

I remember some years ago reading a book to a group of children called 'The What If Monster'.

The What If Monster whispered into children's ears fears of doom and dread and so infected every situation.

What if I get scared?

What if I get lost?

What if it all goes wrong?

Now that may have been a children's book, but it seems to me the What If Monster has been quite busy in our world in recent years with stories and fears of dread and doom and perhaps, as 2024 begins, the What If Monster has got himself busy with you?

What if ... these terrible conflicts we are seeing in Gaza and Ukraine, spill over and become global configurations?

What if ... the fragile seeds of economic recovery come to nothing?

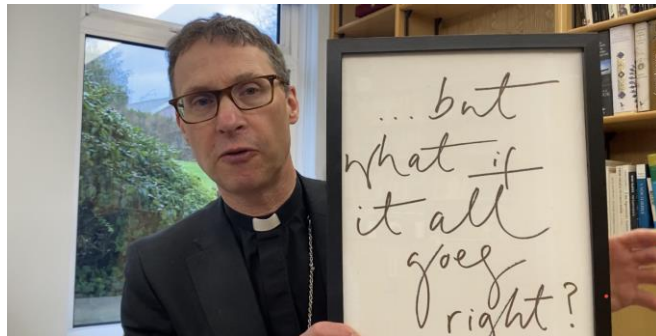
What if ... fuel prices rocket again and give us all trouble with our finances?

What if ... the big elections coming up in 2024 in this country and in the United States increase social division?

What if ... there is another pandemic?

What if it all goes wrong? What if ...? What if ...? What if ...?

It is so easy to make ourselves feel anxious and afraid with those fears.



I was struck in contrast, therefore, by a picture which was given to me by a friend early this year.

It says, '...but what if it all goes right?'

Now, if you take off the 'what if' that's actually quite a powerful statement of the Christian faith, because Christians believe that it WILL all go right.

It will all go right because of the child whose birth we have just been celebrating, Jesus Christ.

Jesus grows up to give his life away upon the cross and, as Jesus dies, He destroys death and sin and evil and all that is at enmity with human flourishing.

And so he rises again to a whole new way of life; a new creation.

In Jesus we know the future. In Jesus we know that we are safe in Him. In Jesus we know that it will all go right.

And it is in that calm, assurance and that confidence in the future can reach its way back to fill our present with joy.

So what would it mean to live 2024 through another set of 'what ifs'?

'What ifs', not of dread and doom but 'what ifs' of joy.

What if ... 2024 was to be a year of peace? We all can do something to achieve that, as we work for peace in our communities and homes and places of work.

What if ... 2024 was to be a year of justice? Again, we can all work for that as we give voice to the poor, as we serve and meet human need.

What if ... 2024 was to be a year of stronger families? We can do something about that too as we give attention to our families and show them just how much we love them and just how much we care.

What if ... 2024 was to be the year when you explored a little bit deeper, to live your life with Jesus Christ and to know the assurance - the joy - that comes from following Him and knowing that your future is safe in Him.

I hope you all have a really Happy New Year and a good 2024. And I hope that this can be a year when you can see that, in Jesus, things will all go right.

Rt Rev Philip North, Bishop of Blackburn