



## **A Pastoral Letter from the Archbishops and Bishops of the Church of Ireland**

*'And the light shines in the darkness; and the darkness could not overcome it.'* John chapter 1 verse 5

2020 is a year which we will never forget. It is a year in which the gathering darkness sometimes seemed as though it might overcome the way we live. Darkened and deserted streets, shuttered up shops and businesses, even closed places of worship. Fears that our health services might be overwhelmed or that we might not have the resolve or the resilience to organise ourselves against a deadly enemy. But the darkness has not overcome us and the brightness of the incarnation of the Son of God shines more brilliantly still against a dark background. Now we can begin to see the darkness scattering. God's coming into the world at Christmas time is the sure witness and foundation of his love for us, and the redemption of the whole creation.

Covid-19 has stripped away the layers of what is impermanent in our lives and revealed just how fundamental the central messages of the Gospel are for the good of our world. To love God and to express that love in the love for our neighbour. All over this island, our parishes and our people have worked to be lights set on a hill, in solidarity with all people of goodwill. And we will continue in his strength to do so as this shared time of hardship continues.

And we have experienced those hopeful acts of service as the privileges of our calling as disciples of the incarnate Lord. Sometimes it has been difficult to be with those who needed us in the way we would have wished to be; in the way that God came to be with us. The frustration of being apart has been keenly felt across our countryside, towns and cities. But we have prayed, and persevered and hoped and loved, and trusting and following him has seen us through. Many of us had little to endure. Some have had much. We are all in the debt of those who kept us well, or who cared for the sick, or who comforted the fearful, bereaved, and those whom we have lost to death in these months.

We have had to learn again the lessons of our dependence on one another and of the interdependence of the whole world. The frontline kept expanding and we found that there were simple things – even washing our hands, maintaining our distance, and covering our faces – that each of us could do for the benefit of others.

The star of Bethlehem attracted people of wisdom to the infant Jesus. The star symbolised the bright moment when God became part of his own creation and inseparable from it in his fatherly love. Through the presence of his Holy Spirit in our world today, the brightness of the star remains, illuminating the work of scientists and researchers, and providing inspiration still for many who find their motivation in working for the good of others.

We hope and pray that you will be able to make this a Christmas you will never forget, in deepening commitment to the Lord of the Church, joyful in the warmth of his presence, and with those who can safely be with you.

**The Most Revd John McDowell**  
Archbishop of Armagh & Primate of All  
Ireland

**The Most Revd Pat Storey**  
Bishop of Meath and Kildare

**The Rt Revd Michael Burrows**  
Bishop of Cashel, Ferns and Ossory

**The Rt Revd Dr Ferran Glenfield**  
Bishop of Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh

**The Rt Revd Andrew Forster**  
Bishop of Derry and Raphoe

**The Rt Revd George Davison**  
Bishop of Connor

**The Most Revd Dr Michael Jackson**  
Archbishop of Dublin, Bishop of Glendalough  
& Primate of Ireland

**The Rt Revd Dr Paul Colton**  
Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross

**The Rt Revd Patrick Rooke**  
Bishop of Tuam, Killala and Achonry

**The Rt Revd Dr Kenneth Kearon**  
Bishop of Limerick and Killaloe

**The Rt Revd David McClay**  
Bishop of Down and Dromore

