

“Easter is the most important date in the Christian calendar, and an incredibly special time for people across Britain and around the world. Last month I was in Jerusalem and Bethlehem and I got to see for myself the places where Jesus was born and died. It was an extraordinary experience to be in those places where so much history began.

Today, 2000 years on, Easter is not just a time for Christians across our country to reflect, but a time for our whole country to reflect on what Christianity brings to Britain. All over the UK, every day, there are countless acts of kindness carried out by those who believe in and follow Christ. The heart of Christianity is to ‘love thy neighbour’ and millions do really live that out. I think of the Alpha courses run in our prisons, which work with offenders to give them a new life inside and outside prison, or the soup kitchens and homeless shelters run by churches.

And we saw that same spirit during the terrible storms that struck Britain earlier this year. From Somerset to Surrey, from Oxford to Devon, churches became refuges, offering shelter and food, congregations raised funds and rallied together, parish priests even canoed through their villages to rescue residents. They proved, yet again, that people’s faith motivates them to do good deeds.

That is something this government supports and celebrates, and it’s why we have announced more funding for the Near Neighbours programme bringing together even more faiths in even more cities to do social action. And as we celebrate Easter, let’s also think of those who are unable to do so, the Christians around the world who are ostracised, abused - even murdered - simply for the faith they follow. Religious freedom is an absolute, fundamental human right.

Britain is committed to protecting and promoting that right, by standing up for Christians and other minorities, at home and abroad. Our hearts go out to them, especially at this special time of year. So as we approach this festival I’d like to wish everyone, Christians and non-Christians, a very happy Easter.”