

Bishop Declan's Christmas Message

A friend recently told me a bit of information which on the face of it is not that important. We apparently use enough wrapping paper at Christmas to wrap up the whole of Guernsey. That's a lot paper! And think of the time we put into wrapping up presents, sticking on bows and labelling correctly. How much of that wrapping is kept? Probably very little. Most of it is thrown away once presents have been exchanged.

On the first Christmas night shepherds were looking after their sheep when an angel appeared to them and told them that in Bethlehem a child had been born. They would find him wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. The swaddling clothes were to keep the child warm and quieten him. In a sense the rest of that child's life was an unwrapping of who he was – Jesus, the Christ, the Saviour of the world.

Christmas invites us to enter into the mystery of who Jesus is for ourselves individually, for our families, for our communities and for all nations. We are called to allow the message of Christ to find a home within us in all its richness. In welcoming Christ we discover something about ourselves. In Christ we are shown a way to relate to one another which enables there to be peace.

Often in our lives we wrap up to protect ourselves from other people. We are afraid to let them see who we really are. We put on a good face but inside we know it is not our true face. Sometimes that face appears to be hardened as a protection from being hurt. But if we are “all face” and not our true self, we can lose sight of who we are and indeed want to be. In losing sight of our self we can then lose sight of others. We then find our self in a lonely place. That is not a good place to be. Yet many people say they are lonely even when all appears to be going well. The “wrapping” can disguise what is really happening inside someone.

What makes a difference is when we find we are loved. With those we love and who love us, we can be our true self. We can “give our self” away knowing we will not be hurt – at least not deliberately. That we are loved is the Christmas message because God so loves our world that he gives us his only Son – Jesus, the baby at Bethlehem. That baby doesn't throw away the wrapping, because it is part of us. But he enables us to see the gift beneath the wrapping – the gift of who we all are to one another.