Season’s Greetings

As I sat down to write you this letter I turned on the Christmas lights, began to listen to a Christmas music album and poured myself a glass of eggnog. I have been reading Christmas letters for 30 years and I must tell you I often wonder if they are written in a sterile environment. Suffice it to say that’s just not who I am.

This letter comes to you with prayers and positive thoughts for every blessing in your life this Christmas. It’s important that you know that there is somebody not only thinking about you this Christmas but also praying for your well-being in body, mind and spirit. The more people I listen to these days, the more I hear about the stress, anxiety, frustration, and complacency there is in our world these days. You and I can probably agree that Christmas has become way too commercialized. You might even agree that Covid has redefined family gatherings and social interactions in the last year. Despite all of this I hope you can join me in living in a constant state of hope. You and I need to continue to believe that the light will outshine the darkness. We need to continue to worship our God with every opportunity provided and St George’s will be providing many opportunities in the next couple of weeks. Before I get to that, may we please take a few minutes together to reflect on the true meaning of Christmas? I believe that Christmas is about ordinary people being selected to observe or experience extraordinary events. I believe that God wants to take an ordinary person like you and grant you the experience to witness and participate in the extraordinary event of Christmas this year.

Historically, shepherds represented people just like you and me. They were the ones living and working in the fields, doing long shiftwork with considerable risk to their health. It was a tough life but they were also tough people. God sent angels to announce to them the Good News of the gift of the Saviour. It was a dangerous time with high risks. They were hard to impress but a sky filled with angels caught their attention. May you and I take this moment to ask rather serious questions? Is it possible that you have been visited by an angel? Did that encounter change your life in the same way that it changed the lives of the shepherds that night long ago? Is there a chance that the encounter came in a dream or was it some form of holy visit? Did your unimaginable experience send you on a journey to meet Jesus? You see, I think angels show up often, we just don’t always see or hear them. These encounters can result in a new beginning or in the birth of a new idea or even a new relationship. If you remember the holy story, there is overwhelming evidence that far, far away in a place and time that we don’t fully comprehend… Mary was encountered by an angel who provided her with a message that would change her life forever. Mary gave birth to our Christ and to the best of our understanding Joseph too received a message from an angel and knew how important it was to stand beside his partner no matter what may come. One author put it this way, “Christ struggles to be born in our human lives and our human experiences.” (Herbert O’Driscoll) If you and I had been there that night so very long ago we may have seen a tiny baby wrapped in cloth… nothing extraordinary to the human eye but we would have wondered, is there more to all of this experience?

Today Christ comes to you and I often in ordinary experiences with what seem to be ordinary people. But there is more when we realize that the ordinary can actually be quite extraordinary. Would you consider praying for an extraordinary encounter with Christ during our ordinary days and nights of the Christmas experience?

Have you ever wondered if history repeats itself? Have we actually learned so much about healthy and unhealthy behaviour that we have fixed more problems in society? Or is there continuing tension between the wealthy and the poor, continuing abuse between races and cultures? Has the gap between the “have and have nots” decreased or grown? It’s helpful to reflect on the Roman Empire with all its power, control and abuse. It was the very core of who they were. From the outside the Roman Empire would have appeared to be filled with breathtaking art, extraordinary music and families enjoying every imaginable thing. From the inside it was a very different experience. Too many people were on the losing end of the socio-economic situation. Too many people were suffering. So how is our society doing today? What have we learned? When Jesus arrived on the scene the people were accustomed to dictators and other abusive leaders who reinforced their ideas and policies with brute force. Jesus was a new kind of leader who would transform our hearts and minds. The world into which our Lord was born had all the complexities, concerns, corruption and confusion as today. Therefore Christmas is Good News for all today as it was 2000 years ago. God is here and now in very ordinary moments of our lives.

How does one capture the magnitude and magnificence of the sacred events at Christmas? Could it change your experience and mine if we could remember that there is a reality beyond our immediate situation and that that is the ultimate reality of God? You and I know that our culture tries to deny the events of a divine source of grace and synergy. For too many control and manipulation are the ultimate realities functioning today. You and I can make a difference. It is in the simple things whereby we reach out to those in need and in our own small way respond to those needs. My deepest appreciation to the many ways you do that with those around you every day.

Many know about Jesus but few really know Him. Knowing Him is to experience his hope, joy, peace and love. I find comfort in the reality that He loves you and me the way we are and invites us to grow. Meanwhile He invites us to spiritual maturity. All this can be renewed during this Christmas season. May I please invite you to join the congregation for worship Christmas Eve at 4pm or 10pm? Realizing that you might be busy Christmas Eve, there is also a quiet, reflective service Christmas Day at 10am.

Thank you for taking these few moments to read this letter and share in my ponderings about the Christmas season. I hope something in these reflections has touched your heart. May God bless you and all those you love today and always.

Merry Christmas

The Rev Dr Stephen Hendry