



THE ARCHBISHOP
OF YORK

The Archbishop of York joined BBC Radio 2 Breakfast this morning to deliver a Pause for Thought. This follows in full:

Twenty years ago, when our children were little and money was tight, I sometimes dreaded switching on the television at this time of year.

One glossy advert after another told them what stuff I had to buy them. Or painted such an impossibly cheery, fun filled and extravagant picture of Christmas family life that I felt sure the reality of our Christmas would be rather disappointing.

Neither were things necessarily much better when we went to church, for the Christmas story itself was often presented in a way that seemed way too cosy, almost Disney.

So a stable turned out to be quite the loveliest place for a mother to give birth. Shepherds in the middle of the night the most welcome visitors.

I expect for many families things may feel even worse this Christmas. Money is very, very tight. Bills higher. Help welcome, but limited. And last night it snowed, the world grinds to a halt.

What do we say to our children and grandchildren when we simply can't afford to buy the things the adverts stress they want or need. How will we put Christmas dinner on the table when so many people who were donating to food banks a year ago now use them themselves? Or even harder to imagine, or to bear, those who are having to make choices, between heating and eating?

I don't know the answers to these questions.

But I do feel the stress.

All I can do is turn to the Christmas story itself.

Which is not cosy. It's about a pregnant teenager, a poll-tax summons, a difficult journey, an overcrowded city, a frightening birth in the outhouse at the back of a pub, and then a little refugee family fleeing genocide.

Christians believe that this incredible story is the story of God, God come down to earth. God sharing what it is to be human. It brings hope to the bleakest situation, precisely because it is so real and resonates so powerfully with the dark and difficult things we experience.

It is therefore light in the most oppressive darkness.

And it can also bring joy in great simplicity.

Therefore, this story, the story of God among us, might enable us, however challenging things are, to have a very happy Christmas when it comes.

And maybe even make the next fortnight, as we get ready for Christmas, a little less stressful.

