

A MOST UNUSUAL CHRISTMAS

December 2020

The way things are going at the moment, it is highly unlikely that I will attend a Service of Worship in person during Advent and Christmas. I hate that! Of all the season of the Church Year, this is the most special of all for me. In my years as an active pastor I thrived on the season. It got my creative juices flowing. The delight of being with people, the magical quality of childlike glee, the deeper and more challenging theological meanings all energized me. This will be a most unusual Christmas.

Much as I have savored the familiar celebrations of Christmas, this year I will be forced to focus on the eternal meaning and message of the season. Time to reflect on the grace of Joseph who put aside the embarrassment and scandal of Mary's pregnancy and supported and protected her through the birth and the nurture of Jesus. Time to reflect on the faithful trust of Mary who accepted the favor of God and bore the Love that would transform the world. Time to reflect on the simple rejoicing of the shepherds and the wisdom of the Magi. Time to reflect on why the rich, the rulers, the oppressors, even the religious are so afraid of what this baby represents.

The meaning of Christmas sometimes gets lost in the pageantry. We dare not forget that the beauty of a Candlelight Service symbolizes the One who is the Light of the World. The music and the carols echo the heavenly chorus which announced the birth. The poetry, the meditations, and the messages all point to the Word made flesh. The gathering of families and friends is a reminder of the community that came together in response to the good news. Those realities are always there, even though we sometimes miss them. In truth, this year we will likely have to make these sacred memories do.

Christmas will still come, of course, and with it the timeless truth it embodies. The Word is made flesh, a child is born full of grace and truth, the world will rejoice. This message endures in every season and in every circumstance, even the one we face in our time. And we, yet again, have an opportunity to pay attention to the message, and we are invited to start over. As in every generation the words of Isaiah ring clear: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined." "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be on his shoulder, and his name will be called 'Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'" [Isaiah 9]

We may be tempted, of course, to try and celebrate Christmas the way we've always done. But that probably won't be possible this year, and perhaps it shouldn't. There is light for this darkness. There will be healing for this contagion. There is hope and a future because this child is born. While this promises to be a most unusual Christmas, we are assured that Christmas will come! Full of grace and truth! "Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!"