

Bishop Rachel's Christmas Message to Worshipping Communities 2024

It's that time of year when we hear the sound of voices singing carols. Undoubtedly there will be that carol, 'Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright' – voices and silence, and both are powerful.

Earlier this year I was in Bethlehem, that place where the Christmas story first unfolded. I was there to listen to the voices of Palestinian Christians, to be silent as they express their struggles living in the occupied Palestinian territories of the West Bank, and their turbulence at the silence of the wider world. Silence can be about colluding with the dark. Silence can be about listening and shining a light.

We've been rightly and painfully reminded of all this in the Church of England in recent weeks. In these days of Christmas, wherever you are, whatever your age or story, whatever the joy or pain, may there be moments to be silent, to peer into the animal trough of that first Christmas, and to see the baby Jesus Christ, God come to be with us.

God can seem silent amid the noise of media and social media, and amid the world's noisy hatred and vengeance and abuse of power, and yet God's love and hope are powerfully present if only we would listen. May there be moments of silence to hear the voice of the angels, just as on that first Christmas night bright against the dark night sky of the Bethlehem hills.

'Glory to God in the highest and peace to God's people on Earth'. May your silence be that of wonder as you dare to open your heart to the silent power of the love of Jesus Christ, offering peace in our noisy brokenness, and inviting us to be people of peace listening deeply and courageously using our voices for transformative love, hope, and justice.

I wish you a peaceful and hopeful Christmas.

Please do visit www.achurchnearyou.com to find details of your local church services this Advent and Christmas.

+ Rachel