

As I write this Christmas message, what seems to be an annual series of stories has started about people, places and institutions trying to ban Christmas.

I want to dispute these stories for two reasons. Firstly the attitudes described do not reflect the positive attitudes to Christmas that I have come across in this city and region from people of many faiths and none.

Last year it was a delight to lead a carol service amidst the bustle of the German Market; preaching, praying and worshipping with hundreds of shoppers on the steps of Victoria Square. Equally it was a joy to watch young children in our primary schools perform nativity plays; sharing in the awesome story of the baby who showed us the human face of God.

Secondly it seems to me that many of these media stories are a thinly veiled way of attacking our inter-faith communities. One of the first of this year's stories, in early November, was in response to a think-tank report which suggested that public organisations should not celebrate Christmas unless they also recognise the festivals of other major religions.

Here in Birmingham the Faith Leaders Group, which I am a part of, works closely together and there is a tradition of Christian leaders sending cards and letters to recognise the festivals of each religion. During our season of Lent this year, we encouraged Christians to send Purim cards to a synagogue in the city.

Recognising the festivals of other faiths does not somehow lessen the significance of our own festivals. At a basic level it simply an expression of loving our neighbour and will strengthen genuine relationships in which we can be confident about expressing our own faith.

Wanting to allow others to practise their religion and celebrate their festivals does not mean I want to hide my Christianity from people of other faiths nor would I want to pretend that we are all the same.

Christmas is about God becoming one with us, giving dignity and meaning to our humanity. This is something we can celebrate and confidently share with others as we explore together what we can contribute to our wider communities as people from many different backgrounds across the Diocese.

I want to see a church that is equipped to celebrate, that has the courage to proclaim and preach, the patience to nurture new Christians and a passion to see lives transformed through the love of Christ. I want to be part of a church that cares for all people and has respect for the many religions that are followed in this region.

So let us rejoice together in the birth of our saviour, Jesus, God's message of Love to the whole world.

Happy Christmas and a Peaceful New Year

+ David