

## **Christmas Message 2011**

### **The Rt Revd Donald Allister, Bishop of Peterborough**

What sort of year have you had? Some of us could say very quickly, 'a good year' or 'a bad year'. Some might want to say, 'a busy year' or 'an empty year'. For most of us 'a mixed year' would probably cover it.

It is worth looking back and reviewing a period of time. Not just "What has happened to me and mine or in the world?" But "How have I changed or developed, what have I learned or achieved, how are my relationships compared to this time last year?" Those are tough questions but very worthwhile.

Christmas is a good time to ask these review questions – not just because the season involves a break from work for most people at the end of the year, but also because it is a time when we should focus on what God has given to us. That also means asking what we have done with God's gifts and what we are going to do with them.

So, what gifts has God given to you and me? Are we in a position to write him any thank you notes this Christmas?

Life, health, family, friends, job, home – we could all recognise at least one of those things and most of us have received far more than one. The old song "Count your blessings, Name them one by one" may sound a bit twee today but it is still right.

And on a bigger scale, despite all the problems in our world and even in Europe, we can and should give thanks for a wonderful world, largely at peace, and for continued peace and relative propriety in our part of the world. These are big things and we ought to be thankful.

But of course the big Christmas gift is Jesus. Does that sound corny? For God to become human, to enter our world, to share our life, our sufferings, to care for the needy, touch lepers, give dignity to women – that is pretty special. And for God to come into our world to die for us and show us the way to eternal life – well that takes a bit of explaining (which I can't do now) but it is mind-blowing. The fact is, the big story this Christmas is, God loves you and me. He really cares, he wants to be involved in our lives, he wants the best for us.

And Christmas is a great time to respond to that and to welcome Jesus and ask him to live with us and help us live with him and with each other.

I wish you a very happy Christmas, and a New Year of God's blessing.