



Presbytery of Carlisle

Supporting our Congregations in the Name of Jesus Christ

December, 2020

This Christmas we ponder again, the faith of a young couple who sought shelter in an inn and ended up in a stable. And, their fortitude when the decree of Emperor Augustus sent them on a journey fraught with danger, just when they must have wanted nothing more than the comfort and safety of home. And the courage that grew, as Mary delivered her child and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in the manger. What trust it must have taken, to wait in all that darkness, before the light came.

This year, we're the ones who wait with faith and fortitude, courage and trust, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Covid-19 infections and deaths rise daily. Local hospitals are overwhelmed and health care workers are stretched to their breaking point. Many of us have been directly impacted by Covid-19, or personally know people who are. Daily, we hear stories of people who are quarantined, due to exposure to someone who tested positive for the coronavirus. Health officials urge us to stay home. Yes, we are in a tough spot.

It's hard to imagine Christmas without the comfort we draw from our sanctuaries, in the company of people we know and love. For some, the pressures to make exceptions in this season, are strong. We are caught between the rock of wanting to protect ourselves from the virus and the hard place of yet another disappointment. We want something familiar and durable to hold onto, that gives us hope.

Even so, this is not the year to fill our sanctuaries. Instead, might we find shelter, hope and home in the Child who comes to us, right where we are? When everything else is stripped away, might our faith be renewed as we hold onto the love born to us, today? Might we, with wonder and gratitude, kneel at the manger...and then rise to act for peace and justice in this world that God so loves?

This good news cannot be contained. And though we may bear the sadness of celebrating Christmas without loved ones by our side, and we are pandemic-weary... ***Yet, Christ is born.*** So, wherever we are, we will light candles and lift them high because ***Christ is the light no darkness can overcome.***

This Christmas, among the congregations of Carlisle Presbytery, there will be services of Lessons and Carols online. Light will spill across time and digital space, as worship streams from sanctuaries adorned for Christmas. From parking lots, drive-in nativities will tell the Christmas Story, with carols wafting from car radios. From Angel trees and Giving Trees, through food offerings and Joy offerings, love will burst through the windows of our hearts to touch those who might otherwise be forgotten. Bells will ring. Earth will sing. In a rare convergence of two planets in the night sky, light will shine...and if we listen carefully we may even hear the sound of angel choirs, singing of peace on earth and well-being for all.

We don't know how much longer these COVID-19 conditions will last. With the beginning of vaccine distribution, there is hope that the end is in sight. However, it's unlikely that most of us will see relief before winter is over. ***So let's stay the course.*** *Cont'd.*

I am urging our congregations to follow the guidance of government and health officials. This means we limit our numbers, both indoors and out. We are vigilant about wearing masks, physical distancing, and sanitizing. And at least until the curve is flattened again, we refrain from gathering our congregations, in person. With energy freed from continual decision-making, we imagine what more we can do to bring hope and healing to those around us. We look for the valuable gifts of this unprecedented time. ***And we go gently with ourselves and others.***

This is exhausting for everyone. Please consider the need for pastors to have a break, after Christmas. A couple of new sermons have been posted on the presbytery website and more are on the way. Feel free to use one of these sermons, or to partner with another congregation. By mutual arrangement, why not direct your congregation to the virtual worship of a neighboring church, so both congregations get the benefit of a single preacher? And then switch.

This Christmas, may your hope be renewed and your courage restored through the Child of Bethlehem.

*By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”*

-Luke 1:78-79

Christmas Blessings,

Cheryl D. Galan, Interim Executive Presbyter