The British astronaut Tim Peake is tweeting from the International Space Station. He received a tweet from the Queen, wishing him ‘a productive mission’ and ‘a safe return to Earth’. It was signed off Elizabeth R. This is unbelievably the new normal in our world; instant personal messaging, even into space, putting us in touch with one another in ways that we could never have imagined a few years ago.

Christmas is about God being in touch with us. Not an instant message from space, or even from ‘a galaxy far, far away, but a closeness that is lasting; touching us; God with us to share life with us. Not just for one day, Christmas Day, but for everyday.

Think about how you are in touch with families and friends at Christmas. You send cards and message, give presents, meet together, share food. Sometimes we have to admit this is challenging. We don’t always get it right. Sometimes being close isn’t easy. The present you give is a disaster. You have the same argument with your brother year after year, your roast potatoes are criticised. And you look forward to when the family goes and peace reigns again. Being close to one another shows up our insecurities, our vulnerabilities, and sometimes our worst sides. And yet, we are made to be with one another and it is the source of our deepest joys. And we are made to be with God, the God of the universe; God who created the galaxies, who sends us into space, who gives us the minds to create the technology to keep us in touch in ever more amazing ways; and yet a God who comes close. In the incarnation, ‘God with us,’ we see God who meets our vulnerabilities with his own. What does this look like?

On your way into church tonight you will have passed on the portico a sculpture of a baby, carved in stone, with the umbilical cord still attached. Not new-born but ‘just-born’. (If you didn’t see it on the way in, take a look as you go out). This is how God comes to us; ‘Just-born’. Born into the very fabric of our lives. Around the base of the stone are the first words of John’s Gospel that we’ve heard tonight. ‘In the beginning…was the Word and the word became flesh and lived among us.’ That Word was not an instant message that came and went in a moment. That Word was a life, a real human life, that came and lived with us and stayed with us.

Like that baby, outside in the heart of this huge vibrant city, unwrapped, open to the world - God comes to us and makes a new beginning with us, just where we are. That is why we stand in wonder this night. Because a child has been born for us; so near to us. Showing us the humility, and simplicity, and generosity of God who loves us.

God has placed himself in our hands at such great risk; this creator of the universe, come to us. A God, Rowan Williams says, ‘Who can’t help overflowing into the world he made. Who thinks that there is no gift or risk too great to bring us full life and joy.’

Our first response is to want to pick up this child and cuddle it, wrap it warmly and hold him. God is not distant from us but right here, to be held close. But most likely we haven’t made space for this

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1 Rowan Williams, A Good Christmas, St Paul’s Cathedral, [https://www.stpauls.co.uk/learning-faith/adult-learning/videos-podcasts/2015-videos](https://www.stpauls.co.uk/learning-faith/adult-learning/videos-podcasts/2015-videos)
child; this way of God being with us. Perhaps we wonder where we are going to put him. Our lives are arranged in particular ways. We don’t have room for this child who is Jesus, God with us, in our modern world. He might put our lives out of shape. Tonight we’re invited to see how we can make room for this vulnerable life of God. How could you make space for God to be close to you, God who risks everything to be with you?

That is the invitation and the challenge we face in our world just now, to make space, space for others. The refugee crisis of this year has brought 1 million people into Europe fleeing the war in Syria and other places of conflict and instability around our world. The time is now for us to ‘make room’. Making space for this child who is Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, will challenge us and change us. And some people are finding it hard to make space. It means opening our world, our country, our society our homes, our lives and inviting others in - their needs, their gifts, the things they carry.

We think of the world that Jesus was born into. His family having to flee after his birth, becoming refugees, Jesus knowing what it mean to be on the margins, always to be found with the excluded and underprivileged. People didn’t want to make space for him. But that place of exclusion was just the place where the Christ-Child was born. The centre of our universe. The place of light and hope. That’s where we’ll find him amongst those who are fleeing as we recognise the gift of God they bring.

Tonight we recognise that gift of God born among us. Here in this church. We wonder at the mystery and simple beauty of God’s grace.

A few days ago at the end of one of the carol services someone came back after leaving to tell me how this year more than any other he was deeply moved and uplifted by the service. (Of the many hundreds of people he stood out particularly). An Orthodox Christian with family on two small islands in Greece, he had spent the summer visiting them and had been overwhelmed by the sight of refugees risking their lives, taking the perilous journey across the sea, desperate for a future for themselves and their children. Thousands of people fleeing danger. His family involved in trying to help in whatever way they could. When he left the island to come back to London, the shock and upset of what he had seen left him deeply saddened.

At that service here in this church his heart had been lifted – a church full of people, hearing the Christmas story, singing carols with hundreds of others. And he found peace and hope. Overwhelmed by what he had seen, what was it that he found here that brought him peace?

It was the endless peace of God, the glory of God that he was invited into. He wasn’t alone with the darkness he was carrying, together with others he had somehow, perhaps without even knowing it, lifted it to God.

And this is the mystery that we enter tonight. When we face the deep darkness of our world, the brutal acts of terrorism and violence, in Paris and elsewhere, we are overwhelmed, and feel helpless. But God brings life into the world. God brings light into darkness, God brings hope. And he makes it possible for us to share that light and hope and love, because we too are born into his love. We too find our place with him, and allow that overflowing generous love into our own lives and the situations of our world.

Whatever you carry in your heart this Christmas night, bring it to the manger, the place where Christ meets you and makes a place for you. Make space for him in your heart and life. And allow light to come. Hope to come. Life to come. Peace to come. Joy to come.

May God be with you, and all those you love and all who need to know that hope and life and peace this Christmas time.