

## **Christmas Eve welcome:**

Good Evening and Welcome to St Catherine's on this Christmas Eve of 2020.

My name is Sharon Smith, the Priest of the Saint Catherine's community.

We are delighted that you are worshiping with us wherever you may be.  
Christmas Eve is the beginning of the feast of the Nativity – the celebration of God with us.  
With us, with each of us, in our homes. God is near.

Everything you need for the service is will be on the screen - the prayers and carols along with some beautiful art. Please join in the singing and praying the bold print.

I am grateful tonight for the work of so many in the St Catherine's Community who made this service possible:

Siiri, Mermi, Steve, Alice, Marc and Johannes for the music  
Kim and John for reading  
Bev for leading us in prayer  
Bonnie, Linda, John and Evan for the chancel décor

Gordon and Susana for the livestream and sound.

Let us take a moment of stillness as we remember why we have gathered and that we are not alone. We are in the presence of the Holy.

As the world around us here in North America darkens, every year in December, we receive the comfort of Christmas.

Comfort – that is – the easing or alleviation of feelings of grief or distress.

Comfort.

A word that comes from the Latin:

Fortis meaning strong. With the prefix con – to give or express.

And so in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century we get the word: Comfort – Something producing physical ease.

Or receiving strength from another.

And I have to say that this year – I am glad for the word ‘comfort’. A year where I feel far from my home.

For as I look back on the past 10 months of social distancing, restrictions for worship, memorials, celebrations – I have become a seeker. And I wonder if this is true for you? I have become a seeker of comfort. Seeking sources of strength.

- Bonnie Henry in her fluvog shoes,
- freshly popped popcorn,
- walks on the seawall.
- That now, o so familiar ‘blue square with a white camera’ at the bottom of my computer screen that has become my portal to connection with others. See you on Zoom we say, don’t forget to umute yourself.

Sources of strength.

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Tonight we have once again heard a familiar story. And familiarity can be source of great comfort for us.

- Caesar Augustus – a tower of political strength – decrees – and all in the land obey.
- Joseph – an engaged man, with a younger wife, perhaps walking with shame at her pregnancy outside of marriage in a first century era – faithfully leads his new family to Bethlehem.
- A brave donkey – that also follows the star
- Mary – young, pregnant, fearful, says ‘yes’ each step of the way.
- Angels, sheep, shepherds

Now I don’t know your belief about the connections we may or may not have between those who have lived before us - the spirit realm.

“Christianity has leaned into this connection – believing that the space is very thin that separates us from those who have lived before us. Maybe even that their care for us in this world has been converted into prayer for us in the world to come – whatever that might look like. A communion of saints”

**Curtis Almquist, SSJE**

**Podcast: The ninth day of Christmas: Companionship**

<https://www.ssje.org/2015/01/03/the-ninth-day-of-christmas/>

Carl Jung believed in two levels of the human unconscious:

- The first was the personal level created by personal experience
- The second was the collective level consisting of instinctual and universal patterns of thought developed in human beings over thousands of years. These form what he called the archetypes and foundation of our experience.
- Archetypes appear across cultures, and traditions, in myths, stories, and dreams. By exploring a particular archetype we can reflect on how it is alive in us or perhaps how we have suppressed it.

**Christine Valters Painter, Illuminating the Way: Embracing the wisdom of monks and mystics**

Indigenous communities call on their ancestors.

Richard Wagamese, an Ojibwe elder wrote:

“Around me drifts the smoke of the medicines. This has become my favorite time this hour just before dawn when the shapes of things reclaim their daylight boundaries and everything everywhere edges into wakefulness. My teachers say that all good things require sacrifices. Meeting this hour of prayerfulness and gratitude means I sacrifice the warmth of my bed. But the reward is inward stillness. In this waking world, I am awakened. In this easing of shadow I reclaim the light. I am not alone here. I sit with my ancestors singing this day into being - and I am made more”

**Richard Wagamese, Embers**

Whatever your view, these women and men who lived before us and whose lives are recorded in ancient sacred texts, provide us with wisdom that can offer deep comfort to us.

**Mary and Joseph** as our ancestors, can companion us when we need strength as fellow followers of Christ. We look to their stories tonight... as our sense of vulnerability has been reawakened by this pandemic.

**Joseph** – An archetype of right relatedness.

A man who accompanying a woman through a public scandal

A man who trusted the insight he received from his dreams.  
A discernable guidance that taps into the depths of our souls – dreams are like hunches, intuitions, impressions, that form a tapestry of meaning.

The words read tonight written by the late civil rights leader Howard Thurman tap into the archetype of Joseph – a man of few words but one who acted justly. A man who often acted behind the scenes. Who mentored Martin Luther King Jnr. And who sought in all he did to:

make acts of faith  
Of joy  
of strength  
of trust  
of love

as deeds to God.

I commend to us Joseph - this Christmas – as we dig deep to do what is just toward our neighbours.

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**Mary** – an archetype of the Mother.

Through the ages she has made God accessible. A sacred feminine if you like.

Mary seems to have God's ear.

She has a safety to her – a kind of nurturing and knowing that many mothers embody. It may be true of your own mother. It may be true of the mother you never had or wish you had – perhaps Mary is the mother you and your mother needed.

Mary is remembered in our Christian stories for her faithfulness, but in her lifetime, she may have been remembered as a fraud, deeply misunderstood.

She is remembered for her courage. A courage that came in the face of fear.

Tonight, I identify with Mary – her sense of 'how can this be?' How can this be all the Christmas I am going to have? How can all the loss I have experienced this year be? How am I going to reimagine my life moving forward?

Mary knew deep joy and deep sorrow and held them both in her heart. She shows us the inner life – of holding things in our heart as treasures.

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On this simple Christmas. Of time alone and with my bubble of friends.

I am a seeker..

- Seeking comfort in those whose strength has gone before me
- And treasuring them in my heart.

**For as Howard Thurman Wrote in his meditations:**

“The only hope for [rest], the only possibility of stability for a person, is to establish an Island of Peace within one’s own soul. This is the place where there is no pretense or dishonesty. It is the Presence of God within... the discovery of a true home”

Amen

## Christmas Blessing

May you welcome the Christ child,

May he be born in your breath,  
your heartbeat, your thoughts.

May the Child of God, flesh of love,

take your hand  
and lead you.

Amen.

Adapted Steve Garnaas-Holmes

*Unfolding Light*

[www.unfoldinglight.net](http://www.unfoldinglight.net)

*December 25, 2019*