

God is with us in this dark world, said Bishop Nick in his Christmas message



God comes into the difficult world we find ourselves in to be with us, the Bishop of Leeds, the Rt Revd Nick Baines, said in his Christmas message.

In a year of darkness and uncertainty, Bishop Nick spoke of the conflicts in Israel and Gaza, Ukraine and Sudan, and of “the baby who opts into this world”, bringing Christmas hope by being with His people, not apart from them.

Bishop Nick said that, “God chooses to come among us as one of us, subject to everything the world can throw

at us, and doesn’t walk away from it.”

He also talked of the message of Christmas: “It’s not merely romantic or escapist, but actually it goes to the heart of what Christian faith has to say.

“God among us as one of us; not exempting us from all that the world involves, that being human involves, that being mortal involves, but saying I will never leave you, I will never forsake you, and whatever comes your way, I have walked that path before you.”

Royal Opera House comes to Bradford to sing for Ukraine

Over 350 people came to Bradford Cathedral on Sunday, December 10 for ‘Songs for Ukraine Chorus’, a Christmas Concert collaboration with Royal Opera House.

‘Songs for Ukraine’ is a creative exchange between the Royal Opera House and displaced Ukrainians produced by ROH Learning & Participation.

The concert featured the Songs for Ukraine Choir alongside, from Bradford, the Fiyalka and Dibrova choirs, as well as lay clerks from Bradford Cathedral and the Grace Notes, the Cathedral’s young community choir.

The Revd Ned Lunn, Canon for Intercultural Mission and the Arts, said: “It was wonderful to welcome the Ukrainian choirs from the Royal Opera House and Bradford to join with our own Grace Notes choir for a poignant event of music and reflections.

“It demonstrated the strength of our unique offer to the City of Culture 2025 as a place to host events of this nature and size.”



Together in love

Bishop Anna

One evening in December, having got through security, I sat alongside teenagers and volunteers in the Faith Space at Wetherby Young Offenders Institution delighted to be at their carol service. The invitation had come from its chaplaincy team and was one of the carol services I attended at the invitation of different chaplaincies working across the Ripon Area.

The service at Wetherby felt vulnerable and tough, all at once, while exuding a joy hard to imagine would be possible. With St Aidan's school, Harrogate, its service was polished, but certainly not a performance - every song and reading came from the heart and the church was filled with a profound spirit and energy of youth; and Leyburn Auction Mart's was real, earthy and shone with the need we have of each other when working relentlessly against the odds. In each and every place Jesus was there in hearts, minds and the body gathered as one.

As I've dipped into various chaplaincies over the years there is something in them all which I admire and am drawn to. Chaplains work



at the sharp end of the Kingdom of God. They are one of the best examples of ecumenism and inter-faith work, as differences are laid aside to simply respond compassionately to deep human need. As a Christian, in chaplains, I observe Jesus at work who goes out to the margins and the front line, sees the child in all and responds with God's healing word and action. And in the work of chaplaincies we see that God's redemption can be found even in the darkest corner and all things really are being made new.

As we start this New Year, hopefully with fresh eyes and renewed strength, we can give thanks and be inspired by the example chaplaincies give us. Our world is divided and hurting, but what matters is how we respond, together, in love. What matters as Christians is meeting human need with compassion in and way beyond our churches. What matters, is joining in with Jesus to heal the earth, comfort God's people and make all things new.

Rural Forum considers 'missing generation' at Ripon Cathedral

The struggles of young people living in rural areas were the topic of a recent Rural Forum held at Ripon Cathedral.

Two years ago The North Yorkshire Rural Commission, chaired by the Dean of Ripon, the Very Revd John Dobson, found that there is a missing generation in North Yorkshire; a staggering 45,000 fewer 18 to 45-year-olds than expected for the size of population.

At Ripon Cathedral's Rural Forum younger people from that 'missing' generation told delegates that finding affordable housing and secure employment in their home county were key challenges that made living in rural North Yorkshire difficult, even for those with higher degrees.

Dean John said: "Every community wants to see its children and younger people have the opportunity to grow and flourish, not least in their home area, if they wish to stay there.

"It is tragic that so many young people from this area are unable to stay in their own area.

"There is a moral issue here, a question of how we can enable older generations to ensure justice for the young.

"Equally, the common good is often served by young people having the opportunity to move into the region to provide skills upon which we all depend."



