



**PASTORAL LETTER
OF
THE RIGHT REVD ALAN HOPES
BISHOP OF EAST ANGLIA**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
I wish you all a truly blessed and joyful Christmas!

The headlines in the newspapers last Sunday announced that Christmas had been cancelled! This was due to the fact that many parts of our country have been moved into higher tiers for the foreseeable future in order to stop the Covid virus from spreading.

Life has certainly changed since we celebrated Christmas last year! We have been, and still are living through a time of great uncertainty and fear in the midst of this pandemic. In spite of all the challenges, the human suffering and the tragic loss of loved ones over the past year, we, as the Church, have never ceased to proclaim the Good News of the love, hope and joy which the Incarnation of the Son of God brings to our world.

This Christmas, like every Christmas, calls us once again to proclaim, both through our lives and through our words, the Angel's message: ***Do not be afraid...I bring you good news of great joy..... a saviour has been born for you: he is Christ the Lord.***

Do not be afraid!

In that small baby, born in a stable and placed in a manger, surrounded by the love and devotion of his Mother Mary and protected by his foster father Joseph, God, the creator of all things, has entered into our human history.

Do not be afraid!

Jesus Christ is truly "Emmanuel", God-with-us, sharing in our humanity in all its frailty. He has experienced life as we experience it, with all its joys and sorrows. He knows too all our needs.

Do not be afraid!

Jesus Christ is truly God among us, healing our wounds, strengthening us in our weaknesses, consoling us in our sadness. He comes to redeem and to enrich our humanity in order to show us the way to heaven and to eternal life.

This is the reason for our joy and our hope as we celebrate Christmas and acknowledge the presence of the Incarnate God, both in human history and in our lives, not just at Christmas, but in each and every day and in each and every moment of our lives.

We do not know what all the consequences of this global pandemic might be. We do know, however, that there will be many challenges ahead of us before the world is restored to a new kind of normality. Many will have to face the challenges of unemployment, sickness, the death of a loved one, homelessness and poverty. Our local parishes must be there to support and encourage all who find themselves in such a situation. But we cannot just rely on human abilities and powers to find the solution for these challenges.

The birth of Jesus Christ is for us a radiant light of hope in the midst of so much darkness. To celebrate Christmas with joy in this time of pandemic is to allow the light that is Christ to shine in our world and throughout our local communities. We are not alone or abandoned! God is with us! He loves us and cares for us in our human story and in the story, which is that of our own lives.

So, let us today bring to our new-born Saviour, all the wounds of humanity. Let us ask him that God's love may restore this broken world of ours and grant it hope, security and joy.

As you visit and pray at the Crib today, I pray that the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph may surround you, your families and all those in your hearts, with their loving prayer and protection. And may the Incarnate Son of God fill each of our lives with love, joy and hope for the coming year.

With warmest good wishes and prayer for you all,

Yours devotedly in Christ,

+ Alan Hopes

Bishop of East Anglia