



THE ARCHBISHOP
OF CANTERBURY



The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. (John 1.5)

As we approach the end of a year which has seen terrible suffering in the very land on which Our Saviour walked, and with such seemingly slender prospects of peace there and elsewhere in the world, it would be very easy to be downcast and to feel hopeless in what ought to be – and is! – this great joyous season of the Incarnation. The light seems to have been extinguished in Israel and Palestine these last three months. Sometimes it seems as if our senses reel, numbed by the horrific, daily, mounting toll of injury and death.

My own visit to the Holy Land in October, hurriedly organised in the wake of the devastation at the Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza, brought me face to face with some of those who had suffered so greatly. I was honoured to stand alongside my brother Archbishop Hosam Naoum, the Anglican Metropolitan of Jerusalem, and to be able to express my heartfelt support for his ministry and to pray with him for all those caught up in these terrible events. But it is has been a year in which I have seen or encountered, once again, the pain of God's people in a number of different places and contexts, including amongst the Roma communities suffering discrimination and poverty in Romania, and in Armenia amongst the displaced people of Karabakh.

What is to be done? I hold on to the distinction between optimism and hope. The way forward in these situations of extreme suffering often seems very unclear. The light is hidden. But that does not mean there is no hope. When Christians pray for peace, as I do every day, that is an expression of hope. When Christians join together, worship and pray together, despite their differences, despite their tangled histories, that is a sign of hope. When Christians raise their voices in concern, and call for the pursuit of peace and justice, that is the making plain of hope.

What else should we say at Christmas, but that Christ's coming into the world is the greatest statement of hope ever made! God reveals himself in Christ, the Word made flesh, the Son of God and Son of Man, and the light of truth is made present amongst us in Christ. Let us, brothers and sisters in Christ, hold on to that, celebrate that, pray and praise as ever we should that presence of Christ amongst us, as God's great gift to the world. The light shines in the darkness.

And so, once again, I bring you my joyful Christmas greetings, and pray that the New Year will bring fresh blessings to you and your people.

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