

## **Christmas Message 2014 from The Most Revd George Stack, Archbishop of Cardiff**

Whatever the political causes of the violence in the Middle East, the price being paid by innocent civilians is too much to bear. These ancient lands of the Bible are being scarred by hunger and disease, by persecution and death.

Although the scale may have been smaller, the occupation of the land of the birth of Jesus two thousand years ago was also traumatic for the Jewish people. His life began 'under orders' of the Roman census. It ended with his crucifixion and death, a common Roman punishment for anyone who dared challenge the political or religious status quo. If we begin to understand something of the suffering of Jesus on the cross, we can kneel before the Christ child in the wood of the crib at Bethlehem. His birth and his death give us a glimpse of the truth that no experience, no matter how painful or confusing, lies beyond the love of God as shown in the birth of his Son Jesus Christ. He came to share our humanity from within. "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight".

The great 20<sup>th</sup> century writer Elie Weisel said of the Holocaust: 'Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God himself'. The former Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, replied 'To whom could one speak of these things so much larger than man, if not God? If God existed, how was the Holocaust possible? If God did not exist, how was humanity after the Holocaust credible?' The celebration of Christmas allows us to speak to God about the sufferings of our troubled world. It reminds us, in the words of the poet John Betjeman, "*That God was Man in Palestine, and lives today in bread and wine*".

23 December 2014