

The Bishop of Coventry's 2016 Christmas Message for BBC Coventry and Warwickshire

It's been quite a year, hasn't it? Brexit, though nobody seemed to expect it. Donald Trump now President elect, to the surprise of many. And who's to say whom the people will choose in France in 2017?

Whether all this is good or bad for the peace and good will of the world is the stuff of strong arguments, and today – Christmas Day – is not the day for arguments. It's the day for celebration. The day for joy. The day to enjoy the love that God wants us to share with each other.

That love – the love for which we all yearn, the love that is found in the heart of God – that love in all its immensity was found in a tiny bundle of human life held in the arms of Mary and laid in a crib in Bethlehem.

Christmas Day is the day to celebrate that God *elected* to come to earth as a child. It the day to rejoice that God, the creator of all things chose to be born as one of us – born, as the carol puts it, 'to raise the sons of earth' to the heights of heaven.

I've been touched by one of the Christmas adverts this year. It imagines a dad frantically searching for the very best gift he can give his family, then, just when he can't keep up with the manic rush to get ready for Christmas any longer, a thought flashes through his mind: 'the greatest gift I can give my family this Christmas is *me*'.

The deepest meaning of Christmas is found in just one Hebrew word that we often hear at Christmas services: *Emmanuel*. It means, 'God is with us'.

My best Christmas card this year was from a Syrian Christian refugee family who have found peace and safety in Coventry. The card depicts a nativity scene without the Christ Child in the manger. 'Jesus is not in the crib', wrote the young

mother who had suffered so much in Syria, 'because now he is born in our hearts'.

Christmas calls us to celebrate that love has come among us – for God elected to be born in Bethlehem.

So will we elect to open the doors of our hearts and let Christ be born in us? Will we let the source of love fill us and the power of love flow through us, bringing peace to everyone we meet and goodwill to all the world?

If we will, then we will have a truly Happy Christmas!