



Advent 2019

My dear friends,

I regularly feel grateful to be part of a church community--for the strength and wisdom it offers me in navigating the challenges of life and for alternative I receive to the Me-Centred messages I most often hear in the world around me. At no time do I feel as grateful as I do at Christmas, however. Whereas the shopping malls and the endless competition of advertisers for consumers' eyeballs all suggest a season that is relentlessly merry and flush with cash, the opportunity to come back to the Christmas story of a couple of scared peasants in a barn in Bethlehem makes room for all of us to hear a message that speaks to the deepest needs of our hearts.

Whether you are welcoming new life this Christmas, or grieving a lost loved one; whether you feel excited at the prospect of gift giving with friends and family, or you find the shopping expectations stifling; whether you and your family feel healthy and well and you are delighting in the traditions and tastes of Christmas, or you are struggling with ill health, loneliness, stress and anxiety; whether you are strong in faith or still very much searching (or most likely, a bit of both) there is room for you in this Christmas story and in the life of our church.

In our Christmas story, we learn about the courage and love Mary and Joseph find in welcoming Jesus, even as they are treated as outsiders, forced to become refugees, and asked to face insurmountable challenges. They are asked to leave their familiar lives behind, and no doubt grieve the loss of home and family. And in the mystery of God's impossible plan unfolding through them, they receive unexpected graces, meet surprising people, hear astonishing messages from God about who and what their lives are to be, and they find their hearts opened to a radically new expression of love with Jesus' birth.

In the life of our church, we consider how our gift-giving and prayer might be oriented in life-changing ways, like our support of Indigenous Water Projects in Canada through the Advent Conspiracy, the giving of mittens and hats and cheez whiz and toys through our Advent Giving Tree, and the Christmas offering we choose to make to the ministry and outreach of St. George's. We receive the offerings of humour and heart and song from our youth in their Christmas musical on December 8th. We anticipate the magnificent musical offering of the Senior Choir at our December 15th Lessons & Carols. We hold one another in quieter and more somber prayer at our Blue Christmas on December 22nd. And we lift up all of the needs and hopes, joys and challenges of our community as we come together for our Christmas Eve and Christmas morning services. Every time that we gather, and as the feeding and counselling and shelter programs in which we participate continue throughout it all, we are reminded of what it really means to be church: *If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together. (1 Corinthians 12: 26)*

We have welcomed a large number of new people into the life of our church this past year. One of the consistent observations I hear from these newcomers is that they experience this as a place where people are free to be different, invited to be real and honest, and where God's radical welcome and unconditional love really is being made known. At this time of year, more than any other time, I am so profoundly thankful for this church, for getting to live and serve and raise my family among you, and for the ways in which God is making known through you that no matter where we are, and how we're feeling, we have a place here, gifts to offer, and love to receive.

Yours in the love of the Christ Child,

Martha Tatam +

Reverend Martha



Christmas Services

December 8th	Youth Christmas Concert 10am
	Wassail Party 2-4pm Bear's Den
December 15th	Lessons & Carols 4pm
December 22nd	Blue Christmas—4pm
December 24th - Christmas Eve	4:00 PM Children's Service
December 24th - Christmas Eve	7:00 PM
December 24th—Christmas Eve	10:00 PM
December 25th - Christmas Day	10:00 AM Service Only

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