



al partners and heads of churches around the world.

*'Then Herod sent the wise men to Bethlehem saying,
Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him,
bring me word so I may also go and pay him homage.'* (Matthew 2.8)

The deceit and cruelty of governments and rulers has not changed in the 2000 years since King Herod. 2014 has been a year of desperate suffering for many Christians, unparalleled for centuries. Christian communities have been uprooted from the places that they have dwelt since within living memory of the time of Jesus. Along with them, others have been harried and hunted, blown up, tortured, beheaded, raped and have seen their families, their livelihoods, their futures destroyed. Indeed, the cry of the martyrs rises across the earth, 'How long, oh Lord, how long?'

At the same time we have seen the scourge of Ebola sweep across three countries of West Africa, striking people down above all when they exhibit their deep compassion for the human dignity of others through touching and holding them, or through washing their bodies after death. The acts of love have become the means of infection and death.

In other places, immense economic poverty continues to spoil the lives and diminish the dignity of human beings. In Europe, migration across the Mediterranean has reached extraordinary levels, and the countries of Europe have ceased to see the common good as obliging them to support each other in loving and receiving those who have fled through such horrors, such dangers, and such privations. Rightly, Pope Francis has said that the Mediterranean must not become a vast cemetery. Individualism and selfishness is causing countries to withdraw into themselves and look only after their own interests.

And yet, in the midst of the raging of hunger, disease and war we continue to rejoice in the love of God seen in the helpless, unknown baby in Bethlehem 2000 years ago. In that birth we see God taking on humanity, living every aspect of human life from birth onwards. How can we not be captured by this news? People have been called to worship Jesus in their billions through the centuries, so that with them and the angels we rejoice at the presence of Christ, the promised Saviour, and the hope that he brings to the world.

He comes as the unique Saviour for the world and yet we find ourselves separated by history, creeds, cultures and habits into a church that does not respond to him with one voice. This is not lack of mutual love. In the past year, traveling to 26 countries, I have been overwhelmed by the ecumenical love I have received, as well as by my reception in the Anglican Communion. One of the most moving meetings of the year was that of Christians from all over the middle-east and the Levant coming together at Lambeth Palace to pray for the future of their communities and to testify to their suffering and yet to their hope in Christ. The impressions of that day will not leave me.

Christ our Light is our common source of strength and hope. I pray for a renewed and united spirit among all Christians to follow even more

closely our Lord Jesus Christ, to bring this light to our troubled and tough world.

During this season, let also the humility of the child Jesus draw us afresh into humble love into one another, a willingness to die to our preferences and privileges so that the people of God may live and reflect the unity in trinity of the God who held nothing back, not even his own son. Let us love the world as he loved it, so that the world may know that he is indeed, ‘God with us’.

In the peace of Christ.

The Most Reverend and Right Honourable Justin Welby

Archbishop of Canterbury

Primate of all England and Metropolitan

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