds on the hillside are greeted by angels with 'good news of great joy'. As a Church Leader who also specialises in sharing good news, I have to say, it has this year felt a bit elusive.

2021 has been a tough year. What we probably want to hear more than anything is the simple good news that we can gather with our friends and family at Christmas, free from all restrictions because COVID19 no longer poses a threat to our health. But we haven't received this news yet. We are living with the return of restrictions. We know that we're in for a very long haul.

And there is bad news all around us. Across the world, millions have died from COVID. Many people have had to mourn alone, unable to visit loved ones or say goodbye. Some countries are able to vaccinate their populations. Others are not. Refugees fleeing famine and conflict drown in the English Channel. Climate change continues to bring devastation to lives and livelihoods.

Where is the good news?

Where is the message of great joy?

Perhaps we can learn something from the shepherds.

It was an ordinary night, but something extraordinary happened. They were able to see it.

Can we see the same thing? Or do we get so caught up in the ordinary, or so focused on what we can't do and can't have, that we lose sight of the extraordinary good that is all around us, the good that constantly breaks into everyday life, ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

Week after week, there are many churches, from Rotherham to Richmond, Hull to Halifax, who open their doors to offer hospitality and care to those who are lonely and vulnerable. In community cafes and neighbourhood groups so much good goes on, be it collecting someone's prescription, changing a light bulb for a housebound neighbour, or making a space where those who are hungry for company can enjoy a meal with others, or just a bit of conversation over a cup of tea and cake. One of the highlights of my year was the lunch I held at Bishopthorpe for some of the people who had done amazing things in their community during the pandemic. I met a community champion who works at Morrisons who coordinated support for her local foodbank, postal workers who checked in daily with people on their rounds, as well as community nurses and domestic assistants at hospitals. It was humbling and inspiring to meet them.

Yorkshire often gets unfairly described as being a bit dour, but I see a county that has good news in abundance. Everywhere I go I hear stories of generosity, though with admirable brevity, we don't tend to shout about it.

Across the world, and working with other faiths and other people of good will, the Church of Jesus Christ is alongside those who find themselves washed up in refugee camps, bringing shelter, clothes, food and a listening ear.

In every circumstance, and especially when things are dark and bleak (like that first Christmas night), a word of comfort, a gentle touch or a kind glance brings hope and the opportunity for something new to break in. And for ourselves, perhaps it would be good to recognise that although we won't be able to live in the ways we have been used to, that is not necessarily such a bad thing. Or put it another way: we need to change. We need to receive the hope that Jesus brings.

For many people in other parts of the world, a change in the way we live would be good news. It would mean fewer stories of suffering and more stories of people able to live fulfilling and meaningful lives with access to the very basics that sustain life – food, healthcare, shelter, education and time for rest.

On that first Christmas, God came into the world. An ordinary event - a baby being born in the political tumult of a poor farming society under military dictatorship where there was little freedom - resulted in an extraordinary message to surprising people - wise men following a bright star and shepherds visited by angels.

We live in a world where there is much injustice, where resources are unequally distributed and where the earth is suffering because of the way in which we live. Yet, despite our inadequacy in responding to these crises, there is still hope, because what we see in Christ is a more generous, hospitable, and forgiving way of living, where all people are counted in and where there will be great rejoicing when we are all able to live flourishing lives.

God's extraordinary coming down to earth, coming to be among us, God with a human face, invites us to ponder how we can live differently, not only at Christmas but always. The good news of the first Christmas asks us what our good news is and how we tell our story of hope.

Christmas comes with an invitation to turn the bad news to good. We may, once again, not be having the Christmas we hoped for. We may be uncertain of what 2022 holds. But we can be sure that we will be given opportunities to change things; to live in ways that consider others; to share generously with our neighbours; to speak words of comfort to those who need to hear them; to smile at a stranger; to develop more sustainable ways of living; to be a kinder people in a kinder nation.

May all of you have a joyful, hopeful Christmas!



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