

Because he's full of kindness, God the Son was born to do everything necessary to invite us into that future world, no matter who we are or what we've done. In dying and rising back to life, Jesus offers a way through death and out the other side into life.

Because he's full of kindness, Jesus offers the forgiveness we all need for our own failings: the ways we've lived as if this is a world in which we, not God, are in charge. And his offer is unconditional in the sense that we don't have to earn or deserve forgiveness (we never could)—all we need to do is choose to accept it.

Things may not get better in 2021. In our lifetimes they may never get back to how they were. But Christmas tells you that one day things will be better than they have ever been. And you are invited to enjoy that future for ever by the God whose desire is to shower you with overwhelming unconditional kindness.

3. HE IS FULL OF TRUTH

It's hard to find your way in the dark. 2020 has felt as if the journey of our lives has turned off a well-lit motorway and on to some dark, unfamiliar country lanes that we're expected to navigate without satnav. We've been confronted by the scary

reality that we only have one life, and that it's often unclear how best to live it and how to make the best decisions for it.

Enter Jesus, full of truth: a man who claimed to be the God who directs the future, understands the past, and knows us better than we do ourselves. His truth is sometimes unsettling, because it's not always in line with our views. But his truth is always liberating, because he offers us the insight and the guidance we need. He knows the way we need to take and the decisions we need to make.

Here's the Bible's claim: that Christmas brings hope. "The one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" is the person who is in control, and who offers to guide us through this life and give us a perfect future beyond this life. Jesus is the light that will overcome even the deepest darkness.

This Christmas of all Christmases, we're in need of hope. If the Bible's true, Jesus brings it. But *is* it true? Why not find out more for yourself—you have nothing to lose, and a lot of hope to gain.


To find out more: christianityexplored.org

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COMPANY






2020 is unlikely to go down as anyone's favourite year (unless they're a major shareholder in Amazon or Zoom). Life has got harder, less certain and more fearful. Pandemic, politics, protests... This Christmas we can put up the fairy lights and light the candles, but the world does seem darker than it did last year.

In difficult times, we look for hope—something to hold on to, something to look forward to, something or someone that can say to us, “It will get better”. But this winter it's hard to say that to ourselves. It's hard to believe our leaders when they say it to us. And this December, we can't even escape from it all at a party or on a beach.

But you can still have real hope. To find hope this Christmas, look to... the first Christmas.

2,000 years ago in Palestine, things weren't easy either. Jesus was born into a people suffering oppression and injustice, and into a family who became refugees. He was born in dark times—which is why John, one of the eyewitness biographers of Jesus, wrote of the first Christmas:



“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” (The Bible: John's Gospel, chapter 1, verse 5)

The Bible claims that the first Christmas was all about light coming into and triumphing over darkness—that Jesus coming was all about hope driving out fear. As John continues his introduction to his Gospel, in a single sentence he gives us three descriptions of Jesus that show us how he brought hope:

“We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1 v 14)

1. HE CAME FROM THE FATHER

Is this world a place that is essentially chaotic, or is it under control? This year has shown us that, as a human race, *we* certainly don't have things under control. And, if blind chemical processes are all there is—if there's nothing behind what we can see—then chaos is all we can expect. But if there is a divine being who made everything, then there is someone bigger than this life and someone able to direct this world.

The first Christmas says that there is such a God. It tells us that the God at the heart of the universe is a God of relationship:

Father, Son and Spirit. And the fact that “the one and only Son” came from heaven to earth—from a throne room to a shack—means that he has experienced tiredness, and worry, and betrayal, and uncertainty, and hunger and pain. Christmas shows you that there is a God, and so this is a world under control, not in chaos. But... if God is in control, what is he doing?

2. HE IS FULL OF GRACE

Our speech is now full of phrases never uttered before 2020. Social distancing. Track and trace. The R number. But what if your 2021 could be shaped by a very different phrase: overwhelming unconditional kindness?

That's what the word “grace” means. And Jesus shows us that God is full of it.

Because he's full of kindness, God is preparing to remake this world into one without sickness, pain, grief or death. No more uncertainty or fear—only joy and peace. It's the life we're all looking for and yet feel very far from right now. That's what God is directing the world towards, even when, from our limited human perspective, the route seems very strange.

