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

A Christmas message from the Bishop of Chelmsford

The Rt Rev'd Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani, the Bishop of Chelmsford, has written a message for the Christmas season:

The extraordinary events of the first Christmas unfolded in a very ordinary way. In a small town, among commonplace people, away from the centres of power, a young couple are far from home, there are shepherds on the hillside and a child is laid in a manger. God crosses the boundary between heaven and earth, entering the world not in a royal palace with pomp and ceremony but quietly, into the forgotten places and among marginal people.

Two thousand years later, the message of Christmas is still alive today. Christ is to be found in the ordinary messy in-between spaces of the world and our lives, when we feel lost amid competing powers or demands - unseen, unheard, neglected.

There are communities in this country and across the globe caught in the space between the headlines. Amidst catastrophe and tragedy, the media spotlight might shine briefly, before the cameras move on. But people remain – conflict, injustice, poverty, grief and trauma persist.

Many of us also experience in-between places in our own lives - seasons of uncertainty, waiting and transition; feelings of loneliness, grief and dislocation; the gap between what has been and what will be, when we don't have clear answers, plans unravel, relationships falter, ill health intrudes. It is precisely into the in-between places and unfinished chapters that the Christ child comes, stepping into our imperfect and broken world, into our confusions, fears and failures, offering healing and comfort. That's why Christians celebrate Christmas each year, whether in times of joy or adversity, and churches across this nation will open their doors, to offer warmth, welcome and belonging.

The good news of Christmas is not that God will take away our problems but that God enters into them, bringing light into darkness and peace into turmoil. And we are invited to participate. Christ challenges us to go where he goes, to notice the forgotten, make room for those on the margins, and become signs of hope in the in-between places of our world.

I wish you a peaceful and joyous Christmas.

+ Guli Chelmsford