Our Interfaith Adviser attends Buckingham Palace talks with King Charles



Our diocesan Interfaith Adviser Revd Jenny Ramsden has been privileged to take part in important discussions at Buckingham Palace, hosted by His Majesty, the King.

Revd Jenny was with some 30 community and faith leaders brought together by King Charles to discuss the positives and challenges of interfaith and community cohesion, as well as come up with practical suggestions on how to work together moving forwards.

“It was a privilege to be invited to Buckingham Palace as one of a group of ten women and have such important conversations and with the King taking an active part,” Revd Jenny said.

“Our table of women were incredible - each from different faith backgrounds and all engaged in interfaith dialogue or community cohesion in various different ways.”

She said how King Charles joined each table to hear the conclusions of their discussions.



“He was very attentive, listened to our ideas and was encouraging and positive. At the very least, it was great to see people from different faiths gathered together at Buckingham

Palace, wonderful to see women and young people given such prominence, and encouraging that we all felt heard.

“The King sat with us to listen to our discussions, which included our concerns about the Israel-Hamas conflict on communities here in the UK and practical solutions to bringing diverse communities together in meaningful ways.

“It was especially encouraging that the King wished to hear the voices of women - actively recognising our contribution to dialogue and peacemaking and we felt excited by the possibilities for working together moving forwards. It was definitely a day to remember!” Revd Jenny said.

Dazzling star appeared over Keighley

A new Christmas star appeared above Keighley, thanks to team work by Revd Mike Cansdale of St Andrew’s, local councils and businesses.

Bradford Council’s Festival Lights team made the two metre high star and Keighley Town Council paid for it. Town Clerk Joe Cooney said “When Rev Mike Came to us with the idea we were really keen to help add something a little extra special.”

Two Keighley firms helped fund the installation, which took three men with ropes and winches to carry everything to the top of the tower.

“I’m really grateful for the sponsorship by brewers Timothy Taylor’s and Gallagher Family Funeral Directors that made this a reality,” said Revd Mike.

Tim Dewey, Chief Executive of Timothy Taylor’s added: “We are proud to support the initiative of this star and providing joy to all”.

David Gallagher added: “We’re delighted to be part of this project.”



Connecting with 'God with us'

Theo Sheridan-Watts
Chief Officer, Wellsprings
Together

It's one of the paradoxes of modern life that the more 'connected' we are, through social media, video calls and other technologies, the more 'disconnected' we also feel from one another. This can be particularly true in the month of January, as the hubbub and connections of the Christmas season fade, the long cold nights are still with us and the weather drives us indoors.

The epidemic of loneliness is one which impacts all communities with a landmark report commissioned by the British Red Cross and The Co-op in 2016 finding that over 9 million people are affected by loneliness in the UK.

We would do worse at this time of the year to remember one of the names of Jesus that we spent so much time reflecting on over the previous season, that of Immanuel, God with us. The truth of the Christmas season is a God who enters into the world with all its loneliness and isolation and promises to be with us.

He also is a God who having



invited us in, calls us to invite others to receive a welcome into community. One of the ways that many of our churches choose to do this is through opening up their spaces for those who are feeling isolated and lonely. In community cafes, and coffee mornings across the Diocese we find a simple and yet profound expression of the good news of connection and welcome. At Wellsprings Together we have the privilege of supporting many of these spaces through our Places of Welcome Network which is national network of churches and other community organisations. Each venue opens its doors every week to offer free refreshments in an inclusive, non-judgemental environment, one in which people can relax, share their stories and their concerns and find friendship and blessing.

Our team are able to support with training, advice and on occasion funding for these spaces. To find out more or join the network get in touch at team@wellspringstogether.org.uk.

Lots of joyful song at Dales auction mart carol service

Bishop Anna enjoyed her first ever carol service in a livestock auction mart just before Christmas and declared it the perfect venue for such a joyful community celebration.

Reflecting on her visit with the auction mart's chaplain Revd Chris Lawton, The Rt Revd Anna Eltringham, Bishop of Ripon said: "Unbelievable as it may sound, an auction mart is almost purpose built to act as a church if required. The auctioneer's rostrum becomes the lectern or pulpit. The sales ring was perfect for the Leyburn band and the tiered seating was great for the congregation.

"But we must not detract from the incredible place the mart is for the business of farming and the community which surrounds it. We learnt from the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institute, (a charity that helps farming families in any kind of need), how important the mart is simply as a place for those who farm to connect and talk and support one another. Farming is relentless hard graft and can be quite isolating in the dales or on the moors, so being with those who 'get it' can be a life-line."

