



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

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## CHRISTMAS 2017

### A message from the Bishop of Barking

To all clergy and lay leaders in the Barking Episcopal area

Dear sisters and brothers,

I am frightened of the dark: and when I say dark I mean total and absolute blackness! When I was a teacher, I used to take students down the caves in Derbyshire on educational visits. At one point our guide would switch off the lights and I would feel terror rising inside, but could not show it to the kids! Being trapped in the deepest darkness is literally my worst nightmare!



The adoration of the shepherds. Rembrandt

The world we live in can feel increasingly dark, spiritually, morally and politically. Almost everywhere we have turned during 2017 we have been faced with sombre news at home and abroad, which for so many diminishes the light of hope. In my own life I am also conscious of the darkness that easily invades due to my own weakness, mixed motives and actions.

Yet in this December month, as physically the darkest time of the year approaches, we Christians see far beyond and are reminded that *the people walking in darkness have seen a great light... Isaiah 9:2*. Our job as Christian leaders, pastors and teachers, this and every Christmas is to proclaim the light of Christ which is always coming into the world, no matter how dark it feels or actually is. We are agents of his light! We all know the truth that the smallest light is always stronger than the deepest darkness. How much more so for the light of Christ, revealed to us first in a baby born in a dark stable room and placed in a rough wooden manger.

Our lives as Christian ministers is demanding and at times exhausted by darkness as we seek to offer the light of Christ. As I move around our Area, I am constantly thrilled and encouraged by the quality of worship and ministry I am privileged to share in amongst you all. I am also challenged to see how much it costs some in terms of tiredness, anxiety and general wellbeing. Thank you for all you do and who you are in Christ. Being the Bishop of Barking remains a real joy and privilege because of you.

As Christmas approaches may the light of Christ's presence set our hearts on fire with love for him and as 2018 arrives may his same light guide our steps and ministries.

Have a holy and illuminated Christmas.

+ Peter



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