God has spoken. Amid the cacophony and misery of war, in a world riven by political extremes and widespread corruption, God speaks. The message isn't new, but is addressed afresh to every generation. A biblical writer puts it like this:

“Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son...”

Anyone hoping for a message combining instant justice with the extermination of tyranny and divine retribution is likely to be disappointed. Only imaginary gods, made in our image, could work that kind of wizardry, by wreaking revenge on oppressors, and conferring health, wealth and happiness on everyone we nominate. But that is not how the real God speaks.

The Christmas story offers us clues. It tells of a baby born in a manger, shepherds granted a privileged audience, and foreigners arriving unexpectedly with meaningful gifts. What might otherwise sound like an idyllic event is overshadowed by ominous signs: the homeland is enemy-occupied, leaders are unscrupulous, families are uprooted on a whim, and the first of several assassination attempts on Christ's life is recorded.

There is even more to it than that. God’s final message to humanity is also discerned in the later life of Jesus: in his deeds as much as his words, in his death and resurrection, his continuing presence, and the assurance that the world as we know it is time-limited and subject to his judgment.

The biblical writer, who recognised the Son as God’s lasting word, amplified the description like this:

“...whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word.”

The paradox of a helpless baby as creator and sustainer of the universe is captured by the 17th century parson Giles Fletcher:

“A child he was, and had not learned to speak,
That with his word the world before did make;
His mother’s arms him bore, he was so weak,
That with one hand the vaults of heaven could shake.
See how small room my infant Lord doth take,
Whom all the world is not enough to hold.
Who of his years or of his age hath told?

Never such age so young, never a child so old."

This juxtaposition of weakness and strength is taken up by St Paul, who came to the shocking conclusion that God's ultimate statement of both power and wisdom is found in Christ's crucifixion.

He knew it would be interpreted as "foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God ... for God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength."

The human race has tried plenty of alternatives, in the belief that sooner or later might has to be right and retributive punishment will solve the problem of evil. Confucius is credited with a proverb warning against that philosophy:

“When you embark on a journey of revenge, dig two graves; one for your enemy and one for yourself.”

Reflecting on the endless cycle of reprisals, the late Martin Luther King Jr concluded:

“Violence begets violence; hate begets hate; and toughness begets a greater toughness. It is all a descending spiral, and the end is destruction – for everybody. Along the way of life, someone must have enough sense and morality to cut off the chain of hate.”

No good advice will overcome our lower nature, however. Divine inspiration and motivation are needed for that. Christianity isn't inherited; each generation needs to be won over afresh. The 17th century German priest Angelus Silesius, wrote:

“Though Christ a thousand times
in Bethlehem be born
And not within thyself,
Thy soul will be forlorn.”

Faith comes naturally to a very few. For some it just flickers and needs to be rekindled. But for most people these days, faith-talk sounds completely alien and they won't have a clue where to start.

If it's any encouragement, I was one myself. So I know it's possible to reach out into the unknown and ask for illumination. Don't be impatient if God keeps you waiting a while to be sure you are genuine. Keep at it. Be encouraged by these words from the French philosopher Blaise Pascal:

“Jesus says, 'Console yourself, you would not seek me, if you had not found me'.”

The Bible is the unfolding saga of God searching for a reluctant human race, not the other way round. Christ is God's final word, new for every age, and heralded at Christmas.