

Archbishop Anne's Christmas Message 2021

“Love came down at Christmas, love all lovely, Love divine; Love was born at Christmas; star and angels gave the sign. Worship we the Godhead, Love incarnate, Love divine, worship we our Jesus, but wherewith for sacred sign? Love shall be our token; love be yours and love be mine; love to God and others, love for plea and gift and sign.”

(Christina Georgina Rossetti)

Heaven and earth meet at Christmas in unexpected ways in the ordinariness of place and time and the result is unbridled joy and the certainty of God's abiding presence.

The angel Gabriel appears to the God-chosen Mary at home in Nazareth and greets her with news that she will bear a son to be named Jesus.



This depiction of the visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary hangs in the Lady Chapel at St. James Anglican Church in Stratford Ontario. It was created by a parishioner, Laurie Richardson. I received this photo of it in a Christmas card this year.

Two women, both impossibly pregnant, meet in Elizabeth's home in the hill country and the child John does a jig in his mother's womb when he hears the sound of Mary's voice.

Righteous Joseph is visited in his dream by an angel of the Lord and told not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife, for the child within is from the Holy Spirit. The tongue-tied father Zechariah names his son John and his tongue is freed. He raises his voice in a Cantic of prophecy about the child who will be called the prophet of the Most High.

A young couple deliver their first child, a son, and wrapping him in bands of cloth lay him in a manger in a stable behind an Inn. They name him *Emmanuel - God with us*.

Shepherds living in the fields and keeping watch over their flocks by night are regaled by an angelic chorus announcing news of great joy that a Saviour has been born.

Curious Magi, following a brilliant star enter the house where the Child is, and, offering their finest gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, adore Him.

Heaven and earth meet at Christmas not in the halls of power or in the palace of kings but in a crude stable as a young family holds their newborn son, in a field of glorious angelic light, in an unsettled dream, in a peasant woman's home.

Painted on the biblical canvas these encounters appear larger than life and beyond our experience. However, I suspect in the moment they seemed common place and far from 'wonder-full' – that it was only looking back on it that those who stood in the meeting place between heaven and earth realized the enormity of it all.

The truth is that we don't have to look too far to see heaven and earth meeting in the ordinary moments of our lives. At the time they don't feel or look like much, but when God comes to us nothing is ordinary any longer.

We find this *Love Incarnate, Love Divine* in 10 000 places if we have eyes to see and ears to recognise it.

A frail elder isolated by the pandemic sits with her priest at her kitchen table and holds the blessed sacrament of bread taken, blessed, broken, and given in her hands for the first time in 22 months.

The pews of a church, mostly empty now on Sundays, are filled instead with bags and bags of gifts, packaged with love by faith community members. Squeals of delight and the laughter of children is heard in a hall as brightly coloured presents are opened.

Volunteers drive around town delivering hot turkey dinners to seniors carrying messages of goodwill. Though masked and distanced, the eyes of the ones who receive the gift smile with joy.

A grandmother dying in hospital and unable to receive visitors, Facetimes with her sweet grandchild and words of love flow with the tears.

An estranged son opens his mail and finds a greeting card from his mother with words of forgiveness and weeps bitter tears for the years that are lost.

A new father touches his partner's belly and feels his unborn child kicking for the very first time.

Hungry high schoolers find a meal and fellowship on a Friday at noon in a parish hall.

A beloved pastor receives the gift of a virtual greeting card from his former parish and realizes how much he is loved.

Worshippers following the Light gather in a borrowed church for their Christmas Eve celebration; others meet with members from other denominations thanks to an Advent Decree.

The cynic who lost his faith long ago tunes into a livestream service and is drawn into the message and its meaning – and a new faith awakens.

The Christmas message that the Light of Christ will overcome the darkness of our time, thoughtfully prepared by an inspired preacher, brings hope and healing to all who receive it.

Families gather around the warmth of a fire and share stories and memories of Christmases past, even as they look to a new and hopeful year.



My mom, Nora, having a conversation with my great-niece, Scarlett, in 2017

Heaven and earth meet in an angel's song, in a newborn child, across the threshold of a door, around a table, in a Zoom room, and around a fire. Heaven and earth meet where God wants to be, and no power can stop it from coming.

My hope and prayer for you this Christmas is that you will recognise the moment when heaven meets earth in your home and that you will be filled with the unbridled joy of the gift of Emmanuel *God with us*.

May the joy of the angels,
The eagerness of the shepherds,
The perseverance of the wise men,
The obedience of Joseph and Mary,
And the peace of the Christ child
Be yours this Christmas.

And the blessing of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
be with you throughout the New Year.

+ *Anne*



Colin and I on the deck of Bishophurst, December 23rd, 2021