



The Church of England  
in Essex and East London  
Diocese of Chelmsford

### **Bishop Peter's Christmas message: The Difference of Christmas**

Because of the pandemic Christmas is going to be different this year and that will be so hard. As I write, we don't exactly know how, but it is likely that we won't be able to gather fully as families; no big parties and celebrations; our Christmas worship together will be limited. Added to that many more families than in recent years will struggle to buy Christmas presents or even put a Christmas dinner on the table.

Christmas 2020 will be different.

Yet the truth is that the first Christmas was very different too. The heart of that difference was and remains that Christmas is for outsiders. Everyone gathered in that stable when Jesus was born was an outsider: the shepherds were outside the strict religious rules of the day because of their dirty job with the sheep; Joseph and Mary were in all probability marginalized because Mary was pregnant before marriage. And the Christ Child himself came from totally outside – from the glory of heaven to earth, to be born outside amidst the mess of our humanity.

So if you feel an outsider as Christmas approaches, this same Jesus and his church is there for you and any others who feel isolated or neglected.

So however we celebrate this Christmas, the challenge is to make a difference to those amongst whom we live. If you truly want to make a difference this Christmas then:

- Mend a quarrel; apologise if you were wrong; forgive someone who has treated you badly.
- Give something away -- anonymously.
- Help out at a foodbank
- If we are allowed to, visit someone who is lonely or in need, or e mail, or even write to them. Christmas cards and e mails are going to be so important this year.
- Tell someone who needs to hear it that you love them.

Give as God gave to you in Christ, without obligation, or announcement. That is the Christian difference.

But there is also something to receive at Christmas too: that gift is Christ himself.

After the angel appeared to the shepherds, Luke says this: ***15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."*** And they did exactly that.

However we celebrate Christmas this year we must, with the shepherds, once again go to Bethlehem and peek inside that stable door to see the wonder of all wonders – that the Almighty God loves us enough to come amongst us as a weak and vulnerable baby, born on the outside. A baby who grew up to die on a cross outside the city wall for our sins and rose mightily from the dead to give us hope for our futures.

God has left Jesus outside on the doorstep of all our lives. The question, as with all babies left on doorsteps, is who will open the door and take him in?

**That is the difference of Christmas ....**