

The Bishop of Ebbsfleet's Christmas Message 2019

‘Joseph got up, and, taking the child and his mother with him,
left that night for Egypt’ (*Matt 2.14*).



Jesus and his family knew the tragedy of homelessness; indeed many people in Christian history have meditated on the thought that, coming among us as a human being, God himself can be understood as a wanderer, far from home: ‘displaced’ we say, at risk, and living in the midst of other people at risk. The inexpressible gift that he gives to us all at Christmas is the gift of making himself ‘at home’ in our midst: God with us, with those who are constantly tempted to betray and abandon him.

When the writer to the Hebrews speaks about discipleship—being *followers* of Jesus—he uses language of going ‘outside the gate’ to where Jesus is, and where he suffers, and reminds his readers that they also, like Jesus, do not have a permanent place on earth to live in (*Hebr 13.12—14*). Following Jesus means following him beyond the frontier of comfort, following him to where we shall meet other homeless and rejected.

As we renew our commitment this Christmas – commitment to follow the Word Incarnate into next year and all it will bring – we must undoubtedly prepare ourselves for a journey, a spiritual journey, when all this can be worked out in our own lives: in our willingness to be alongside displaced people; to support all who defend the rights and dignities of those without home or work; to speak up for, and to serve, those who lose their home through conflict, oppression, poverty and climate change, and to serve them in whatever way we can. All churches should be places where we meet Jesus, the ‘divine exile’, who invites us to learn from him his liberty to be at the service of anyone in need.

May God encourage us and open our eyes to the needs around us, the needs in our world; and to all who share in the oversight and service of God’s pilgrim people on their journey towards the heavenly Jerusalem, I wish the blessing of the Lord Incarnate.

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