

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

December 25, 2021



MERRY CHRISTMAS

with hope and love

by Drew Downs

As I write this, we are finishing up our shopping, making arrangements, and planning for the Christmas festivities to come. And as much as my brain **knows** that Christmas is much longer than Christmas Eve services and Christmas morning gift-unwrapping, my heart really does get amped up for those two moments.

Many of us won't have that particular experience of Christmas. Maybe because

we travel or because we live alone. Perhaps we've lost a loved one or are holding fort at home because of Omicron.

The Christmas story gives us a vision, not of *family tradition*, but of *potential and hope*. It is a story of deep and profound love: in Joseph and Mary, shepherds, and God. Love for creation and love for its future. We can all draw hope and love from the story in the days ahead.

CHRISTMAS

Winter 2021

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Warmest Christmas greetings!

We're entering our second Christmas since the COVID pandemic began in March 2020. And like last year, we're doing so with the combined optimism from vaccines and concern from a winter surge with a new variant. We have lived through a long season of frustration, confusion, and discomfort. But it also has been a time of new growth, opportunity, and witness.

There is no question that we're tired. But we're also full of new wisdom and *different* hope.

What Christmas points us toward is not tradition as we've always done it, but the tradition of our ancestors who were driven by the Incarnate One. Who saw hope in spite of great fear and frustration.

May your whole Christmas season, the great twelve days, be full of that hope, joy, peace, and love.

Join us for these upcoming Christmas activities:

Greening of the Church, Wednesday (12/22) @4:30-7:30 pm

Christmas Eve, Friday (12/24) @4 pm and 8 pm

(online service will be available all day and livestream planned for 8pm)

Christmas Day, Saturday (12/25) @10 am

St. Stephen's Day, Sunday (12/26) @10 am

Christmas Lessons & Carols, Sunday (1/2) @10 am

(Regular Eucharist at 8am)

Drew

CHRISTMAS

Winter 2021

FOR CHRISTMAS

Christmas Day

December 25, 2021

Collect

O God, you make us glad by the yearly festival of the birth of your only Son Jesus Christ: Grant that we, who joyfully receive him as our Redeemer, may with sure confidence behold him when he comes to be our Judge; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Reading

From Luke 2:1-20

"When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.""

Reflection

We get the word Christmas from our practice of faith. Christmas is not a word that describes an event two millennia ago, but the church's celebration of that event. When people of faith gathered for the Christ Mass. We gather to celebrate a principle feast of the church, one we often call the Feast of the Incarnation or the Feast of the Nativity. We celebrate that with a *mass*: a service of Holy Eucharist.

At the root of these celebrations is a very particular thing: incarnation. That God has been enfleshed in the world.

CHRISTMAS 2021

Not *just* that God has shown up and done things. But that God has come as *part* of the world.

Last week, we wrestled with the idea that Mary put herself below God – that her *human* relationship with God was as one subordinate *to* God. And yet God turns around and is *born* from her. To be *her son*. The tension in all of this is the most revealing part!

So much of what our last two years has been about is the very challenge of our fleshy existence. Our mortality, our capacity to spread viruses by being together, longing to be in each other's presence, how to create *presence* virtually, and even how to ChristMass without a Eucharist...

Perhaps this time we look at the shepherds for inspiration. Shepherds who heard and went and shared and returned full of joy. I suspect they weren't disrupted by protocols or a sense of inconvenience.

At the root was an encounter and a need to participate.

As we look into our future as followers of Christ—the one who was incarnate in the world, lifted up disciples and led them on the way, who was abused, crucified, and was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven—we continue to strive, like those shepherds, to participate – not in those events *then*, but in them *now*. With *this* world.

That is a source of joy and inspiration. To be loved and trusted, invited and hoped for, by a God who wants us. All of us. As we continue to redefine *presence* in new and creative ways. May you have the merriest of Christmases.

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