

Christmas is all about belief, whatever the materialistic gloss.

A decade ago I was pretending I believed in Father Christmas to my boys. I am glad I don't need to do that any more.

For many this is when they remember the birth of Christ, and I completely respect that, even if the birth narratives inform little in my own faith; saying which, the Magnificat is a stunning indication of what those who wrote them thought this faith was about.

At a secular level it is a time when we reconfirm our faith in family and friendships, and it is none the worse for that. This is essential, and worthy of a festival.

This all seems especially poignant this Christmas. The last year has challenged the faith of many. In a nutshell, the standards of tolerance and respect of others that are at the heart of all true religious faith and which underpin liberalism have been challenged.

Brexit was a challenge to a political and economic order that had forgotten not just that duty of tolerance and respect, but the obligation that comes from it to care.

The election of Donald Trump reflected the same sentiment.

The rise of so-called political populism is a persistent theme in current commentary. This, however, contrary to the Daily Mail's opinion, is not the same as pro-Brexit opinion and is mis-described because I am not sure it is as popular as is said. And nor is it populist: isolationist would seem to be a much better term for the thinking involved. The last thing it does is embrace populations.

If this is the case though I think Christmas is a time to restate beliefs.

I believe in the equality of all people.

I believe in the right of each person to a life well lived.

I believe in the right to live without fear of prejudice.

I believe in the right to speak and be heard.

I believe in our duty to care that is as strong as our duty to ourselves.

I believe in our right to participate in democratic government.

I believe each person deserves the protection of the state.

I believe in the sanctity of life and that states should not threaten it.

I do then believe in peace on earth and goodwill to all.

And I believe that is what Christmas is about.