



'And the Word became flesh and lived among us' (John 1.14)

As we approach once again the commemoration of the nativity of the Lord Jesus Christ we do so against the backdrop of a year dominated by a global pandemic. Coronavirus infections have caused widespread sickness, many thousands of deaths and an economic crisis around the world. The situation of our world was already fragile, with other public health emergencies, continuing conflicts and climate change affecting the lives of God's world and God's people. The pandemic has exacerbated the inequalities in the world, with the poorest and most vulnerable most deeply affected.

In recent correspondence I have been asked on more than one occasion whether Christmas should be postponed this year as it cannot be celebrated with all the liturgical and social customs and traditions that the people of God value so much. However, as I look around the world and through the world's history it is clear that the celebration of the incarnation is always grounded in our acknowledgement that the world is fragile and suffering. Our Lord was born in our fallen world and it is in his birth, death and resurrection that we find hope. People face sickness, war, displacement and poverty every day and, in joy and suffering alike, the birth of Christ is marked and celebrated as a constant reminder of our salvation.

As the early teacher of our faith Justin Martyr wrote:

He became a human being for our sakes, that becoming a partaker of our sufferings, He might also bring us healing. (Second Apology, Chapter XIII)

Christ came to a suffering world to bring healing, reconciliation and hope. As I hear stories of the response of the Church to human suffering in different parts of the world I see that hope made real. Churches and individual Christians are reaching out in love to those in need: most often not from a position of power, but in vulnerability. That is exactly the sort of love that we celebrate at Christmas. Love that gets its hands dirty. Love that is open and generous. Love that, without great ceremony, makes a difference. Jesus Christ, the light of the world, shines even in the darkest times: for that we are thankful and in that we rejoice.

For many in different parts of the world this will be a different Christmas. I pray that wherever Christians are they may find that hope, comfort and joy that comes from Jesus Christ.

In that light and hope I convey my greetings to you and to the faithful throughout the world, praying that, in the strength of God we all may continue to be the ministers of Christ to the world he came to save.

In the peace and hope of Jesus, our incarnate Lord.

The Most Reverend and Right Honorable Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury

Source URL: <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/news/archbishop-canterburys-ecumenical-christmas-letter-2020>