



## HEADER | TITLE 2

### ***‘Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory’ (Luke 21:27...)***

Well, when we prepare a sermon, we are told to have the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other.

These words come with a health warning. Recent events in Afghanistan, the uncertainty created of this ‘post-Brexit’ era, and the uncertainty that remains since by the Trump presidency, mean many people feel insecure and threatened **and are looking for hope**. But it is hope that cannot be found in the shops and the magazines, in the jingles and the baubles.

Those things have little to do with the coming of Christ and his kingdom, or how we can show in our actions what we think are the proprieties of the Kingdom of God, how they challenge the present state of the world.

Today’s Gospel reading on the First Sunday of Advent – the beginning of this new Church year – speaks not of baubles and fripperies but speaks frighteningly about the state of the world today, telling us ‘how on the earth there is going to be distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves’. It might be more accurate, and true to the original Greek to translate this verse so that it speaks about the people on the earth being perplexed by the sound and the echoes of the sea and surf.

I am sure those 27 dear souls were perplexed as they struggled in the icy waters of the English channel as they faded from this life to a more peaceful existence in the next.

It is not difficult to think of the people from many nations who are confused and endangered by the sea and the surf and the waves; the people fleeing war and violence and mass murder in Afghanistan, Yemen and Syria, or who are being washed up against the European shores of the Mediterranean, and this very week those fleeing to find a new hope to Britain across the English channel – only to lose their lives in that terrible tragedy.

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ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY  
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Our own Bishop David here in the Diocese of Europe, recently warned that this is the largest crisis that Europe has had to face since World War II.

The Diocese in partnership with the Anglican charity USPG (United Society for Partners in the Gospel) are working with refugees throughout the Diocese in Europe, from Morocco in North Africa, through Europe and the Mediterranean into Turkey and Asia.

We should note that migration has always existed, and the Bible is a story of people on the move. It is not a new trend in Europe, no matter how we respond to events today. UN statistics this year show that there were 82.4 million forcibly displaced people worldwide at the end of 2020, as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order.

In 2015, the photograph of Alan Kurdi, the child washed up on a beach woke Europe up to the plight of refugees and migrants in the Mediterranean. That year alone 1 million arrived in Greece. Many people are prevented from moving from Turkey because of the impact of an agreement between the EU and Turkey. Borders across Europe have begun to shut down – barbed wire fences have gone up, and there is a knock-on impact. The number of people crossing into Greece dropped significantly last year, and now more are crossing into Italy and now from Morocco into Spain. The route is moving from the East Mediterranean to the West Mediterranean, and the routes have become more dangerous, with people taking more risky and dangerous journeys, and reports of people trafficking, sex trade and slavery in Libya, Turkey and other countries where people are held back.

Our Diocese is working across 40 countries from Morocco through Europe and Turkey and the former Soviet Union. Many churches are small chaplaincies, with few people able to give substantially, and USPG is engaged with a number of critical locations – Athens, Calais, Tangier and Casablanca.

There is good news to tell how the Anglican Chaplaincy in Athens rose to the challenge and working in partnership with USPG – many people have been resettled or re-homed and have access to jobs and the opportunities to sustain them. The work in Greece has strengthened co-ordination between Churches, with long term key partnerships with the Greek Orthodox Church.

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Working together for the past three years has gone beyond meeting humanitarian needs and has brought the Churches together as they bring new hope to thousands. These wonderful partnerships are the lights of hope in this dismal dark winter. The Advent candles on our Advent ring represent, Patriarchs, the Prophets, St John the Baptist, and the Virgin Mary, all pointing to Christ in the midst of darkness, despite the disasters of famines, earthquakes and wars.

We can be beacons of hope. We can show in how we live our lives this Advent that we believe, that we want, good to triumph over evil, and to show that the Light of Christ shines in our hearts.

John Betjeman in his poem 'Christmas' proclaims the wonder of Christ's birth in the form of a question: **And is it true?**

**And is it true,**

This most tremendous tale of all,  
Seen in a stained-glass window's hue,  
A Baby in an ox's stall?  
The maker of the stars and sea  
Become a Child on earth for me?

**And is it true?**

For if it is, no loving fingers tying strings  
Around those tissueed fripperies,  
The sweet and silly Christmas things.  
Bath salts and inexpensive scent  
And hideous tie so kindly meant.

No love that in a family dwells,  
No carolling in frosty air,  
Nor all the steeple-shaking bells  
Can with this single Truth compare –  
That God was man in Palestine  
And lives today in Bread and Wine

**Amen**