



## A sermon for the Eucharist of Christmas Night at Wells Cathedral, preached on Wednesday 24 December 2025 by the Very Reverend Toby Wright, Dean of Wells

### **'Let there be light': Joyful Incarnation**

There's a story I love about two physicists - bright minds, pointy heads - scribbling equations on a whiteboard, trying to explain the origins of the universe. They look puzzled as though something's not right. Someone walks in, glances at the board, and says, "Excuse me—you're missing something." Then, in the middle of their calculations, they write on the board: 'Let there be light.' Suddenly, everything makes sense.

John's Gospel begins with that same cosmic note: light breaking into darkness. But John goes further than Genesis. He doesn't just say light was created - he says the Light came into the world. Not as an abstract force, but as a person: "*The Word became flesh.*" This is the heart of Christmas: the Incarnation. God didn't stay distant. God steps into our story.

Now I wonder if you know that cosmologists are like theologians—they both argue that the constants were chosen just right so life could exist. The difference? One calls it divine providence, the other calls it the anthropic principle. Both agree that the fundamental constants and laws of the universe appear fine-tuned for life.

The Slovenian philosopher and cultural theorist, Slavoj Žižek, calls the Incarnation a "*radical, material rupture.*" It's not a myth or metaphor—it's an utterly singular event: God became human. Think about that. The infinite Creator entered time and space, took on skin and bone, and lived among us. No other religion makes such a claim. It's staggering.

While the world was busy with its own calculations, God wrote in the middle of history: 'Let there be light.' Sterling K. Brown, the actor, tells a story about his first child's birth. His wife was in labour at home, and he confidently explained - he confesses to mansplaining - that she couldn't be crowning yet because it was her first baby. Moments later, the baby was born right there in the bathroom! Life has a way of surprising us, breaking in when we least expect it. That's what happened at Bethlehem.

The truth of Jesus isn't locked in the past; it continues to unfold, bringing freedom and love today. The theologian Nicolas Berdyaev reminds us that revelation isn't just information—it's divine-human cooperation. The Incarnation isn't just a doctrine—it's a living reality that transforms lives.

And here's something fascinating: science backs this up. Research consistently shows that people of faith are happier and more resilient than those who aren't. Why? Because faith gives life meaning. It builds community. It nurtures gratitude, forgiveness, and hope - habits that psychologists confirm boost mental health. Harvard's School of Public Health Professor, Tyler VanderWeele, found that women who attend church at least once a week are five times less likely to commit suicide<sup>1</sup> and 68% less likely to suffer despair. A longitudinal study from 2020 found from three large cohorts that if you attend church at least once a week you are more than 25% less likely to die, less likely to drink heavily and suffer less from anxiety and loneliness, whilst also to have a greater purpose in life. It's for that reason that the International Journal of Epidemiology has said '*Regular Church attendance is linked to... lower risk of death and dramatically better mental health and well-being.*'<sup>2</sup> Faith isn't just spiritual—it's one of the most powerful pathways to human flourishing.

Maybe you're sitting here as an atheist or agnostic, wondering if any of this matters. Consider this: the Christian conviction that every person is made in the image of God revolutionised moral thought. Christian faith dismantled ancient hierarchies, inspired the abolition of slavery, shaped modern democracy and human rights. Without the Christian belief that we are all made in God's image, equality as we know it would not exist.

From monasteries preserving learning to founding the first universities, Christianity fuelled education. It's belief in an ordered creation inspired scientific pioneers like Newton and Mendel. Even the scientific method grew from the conviction that God's world is rational and discoverable.

Hospitals, orphanages, charities—so many trace their roots to Christian love in action. Today, faith-based organizations remain among the largest providers of humanitarian aid worldwide. Christianity turned mercy into a global movement.

Is it faultless? No. Does Christianity get it wrong sometimes? Yes. (And so does every other political, philosophical, secular and religious framework). But what we can say is that in terms of global humanitarian good, and cultural influence, Christianity is unparalleled.

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<sup>1</sup> Backed up in the Nurses' Health Study of 89,708 women which showed a 5-fold lower suicide rate

<sup>2</sup> 2020

The care for the weak and oppressed led to a revolution of the hierarchical systems of the ancient world, with the emphasis on the importance of every individual. This is joyful news indeed.

And here at Wells Cathedral, we aspire to become the country's most joyful cathedral. Why? Because joy changes lives. It fosters resilience, moral growth, and social justice engagement. It's not shallow cheerfulness - it's deep, abiding gladness rooted in God's love. As the psychologist Barbora Fredrickson has written:

*"Joy is not just an emotion—it's a resilience factor. Studies show that cultivating positive emotions like joy broadens thinking, strengthens coping, and builds lasting psychological resources."<sup>3</sup>*

John in his Gospel writes, "*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*" That's our hope here at the cathedral. In a world of confusion and despair, God has written across history—and across your life - 'Let there be light.' The Word became flesh so that we might become children of God. That's not just good news - it's the best news.

So this Christmas, don't just admire the story - step into it. The Incarnation isn't a distant doctrine; it's the singularity that changed everything. Cosmologists say the universe began with a singularity. Christians say history turned on one too - when the Infinite compressed into an infant.

And if that sounds impossible, remember: physics already teaches us that reality is stranger than we imagine. Light behaves as both wave and particle. Quantum entities exist in superposition—two states at once—until observed.

If creation itself holds mysteries that defy intuition, why should we be surprised that God could be fully divine and fully human? In Bethlehem, eternity bent into time, and the Word became flesh so that we might become children of God. That's not just good news - it's the best news.

So receive the Light, let joy overflow, and join in your local church, or even join us in making this the most joyful cathedral. Remember it's good for your health! Because in a world of darkness, God has written across history - and across your life - 'Let there be light.' Amen.

The Very Reverend Toby Wright, Dean of Wells

24 December 2025

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<sup>3</sup> Barbara Fredrickson, Broaden-and-Build Theory, American Psychologist, 2001