

Christmas appeal reflection and questions

A message of hope for the marginalised



The Christmas story is full of expectancy and hope – a story that welcomes the long-awaited Saviour, Jesus, into the world. As Christians, we know that the arrival of the baby Jesus was certainly good news, ultimately providing a path to redemption for a fallen world.

Hope for the marginalised

The good news of the Christmas story is itself wonderful, but what's equally amazing is to whom this message of Jesus' arrival was proclaimed.

You'd expect that the most important message to reach Earth would be announced to the inner circle of the people in power or the respected religious types, but this certainly wasn't what God had in mind. Instead, he chose to share the good news of his son's arrival with those on the margins; with those on the outer reaches of society.



First was a group of gentile astrologers – foreigners from another land far from the religious centre of the day. Secondly, as described in Luke 2, we have news of Jesus' birth announced to a group of shepherds, who were stereotypically considered uneducated, dishonest and harsh. This negative prejudice was so strong and widely accepted that shepherds weren't even allowed to testify in court!

Shepherds at the time were marginalised people living on the outskirts of society and often in poverty. What's more, they had to live with the stigma of being seen as ceremonially unclean, excluding them from the religious life that was so important to Jews living in the days of Jesus.

The shepherds didn't have much going for them in terms of reputation. They certainly weren't the kind of respectable religious types with whom people would have expected God to first share the hoped-filled news of Jesus' birth. But God sees things differently. God doesn't view humanity with the kind of prejudice, or even contempt, that's easily levelled at people perceived to be on the margins.

In what would have been a dazzling nighttime show in the sky, the angel's message to the shepherds was one of hope and joy:

'But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people."' – Luke 2:10

'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.' – Luke 2:14

Today, we still live in a world in which many people are left on the margins, cut off from society. For many living under the weight of debt and poverty, this feeling of isolation and living on the fringes is all too real. This winter, there will be families and individuals across the UK crippled by the shame of being unable to afford to put food on the table, let alone a Christmas dinner. As millions turn on their Christmas lights, there will be those unable to afford to turn on the heating.

The Christmas story shows us that God's message of good news, hope and peace for the world is for everyone. He chose to announce it not via a neatly packaged PR campaign, or to those in high places, but to the very people most overlooked and ignored in society. As God's Church, we have been entrusted to bring this message of hope and glad tidings to those around us, including those who find themselves isolated, marginalised and on the edge of society through debt and poverty.

As we approach this Christmas season, let us reflect on the message of hope that God announced, to whom he chose to announce it, and what we can learn about the way we serve the most marginalised people in our communities today.

Questions to reflect on:

- What stands out to you about those that God chose to announce the birth of Jesus to before anyone else?
- How could poverty be causing people in your community to be isolated this Christmas?
- In what ways are you individually or as a church currently serving those on the margins?
- In what ways could you individually or as a church practically demonstrate the love and good news of Jesus to those isolated through debt and poverty?

Christmas appeal prayer

A prayer of hope for the marginalised



Heavenly Father,

We thank you for the hope brought by the arrival of Jesus on Earth. We lift up those in the midst of financial crisis this Christmas season, praying that your light would pierce through the darkness of these situations. May you grant hope to the hopeless.

We also pray that we, your Church, would extend our hands in generosity and compassion to those struggling under the pressure of debt and poverty, and that together we would see a UK where poverty no longer exists.

In your name, we pray.

Amen.