



A Christmas message from Bishop Sarah



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"My heart-felt thanks goes to all of you for your invaluable ministries; for the time, gifts and inspiration you give so freely in shaping the life of our churches and of the Diocese of London: whether you are a clergy colleague, a churchwarden, an LDF employee, an administrator, Licensed Lay Minister, church worker or member of a PCC.

This has been another difficult year for all of us. Twelve months ago we were preparing for Christmas celebrations hedged around with Covid restrictions. Probably very few of us imagined that the pandemic would still be shaping our lives so significantly a year later.

So once again, we remember especially this Christmas those who have lost loved ones to Covid. The ministry of our churches is invaluable for those who are bereaved. Offering individuals the space to mourn and communities the space to lament is

profoundly important. You have also done a miraculous job of connecting with your local communities in ways that have alleviated human loneliness and isolation; and you have helped to address issues of poverty and mental health for people in extremely difficult situations. All of this whilst you and your households have faced your own personal challenges, no doubt.

Of course, Covid and its wide-ranging impacts are not the only wounds that the world has received this year. In Syria and Afghanistan, Belarus and the English Channel, tragedy has unfolded. We have welcomed into our own city and parish life some of those fleeing for safety. We are aware, too, that among us are victims of modern slavery, hidden in plain sight. We have become even more acutely conscious of the climate crisis and its devastating impact on communities worldwide. I know that many of our churches are putting their minds to the question of how they can respond to these situations.

Yet into all of this the angel says to Zechariah, then to Mary, then to Joseph, then to the shepherds on the hillside at Bethlehem: 'Do not be afraid'.

We are not always able to respond with our whole heart and mind to those words. We are human, we are fragile, we are vulnerable, and the love which God plants in our hearts for our friends, families, neighbours, colleagues and communities means that we are sometimes very afraid: for their wellbeing and their safety, and even their lives.

But the message in full is 'Do not be afraid because God is among you'. God is here, miraculously, in the life of a tiny baby, and from that life and in that presence dawns the truth that God has always been here and will always be here, for all of us in our most vulnerable moments and the tiniest details of our lives. We are named, known and held by the Creator whose radical hospitality and healing love are infinite and eternal. The one who tells us through the prophet Isaiah: 'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine'."

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