



"May we know ourselves strengthened by the grace of God"

A Christmas message from Bishop Rose
December 2022

Friends, I am sure you're familiar with the song, "Christmas comes but once per year it keeps us in a spin..." On this occasion, perhaps it is the year itself that has somehow kept us in a spin. The shadow of Covid 19 remained with us and we heard stories of the lasting impact of the pandemic, especially through long covid. I am sure we have all heard, too, of the effects of lockdown on children's – and adults - mental well-being. Russia's invasion of Ukraine gave no respite to the pain and suffering being revealed on our screens. But we have also seen compassion in action as thousands of families offered to share their homes with those Ukrainian families who have been lucky enough to get visas. We also saw our churches working with many charities to offer support by way of warm community spaces; assisting with language lessons; providing clothing and food. Indeed, the words of our Lord came into it's own: "I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me a drink, naked and you clothed me, sick and in prison and you visited me." Thank you for your part in this.

As a diocese we were not allowed to forget the plight of the migrants as the headlines continued to alert us with news of a steady stream of people coming across the channel on inflatable boats, to try and reach a place of sanctuary here in the UK, seeking a better life for themselves and their family. I give thanks for our Refugee Projects Officer Domenica and her team across the diocese who are involved in some of the frontline work with those seeking safety on our shores.

It is important to name the reality of our times, to notice how we are responding to those crossing the Channel, compared with the welcome we continue to offer those fleeing Ukraine. Personally, I am troubled by what I see as the creation of two tiers of migrants - two tiers of human beings - by the way we have responded as a country. This is seen in the language of "invasion", of "hostile environment" –





and in the distressing conditions of our processing centres and the government rhetoric around deportations.

Politically here in the UK, we have witnessed great upheaval – three prime ministers in a matter of weeks – unprecedented in our times! And we saw the effect of this disruption on the financial market and ultimately on the purses of ordinary men and women. And, of seismic proportions, in 2022, the loss of our beloved late Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II. People queued for days to pay their respect. We mourned her loss and I know many will continue to be saddened, especially her family, as they gather for their first Christmas without her. But we also welcomed in the midst of our sadness, her heir, King Charles III.

But - in the loss of her majesty, the plight of the Ukrainians, and the expansion of foodbanks - we have witnessed an abundance of compassion, reminding us of the goodness that exists amongst us, of the common humanity that we share. And this is at the heart of the story of Christmas. It is about love and forgiveness; goodness, compassion and kindness. How can we ever forget that the infant Jesus and his parents were refugees – and I am sure their first instinct was as his parents, to do all that they could to keep him safe to give him a future – a future that changed our world forever. Before my consecration, I visited Egypt and the place where Jesus' family apparently sought refuge when fleeing the rage of Herod. There I found myself reflecting on the compassion shown by those who received Jesus and his family – who saw their humanity and offered them sanctuary.

As 2022 draws to a close, let me say thank you for all that you have done in fulfilling your ministry amongst those whom you have been called to serve - as both laity and ordained ministers of the gospel. I want to encourage you to keep focusing on Jesus – our Saviour, the perfect or of our faith, the Alpha and the Omega. Let us always be ready to provide courageous advocacy with those who are most vulnerable in our communities. May we know ourselves strengthened by the grace of God to keep moving forward with a depth of curiosity in seeing what the Lord is doing and joining in; with commitment to stay present, walking side by side with each other and together to continue to re-imagine the ministry afresh for 2023.





Our late Majesty, in her Christmas message of 2011, drew on the words of the Carol:

"O holy child of Bethlehem,
Descend to us we pray.
Cast out our sin,
And enter in,
Be born in us today."

Those words continue to echo in our hearts.

Jesus was born into a world also beset with difficulties and suffering.

He came as Emmanuel – God with us bringing light in the darkness, to the troubled – peace, and to the lost, hope.

May the peace of the Christ child be born in us today, filling us with love and compassion as we navigate the challenges around us so that together we might build a better world.

+ Rose Dover

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