

DIOCESE IN EUROPE

THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

The Bishop in Europe:
The Right Reverend Dr. Robert Innes



CHRISTMAS MESSAGE 2016

The Christmas Season is nearly upon us. We anticipate family gatherings, the exchange of gifts and the annual celebration of the birth of Jesus, the Word made flesh.

This December, there is a sense of relief at being able shortly to bring the year to a close. It has been in some respects a horrible year for Europe. Disaffection with ruling elites began to tip over into resurgent nationalism. Brexit was the most obvious example. The migration crisis touched every country. The poorer southern countries – Italy, Greece – and on Europe’s borders Turkey – continued to shoulder the heaviest burdens. And terrorists struck Brussels, Nice, Istanbul and most recently Berlin. As I write this, the European Council gathers with “Security” top of its agenda. The year ends with the world having become a more difficult and dangerous place.

So we turn to enjoy, again, the familiar message of the birth of Jesus, to sing familiar carols, and to take delight in traditions and memories we may carry from childhood.

Sheer escapism? Not at all! The goodness, gentleness and decency which characterise ‘Christmas’ are surely closer to what life is really about than the brutality and ugliness which dominates our daily news. They are to be treasured.

What is more, we don’t have to go very far at all beneath the surface of the Christmas Story to realise that it is precisely about God entering a world of darkness and danger and seeking to transform it from within. The Birth stories are compelling because they so skillfully juxtapose the supremely innocent and vulnerable baby with the earthly reality of hostile and menacing powers. To celebrate the Christian Christmas is to immerse ourselves again in God’s plan to save the world.

Finally, Christmas puts particular opportunities and pressures in the way of our chaplaincies. We receive lots of visitors. At the same time, many regular church members are away visiting family or friends. So those that remain have to work especially hard to keep everything running and to provide a cheerful welcome. To those who sustain our worship over Christmas I give my warm and sincere thanks: to our clergy, lay readers and leaders, musicians, flower arrangers, welcomers, wardens, caterers and cleaners.

I wish you each and all a joyful and peaceful Christmas.

+ Robert Gibraltar in Europe

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