

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE 2013

By the Church of England Bishop of Portsmouth, the Rt Rev Christopher Foster

Every year at my office we have a traditional Christmas tree – nine foot high and tastefully decorated. But this year additional trees have been brought in by colleagues.

First to arrive was a garish little pink tree, complete with glittery silver star and little shiny baubles. Then came a colourful musical tree, which plays jingle bells and doubles as a biscuit tin.

Between them, the various trees express some of the things that are special about Christmas. The main tree speaks of tradition and provides a focus for the family gathering. The biscuit tin tree emphasises the importance of food and music.

The pink tree gently sends up the whole thing, poking fun at some of the frivolities and obsessive consumerism of this time of year. It enables us to laugh at ourselves - an important element in any Christmas celebration.

It's good to gather round our Christmas trees, to enjoy the indulgences and pleasures of this time of the year. I for one love the traditional carol singing, the candlelit church services, the laughter and the food. I love seeing friends and family, and the spirit of generosity that sweeps through us all at this time of the year, inspired by the love God shows us by coming among us as a newborn baby.

I hope you too delight in some or all of those things. But I am conscious that some of you may find this a difficult time of year. Along with ministers up and down the country, I am privileged to be alongside people who are going through hard times: people who are unwell, or hurting with broken relationships, or grieving, or facing financial insecurity.

So alongside the festivities I will be spending some time over Christmas with people who I know are finding life difficult. If you find yourself in a difficult place just now – if you are hurting or struggling with life - please know that the doors of the church are open to you.

Whether you find yourself in a joyful place, or in a place of pain or uncertainty, I wish you every blessing this Christmas.