

Dear Friends

Well, it has arrived, my last Christmas with you all! I cannot believe this is number five. I've said this before, but Christmas is my favourite time of year. As the Christmas trees begin to appear in the windows, the dark wintry evenings suddenly begin to sparkle with light and hope, and no matter how cold and icy it becomes, somehow, for me, it feels less cold. I guess I am cheered by the visual clues that soon fill our shops, schools, workplaces, homes, and churches, that something special is coming. 'Something special is coming', having just typed that, I reflect that it does accurately sum up the message of Christmas, for something special did come, even if almost 2000 years ago, very few people noticed. Having learnt about the Christmas story as a child, and taken numerous services, carol services, preached a myriad of sermons, the reality of what happened to an unmarried teenage mother and her husband-to-be, is still hard to make sense of. We have, over 2 millennia of Christianity, developed four building blocks of faith that are essential to our journey as believers: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience. All are important if we are to have a balanced view and understanding, and yet the Christmas story, told over and over in School Nativity plays, Church Crib and Carol Services, etc appears so risky, so fraught with danger, so Geographically restricted, so dependent on vulnerable individuals, and so unlikely that it begs the question, 'why God?'. 'Why leave such an important act of unconditional love, of sending your Son into the World, to chance?' But maybe that's the point, maybe God needed to be amongst the devastating fragility of humanity for us to be able to believe and to trust? If you or I were planning to do what God did, would we have chosen a physically immature young girl to give birth to Jesus? One that was not even yet married? Would we have been happy, right before her due date, for her to set off on an arduous long walk, away from her home, away from her family and her support? Would we have accepted that it was o.k. for her to give birth on the straw in the place where the animals bedded down, with only her husband-to-be by her side, with no running water and no medical assistance whatsoever? And even, when against all the odds, the baby was delivered safely and healthy, would we leave the spreading of the good news to a few shepherds? Probably not, we would have had a fail-safe plan, with every contingency covered, the best of everything, the best available, experts brought in at the planning stage, a project manager, etc. etc. The Christmas story seems implausible, and yet, it still sits at the heart of all that is good, and wonderful, and precious about humankind, for it is a story of love, and love endures forever. So, whether you enter this season with sadness or joy, or something in between, I pray that you may know and experience the love of God and the light and hope that the Christmas story brings.

May God Bless You today!

Rev Melanie Reed (Superintendent).