

**Christmas Message of The Most Reverend Malcolm McMahon OP,
Archbishop of Liverpool**

We always speak of Christmas celebrations as being a time of joy and happiness, and a time to gather with family and friends. We see this in the weeks leading up to the feast - a time of preparation when people want to make sure that everything is perfect. This year may have to be different – a recent survey suggested that 54% of people in this country will be cutting back on Christmas celebrations against a backdrop of rising food prices and energy costs. It's very easy to lose sight of the real meaning of Christmas amidst the tinsel, glitter, food and drink, and yet the realities of the first Christmas are all around us today and we don't have to look far to see them.

Life was uncertain for Mary and Joseph too as they travelled the long road to Bethlehem where they had to take part in a census called by an occupying power. Christ was born in a stable on a cold winter's night – not an ideal time or place for our saviour to be born. His first visitors were shepherds who had been looking after their sheep on a cold, bleak hillside, not the visitors you might expect.

Our times may be uncertain, and our Christmas may be different this year but the reason for our celebrations remains unchanged.

Our annual celebration of Christmas is one of love and peace and nothing can change that. We believe that our love for one another is a sign of God's love for us - 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son' – and through our celebrations we give thanks to God for sending us Jesus, born of Mary in Bethlehem, announced by the angels, and visited by those shepherds and later by wise men.

It is the love of God that shines through this great feast, and we show that love by the ways in which we reach out to those around us. To our relatives and friends, to those alone at Christmas, to those in need who have much less than ourselves and by the way in which we welcome those seeking refuge in our country.

While some things may have to change for us the message of Christmas remains the same, precious moments with those we love and care for, this is the warmth, the comfort and the joy which Christmas brings to us and those around us.

Above all Christmas is, has always been, and always will be a time of hope. The hope which the birth of Jesus brings is for all time and eternal. In his Gospel St John says, 'the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it'. Jesus is the light of the world shining through any darkness in our lives. May this Christmas be a time of hope for us all.

I wish you a happy, peaceful and blessed Christmas.

The Most Reverend Malcolm McMahon OP
Archbishop of Liverpool

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St Margaret Clitherow Centre

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