

Bishop of Lancaster – Christmas Message 2018

Firstly, I want to say a massive thank you to everyone reading this message for such a warm welcome back to Lancashire.

Six months on I'm still enjoying the role and it is such a privilege to be the Bishop of Lancaster. I'm finding 'buried treasure' in our parishes across the Diocese.

Recently we held a Diocesan Conference for clergy and for lay people from across Lancashire. It was great to get a chance to meet so many people in one place. My heart has been warmed with hope for Lancashire.

Now, I wonder if you've been following *Strictly Come Dancing* this autumn? I confess it's my favourite thing to watch on a Saturday evening.

I like the way they take a celebrity who has never danced before and, in a few weeks, they're shining on the dancefloor – I love the moves, I love the music, I love the wonderful sense of party.

And that's what we expect from our celebrities. We want to see them glitter and shine in the limelight; we want them to make a dramatic entrance. Like 'Strictly' winner Stacey Dooley descending on a stick of Blackpool rock into the Tower Ballroom at Blackpool to dance her samba.

And we start to expect the same 'glitter and shine' of God. And that's when we get disappointed.

The incredible thing about God is at Christmas you won't find him on the red carpet.

Instead the Christmas story tells us He turned up in the forgotten place, fragile, overlooked.

And yet in the forgotten place, the stable in Bethlehem, the most incredible miracle of the universe happens. The God who flung galaxies into space becomes a baby.

He comes to be like us

Forgotten, fragile, overlooked.

He's not the God of the celebrities.

He comes into the pain of Christmas and the fragility of human relationships.

He is right there. And in the darkest place he quietly lights a beacon of his love.

Jesus's disciple John put it like this in the Bible, in his gospel: John 1: "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."

God longs for us to receive him. He's waiting at the door of our hearts. He isn't covered in glitter and shine and celebrity limelight, but if you receive him in this Christmas you will find he brings the most amazing party that would put *Strictly Come Dancing* to shame. He does not disappoint.

He seats us in the heavenly realms, he invites us to dance in his heavenly ballroom. His Spirit in us makes us his most beautiful dance partner. And he invites us to dance to the beat of heaven, where everyone is welcome at the party.

May I wish you all Happy Christmas, and may you enjoy dancing at His party!