Christmas message from Bishop Robert

Saint John proclaims that the light, the word of God in Jesus Christ, shines in the darkness.

I don’t know about you, but as I look at our world at the end of this year in Israel and Gaza, in the Ukraine, in the lives of so many struggling in this and all nations, the darkness seems often very dark indeed. But John goes on, ‘the darkness did not overcome it’. This is the good news that we tell in our Advent preparation and Christmas celebration as we join with John the Baptist in bearing witness to the light, the baby born in the stable to live among us, who will open his arms on the cross, face darkness and death, and live! We have seen how St John goes on to say God’s glory, ‘full of grace and truth’.

This is why I pray that even as we face the darkness of this winter, we may celebrate with every fibre of our being and all the resources we can muster the wonder of this season. Not setting aside all that troubles us but bringing it to the heart of what we do so the world may know that in Jesus Christ it is love that will win, and that this is our greatest and surest hope.

May God grant you joy in your celebration as we tell again the good news of the Word made flesh, of the birth of the promised one who brings life to us all.
Follow the Star: Join the Song
Churches across the Diocese of Gloucester are looking forward to welcoming everyone to services and events this Christmas, many of which will be filled with wonderful music.

The Church of England’s Christmas campaign, Follow the Star: Join the Song, highlights how singing can help draw us closer to God and each other through the journey from Advent to Epiphany. Singing and hearing carols can enable people of all ages to get in touch with the wonder and the truth of the Christmas story.

Visit A Church Near You to find details of Christmas services and events in your area. Here, you can search for:

- Christingles – a popular family service where you decorate an orange and light a candle to think about Christian themes
- Advent carols – traditional carols and Bible readings
- Crib services with a retelling of the Christmas story
- Christmas tree festivals or tree-decorating events
- Midnight mass – a late-night communion service
- Christmas Day celebrations – join in and celebrate the birth of Jesus with your worshipping community

Your local church would be delighted to welcome you along to share in the joy of the season! Visit: achurchnearyou.com

Keep connected with news from the Diocese of Gloucester
Every Friday, get a free WhatsApp message with our top three inspiring stories, videos or events, straight to your phone. Simply scan the QR code to join, or visit: gloucester.anglican.org/sign-up-for-onedioce-whatsapp-messages

Help the homeless with Gloucester City Mission’s winter appeal
Each year, Gloucester City Mission gives out 750 pairs of men’s and women’s underwear to people who are homeless, costing the charity £6,000. Their Undies Under the Tree appeal asks if you can donate a new pair of boxer shorts or briefs, size 8 to 14, that they can then distribute to rough sleepers or through their Restore Clothes Bank.

Leave your donations before Christmas Eve under the Giving Tree in the Eastgate Shopping Centre or at participating churches and schools. Visit gloscitymission.org.uk to find out more and for ways to donate.

Can you host a meal this December?
To Stroud-based charity The Long Table, the real magic of Christmas lies in sharing a meal. Host a meal in your worshipping community between 9 and 17 December and, together, all the meals shared will create The Longest Table. All the events will build connections and communities, as well as raise money so that even more people are fed. To host your event, sign up to receive your resource pack. thelongtableonline.com/the-longest-table

Top tips for a greener Christmas

1. Choose natural decorations. Holly, ivy trails, pinecones, rosehips…. Take a bag on a walk and see what you can find.
2. Use old Christmas cards to make your own gift tags.
3. Create homemade gifts, like biscuits, or buy gifts from a charity shop – you’ll be amazed at what can be found.
4. Give the gift of time. Gift cooking for someone once a month for a year, taking them for a coffee, babysitting, cleaning….
5. Recycle wrap right. To find out if your wrapping paper is not recyclable, do the ‘scrunch’ test. If it springs back, it isn’t recyclable. And always remove the sticky tape before recycling.

For more tips, visit A Rocha’s website: arocha.org.uk/our-twelve-tips-for-a-greener-christmas