
Christmas messages

The Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, Bishop David Chillingworth, The Archbishop of Dublin, The Bishops of Cork and The Bishop of Connor

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We are living through times of exceptional difficulty at present. The murder of 24 worshippers in St Mark's Christian Coptic Cathedral in Cairo is only the latest in a series of horrors.

We look through all that suffering and try to find ways of identifying with it and so we reach for symbols. A candle has become a symbol of our care about the suffering of the people of Aleppo in Syria. The Lampedusa Cross was made from the fragments of smashed boats of the migrants



who perished on the journey across the Mediterranean to the island of Lampedusa. And a cross somehow links it to the suffering of Jesus.

You might think that in a world like this, our politics and our care would be about the homeless and the stateless, about human rights and compassion; but actually we seem to be living in a period of fear, and division, and even hatred in our politics.

The world into which Jesus was born was not so very different from this. The birth of any child is a sort of miracle – a miracle when potential meets helpless vulnerable human life. God's sending of His son, Jesus, as a vulnerable child born in the

stable in Bethlehem, is a sign of His determination that the world will be saved; but saved by the power of love – and that alone.

This Christmas, I send to you and your loved ones, near and far, my hopes that you will have a very happy and peaceful time together.

The Archbishop of Dublin

The annual return of Christmas is eagerly awaited by millions of people the world over. It is a time of excitement and anticipation for the younger, a time of preparation and of remembering for the older, and a time of shared expectation and hope for everyone who participates in Christmas. In a real sense, the preparation and the anticipation are part of the Season of Advent which immediately precedes and builds up the Christmas experience in our hearts and minds. Advent is a God-given opportunity to get ready for Christmas by making straight the way of the Lord in the company of John the Baptizer, the last of the prophets, and of Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ.

Building Christmas up in this way is very important. And if we have not done it this year, it is good to think of doing it and doing it early next

year. Time after time, people tell me that somehow Christmas just stole up on them, that they were worn down by the time it arrived and that they wished they had slowed the pace a little bit earlier and been more organized in advance. Organization and excitement are not ready companions, as well we know. Being organized looks as if sparkle and spontaneity have gone out of the party. But in the things of God, preparation is always a good idea. We tend to get more out of something for which we prepare in the longer term. We tend to have more time to look around and think of others if we prepare, as we prepare.

Christmas is such a time because the Christmas story is the bedrock of salvation. In Jesus Christ we are constantly found again in our lostness by God, year after year. We are reunited with what it is to be a child and to be a child of God. Simplicity and need draw us in a direction that we ought not to neglect: the direction of connecting with the simplicity and need of others. They may be the people in cities and townlands right across rural and urban Ireland who struggle, often without conventional hope, to make ends meet and who are homeless and loveless. They may be people in cities and wastelands across

Europe and the Middle East and Africa whose only hope of a future is to flee everything that once was theirs amidst trafficking, the dismantling of their dignity and the care and worry for those who remain dependent on them – wherever they are – and that human instinct will not go away. They may be the poor who are The Gospel.

Many of you would undoubtedly like to give something to help others at this time. If you can, I encourage you to do so and, however late and however insufficiently organized you think you are, to make this your preparation in the run-up to Christmas to welcome the Christ Child into your heart and the stranger into your world.

+Michael Dublin and Glendalough

The Bishops of Cork

As Bishops of Cork, we join in wishing you all a peaceful Christmas. We pray that God will bless you, not only during this Christmas festival, but also throughout 2017.

This year, 2016, has been a year of centenary commemoration for our country as well as of wider world events one hundred years ago.



The Right Reverend Dr Paul Colton (left) and the Most Reverend Dr John Buckley.

Landmark remembrances such as these are opportunities for reflection. We recall the years since, and we ask ourselves what have we become, and what are we becoming? Even more challenging is the question, how do we work together today, and what is to guide us, as we try to shape our tomorrow?

In a similar way, Christmas gives all Christians an opportunity, not only to celebrate and to enjoy the festivities, but also to pause for thought. What was the significance of the birth of Jesus at

Bethlehem, and how does it affect us and transform us in our lives, in our relationships, and in our engagement with the world around us today?

We live in a society that faces many challenges that call for our resolve, partnership and commitment, including, for example, poverty, homelessness, housing, mental health issues, and enduring economic concerns. On a broader stage, Brexit, political stability within Europe, migration, human catastrophe, and wars, especially in the Middle East, weigh on many minds during the current time.

It is against this background that we celebrate Christmas this year. We hear again the Christmas message of light and hope. The message of the angels announcing the good news was 'Do not be afraid'. When the baby was born they named him 'Emmanuel' which means 'God is with us.' And the assurance from Saint John's Gospel is that Jesus, the Word of God 'shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.'

May Jesus, the Word of God, 'the light who shines in darkness' be your light and hope; may God be with you all this Christmas always.

+Paul Colton +John Buckley

Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross Bishop of
Cork and Ross

Bishop of Connor



I do enjoy the Christmas Market, the tangible excitement of children, the smell of food, the crush of people all enjoying the buzz. As well as the market there are the crowds shopping and the queues of traffic seeking somewhere to park. Everywhere is vibrant and busy. The Carol singers and musicians add to the atmosphere and sense of expectation.

Travelling anywhere takes longer, the bus queues are longer and the footpaths become obstacle courses, especially if you are in a hurry. This all adds to the sense of busyness and anticipation of the celebrations, although sometimes it can be difficult not to get frustrated when it is harder to get to places and takes longer to do so. There are times when the words recorded from the first Christmas appear very apt – ‘there is no room...’

My prayers this Christmas are with those who can find nowhere to stay or even somewhere safe to stay, people that are homeless, refugees from war and famine in places like Syria, the Yemen and South Sudan.

For those who worship the word made flesh, we need to wrestle with the tension of how we can celebrate the moment and yet keep room in our thoughts, prayers and actions for those who have no room in which to live.

May we find room to help others find life and hope as Jesus found a stable in a world where there was no room for Him.

