

Bishop Martin Seeley writes...

Christmas is about not being alone.

As we look forward to this Christmas, we will all be hoping that our plans for Christmas Day are not disrupted as they were last year, when gatherings of family and friends long planned had to be scrapped.

And many people who had been looking forward to company, to be able to spend time together at last, were left alone, at home.

Christmas is about not being alone, and in 'normal' times we all go to great efforts to make sure that family, friends and neighbours, people we know well and maybe relative strangers, are not left on their own.

I am hoping that will be the case again this year, for all our sakes.

I have been struck these past few months when we have been able to get together, just how important it is for many of us to be able to meet up in person.

As much as we have become used to meeting over "Zoom," which in so many ways is good for the environment with less travelling to and from meetings - to be human beings together again when we can is what we really want – and need.

And Christmas is one time in the year we want to do this, because it really is about not being alone.

I see our instinct, the determination of so many of us, to make sure each of us has somewhere to go, people to be with at Christmas, is an instinct born out of what Christmas is really about.

This is the meaning of Christmas: we are not alone.

I have spent a good deal of my spare time recently making angels.

They are very simple wooden figures, turned on a lathe, with minimal decoration, with just a golden halo and a pair of golden wings, handily available for purchase on-line.

I am grateful to my woodturning mentor, recently retired circuit judge Rupert Overbury, for showing me how to do this, although his idea I should be able to turn one in ten minutes has proved a little optimistic.

And my hands are covered in gold halo paint, having neglected to wear gloves when I was spraying the halos on.

Making angels has become my contribution to a plan hatched by the Revd Rachel Revely, the vicar of St Thomas Church, Ipswich, to “angel bomb” the town this Christmas with pictures and models of angels across the town in homes and shops and businesses.

Like all good plans, it is simple, and seems to have caught on, not just in Ipswich but across the county. A simple way to prepare for Christmas.

But why angels?

Well, angels are another way of saying, we are not alone.

We think of guardian angels, angels as messengers (which is what the word means), angels to guide, angels to protect.

Angels make sure we are not alone, and whether we believe in them literally, or use the term figuratively about other people, we all know that being an angel means someone is on our side, and we are not alone.

Because this is the meaning of Christmas.

So whether we are making sure our neighbours who live on their own are invited to Christmas dinner, or whether we are putting up images of angels, we are declaring that the heart of the message of Christmas is that we are not alone.

In the vastness of the universe, in the perplexity of our lives, in the muddle the world is in, we are not alone.

The birth of Jesus, of God coming among us as one of us, gives us that incredible assurance that our lives have purpose and meaning.

We have been through some very tough times, and we are still in those tough times, and we still have to be careful, and we do hope this Christmas might be different.

And through the tough times, and the less tough, it has been important for us all to remember that we are not alone, that we do not live in some impersonal, purposeless universe, left to our own fate.

Our eagerness to look out for one another, and the language and images of angels are both signs of that. Signs that we are not alone and that God is with us, whatever is happening. And that God is personal, and purposeful for each one of us.

And all those angels in the Christmas stories are there to tell us precisely that. And they announce that God being personal, and purposeful, for each of us means God comes among us in the birth of the child, Jesus.

Christmas really does mean, we are not alone.