

The Bishop of Coventry's 2013 Christmas Message for BBC Coventry and Warwickshire

I've just come from *Open Christmas*. It's all happening at a Baptist Church in Coventry which opens its doors each Christmas to people who are living rough on our streets. That's what someone did for a young woman called Mary, about to have a baby, and her partner, Joseph. 'They were far from home. Caught up in the deadhand of the bureaucracy of the Roman Empire – they'd had to travel miles to fill in forms in Bethlehem. The town was packed and so, as the Bible says, 'there was no place for them in the inn'.

Jesus, born homeless; Mary and Joseph almost destitute, soon to be refugees trekking across dangerous roads in occupied Palestine to escape from Herod, one of the worst child abusers of history. It all sounds a bit familiar doesn't it? And not the sort of things we really want to think on Christmas Day. But that's what Christmas is really about: God holding nothing back; God coming into the toughest conditions of human life; God becoming one of us so that he can raise us up, give us a new dignity, and hand hope back to us.

That's what I saw at *Open Christmas*. People who live on the streets finding a home for a few days. People who walk their lives alone, moved on from place to place, being settled for a while and finding friends. People who usually beg for money finding that their plates are filled with goodness. People who wander from corner to corner of a city wondering if anyone would notice if they simply disappeared, discovering that God has seen them, held out his arms and welcomed them into his home.

May we know God's welcome to us into his heart and home this Christmas, and may we share that welcome with others.

Happy Christmas to you!