

Bishop James' Christmas Message

December 2019

There's a phrase in one of the prayers we sometimes use in church about watching for the signs of God's kingdom.

The whole quote is this, 'As we watch for the signs of your kingdom on earth, we echo the song of the angels in heaven.'

Watching for the signs of God's kingdom.'

In this season of Advent, watching and waiting, looking, expecting, anticipating, this is the language we use about looking to God.

Looking for the breaking in of the reality of God's reign, of God's presence. Looking in hope to God, waiting for God to come among us as both judge and saviour.

And of course, part of this season is our preparation as a church and as individuals for the celebration of Christmas.

For the celebration of that great and fullest coming of God in the birth of Jesus, as the child of Bethlehem.

Word made flesh. God coming into our midst. Watching and waiting.

As we journey through this season this particular year, we do so of course at a time of significant uncertainty and even conflict and difficulty within the world around us.

For us in our country a time of election and potentially a new government.

All sorts of questions around that questions of course prompted by Brexit about the language were using, and we've had big issues around anti-Semitism, racism, Islamophobia and debates around that.

And other issues which we as a Diocese have focused on in these last months.

Things like knife crime which affect so many of our communities. Wider issues in the world like modern slavery. Issues of domestic violence.

In the midst of all of this, where do we see the signs of God's kingdom?

Well one of the places I see the signs of God's kingdom is just in my everyday ministry as I travel around the Diocese visiting parishes and communities, chaplaincies. I see the work of God in those places.

In our work with those facing dementia, in our community cafes, in the food banks. In our work with children and young people in so many different settings; in our church schools, and others.

In the work of evangelism and the nurture of those who are coming to faith.

In the stories that I hear from those being confirmed, who've come to new faith or renewed faith, and God has broken in and is real for them in a fresh and living way.

Where the reality of God is being proclaimed lived and glimpsed, there are the signs of God's kingdom.

So, in this season of Advent, as you prepare, whether within your church setting or more personally, for the great celebration of Christmas, can I encourage you to look around yourself.

To look into your own life, to look at your church, to look at the world and prayerfully, to see where you see signs of God's kingdom.

Where do you see something of God's character, God's work, breaking in? Where can you glimpse something of the glory of heaven in our human sphere?

And then when you come to Christmas, to carry with you that glimpse of the kingdom that you've seen.

To allow your praises to be mingled with the praises of heaven, so that your song is joined with the angels as they sing, 'Glory to God in the highest and peace for people on earth.'