

WEEKLY SERMON

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Bishop Julian was invited to write the Christmas message for the readers of Lancashire Life magazine for their December 2021 issue. This was in addition to his regular annual Christmas message for the Diocese which you can [watch and read here](#).

For this week's Weekly Sermon, we reproduce the Bishop's Lancashire Life column which focuses on the message of Hope in the Christmas story, for anyone who hasn't had chance to read it in the magazine.

And please note there is also [an Advent and Christmas resources page](#) on the Diocesan website which features a whole host of helpful materials to support parishes at this busy time.

Christmas is a Season of Hope

I write this message at a time when the world waits in hope for all kinds of situations to resolve. Whether it is a positive outcome for the created order from the various conferences and initiatives taking place regarding climate change; or an end to the migration crisis of people fleeing from their homes and cultures; or the release of innocent people unjustly held against their will.

At a personal level, hope is also crucial for our human wellbeing, whether it is a change in circumstances; a search for work; a desire for relationship or, particularly during the pandemic, the anticipation of meeting up with family and friends once again after time apart.

The need to have something to look forward to is a deep human longing. Hope matters, but when it is absent it easily causes despair, mental health issues and addictive habits.

Many of our social ills can be traced back to a lack of hope. Without a reason for getting up in the morning, for facing the challenges of everyday life, for coping with illness or for seeing a route out of poverty, many have found it is easier to give up and become reconciled to a way of life that is far from the good that all of us are intended to enjoy.

Christmas is, at its heart, a season of hope. I know there are those who may dread the holiday; concerned about loneliness, the pain of not having certain people with us, the over emphasis on material things and the temptation to overspend.

But if we go to the message behind all the trappings of our traditions at Christmas, we discover a story about the Creator of the universe choosing to come to Earth as a tiny child and live among us as Emmanuel, which means 'God with us'; Jesus, the Saviour of the world.

The purpose of His coming to Earth was to make it possible for us to have life in all its fullness. He achieved that by laying down His life for us on the cross, so that our sins could be forgiven, we might receive the gift of eternal life and look forward with assurance to life beyond the grave.

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As a Christian, I do not believe that this extraordinary story is pie in the sky, but a real hope arising out of Jesus' resurrection from the dead on that first Easter Day.

Whatever life may throw at us we can, by faith in Him, have the assurance of God's presence with us in the present and His guarantee of eternal life.

I am always amazed by this Gospel message of hope in that popular hymn, 'To God be the glory'.

*O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood
To every believer the promise of God;
The vilest offender who truly believes
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives.*

There's no greater hope than this, transcending all our other hopes and longings.

I wish everyone in our Diocese a very Happy Christmas.

Rt Rev Julian Henderson
Bishop of Blackburn