

## **The Bishop of Coventry's 2015 Christmas Message for BBC Coventry and Warwickshire**

Did you hear about the baby, wrapped in cloths and laid in a manger?

I mean the baby born in New York this year to a frightened mother who thought she couldn't cope with a child. Soon after she gave birth she found a church – amazingly, it was called The Church of the Holy Child Jesus.

The church caretaker had just set up the familiar nativity scene of a stable, complete with a manger – the trough where cattle normally fed but where, in the Christmas story, a baby would be laid.

Of course, he expected that the figure to be placed in the crib would be a doll of some sort, as it had been every other year – a model or replica of the real thing.

But when he came back from his coffee break, he heard the sound of a real child: unmistakable life; vulnerable life; life breaking into a dangerous world; waiting to be welcomed, yearning to be loved.

The mother had put him there because it was the warmest place in church, and then she had fled.

The New York parish of the Holy Child Jesus celebrated the birth of Jesus Christ every year but this year 'a miracle child' – as the Bishop put it – had come to them and they rose to the challenge of this unexpected visitation.

They sent for the paramedics to make sure he was safe and well. A couple from the congregation offered to adopt him. They went out of their way to find the mother. They called the child Jesus.

What will be my 'miracle child' this Christmas? How will Jesus, who came to be born in a manger in Bethlehem, break into my Christmas this year and break open my heart to love; to care; to welcome those who long for help, who cry for my attention?

Will he come as the friend with whom I lost touch? Will he come as the relative from whom I'm estranged? Will he come as the stranger whom I fear? Will he come as the refugee seeking safety?

Will I be ready to receive him? And will I see that his name is Emmanuel, which, as the Bible says, means 'God is with us'?

May God be with you this Christmas: and may your eyes be opened to the surprising and unexpected ways he may break into your life.