



Marjorie Duncalfe-Brooks memorial nativity set
Photo credit: Laura Porter

SAINT JOHN THE EVANGELIST ANGLICAN CHURCH Christmas 2020

Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. – Isaiah 43.18-19

Beloved in Christ,

It has been an unimaginable year. This time last year, very few, if any of us, thought that a global pandemic of the scale we have experienced would sweep across the earth. Then we started watching it all unfold, as though in slow motion. Asia. Europe. North America. Home.

Everything we thought we knew changed almost overnight. And just when we thought things were getting better, the predicted second wave hit, sending us back into isolation, anxiety, loneliness. No big family gatherings at Thanksgiving, nor, it would seem, at Christmas.

Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann writes: *“Christmas is especially for those whose lives are scarred and hurt in debilitating ways. Of course that means all of us. You see, Christmas is not finally about a baby and all of that romantic business. Christmas is about a word from God addressed to the world in its exhaustion.”* ([Celebrating Abundance](#). Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, KY © 2017, pg.68)

As we all come to terms with this year’s scaled down celebrations, the words from the prophet Isaiah, offered to a people who were exiled and without hope, are offered to us too. In our exhaustion of restrictions, masks, isolation and loneliness, Isaiah reminds us not to cling to what was and to open our eyes and our hearts to what will be.

God in the person of Jesus did not come to dwell fully with humanity in an orderly, sentimental, tidy way. He came as an impoverished, vulnerable baby, born on the road, soon to be on the run as a refugee. He was born to Mary and Joseph who would have been shunned by their families. The Messiah did not come as the people thought the Messiah should come – with glory and might ready to overthrow the oppressive regime. He came instead as a helpless infant born into poverty so that in the poverty of our nature, we may know his presence and affinity with us.

God is doing a new thing in this season. For us in our pandemic exhaustion, there is the very real hope of effective vaccines sooner rather than later. There is the hope of renewed contacts and gatherings and seeing people’s smiles in person once more. There is the hope of warm embraces, laughter, singing and sharing food and fellowship. In the meantime, we are called to care for one another and love one another with the sacrificial love Christ has for us.

I am very grateful to all of you for your steadfast faith and joyful hope this past year. To those of you who continued to financially contribute when the doors were closed, and to those of you who continue to contribute even though you are not yet able to join in person worship, thank you. The mission and ministry of St. John's is possible because of your faithful contributions. We were blessed in the collective strength and resources of our diocesan church which has eased the financial burden faced by all congregations during these challenging times, but your contributions are vital in allowing St. John's to proclaim the good news of God in Christ in our community, and to be a beacon of hope for an exhausted world. Your donations matter.

Our Christmas liturgies this year will be a bit simpler than the past. There will be fewer of us in the pews, by intentional design. The familiar carols will be sung in our heart, rather than through our lips. But God will be present. If it is not safe for you to come to church, there will be a service broadcast on our social media platforms. And enclosed is a resource to use with yourself or your family on Christmas Day at your own table.

Please embrace the simplicity that this Christmas season in pandemic is offering. There is richness to be found in it. As the social media memes say: the first Christmas was pretty simple too. Rather than spend your energy lamenting the loss of "the good old days", open your eyes to God's surprising presence. The old order is being displaced and the newness God is working has the power to transform, liberate and heal.

May the peace, grace and the indestructible love our Creator who came to dwell with us be with you this holy season and always.

Yours faithfully in the service of Christ,

CHRISTMAS LITURGIES AT ST. JOHN'S

Thursday, December 24	Christmas Eve	Holy Eucharist	4pm 7pm 11pm
Friday, December 25	Christmas Day	Holy Eucharist	10am
Sunday, December 27	First Sunday after Christmas	Holy Eucharist	9:30am*
<i>*Note one service only on Dec 27</i>			

For all in-person worship at St. John's, including Christmas:

- Capacity limits are in effect. Please pre-register by contacting the parish office at (613) 283-1261 or stjohns_smithsfalls@bellnet.ca
- Masks **must** be worn when inside the building.
- Please self-screen for COVID symptoms before coming to church, and stay home if you are not feeling well.
- Congregational singing is not permitted at this stage. Music will be offered by the organist, instrumentalists and soloists.
- Entrance is via the Parish Hall door facing George St. The rear entrance is reserved for those with mobility issues who need the ramp.
- Seating is arranged and assigned ahead of time to ensure physical distancing. Household groups will be seated together. Please do not switch pews or move about once you have been seated. We want to keep everyone safe.