

## Christmas Eve 2020 (Covid)

This year, Christmas comes in a very different way. Our Advent has been very different. Our whole year has been very different. Covid-19 has impacted everything we do and have done for almost a whole year now.

For example, my daughter wrote a letter to Santa Claus with very clear instructions on how to handle things in our house this year. **Step 1: (first picture)** watch out for the Corona Virus. As Christians, we are called to keep watch for that great star in the sky, giving us a sign that a Saviour is born, God-with-us, Emmanuel. Just like those shepherds were called to keep watch. **Step 2: (Stay on first picture)** the cookies are in a baggie for protection. Mary and Joseph walked and walked to find a place to rest, protection for a safe delivery of the wee babe, who ended up borne in a manger. **Step 3 and 4: (second picture)** put on gloves, put on a mask. Daily in our Christian lives we are called and challenged to put on our armour of faith to protect us and strengthen us. Our armour is love, compassion and patience. Mary and Joseph also wrapped the babe in swaddling clothes to protect him. **Step 5: (third picture)** leave presents under the tree. The magi (not just wise men!) were following that star and eventually came offering those precious gifts so rare. **Step 6: (fourth picture)** Don't forget our stockings. Oh! And don't forget to tell the elves. **(fifth picture/last picture)** In

fact, it would be better if THEY came instead of Santa, just to keep him safe for next year. And so, we continue to protect our elders, who are critical to our communities, to our celebrations, to our families, our history. We prepare ourselves for the coming of Christ; and the angels foretold of things that meant the magi were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, but to return to their country by another route. Safety. This letter to Santa, these words of scripture, all lead to safety, and endeavour to deliver hope. This is the message my daughter has gotten as a 6 year old. A story wrought with anxiety, stress, and fear, as this is a year no one has ever experienced. Thankfully, Dr. Bonnie Henry has stated that Santa Claus is immune to Covid-19 and children and families need not worry – as much. It is such a different Christmas memory for her, that none of us ever had in our own childhood. We are making sacrifices to protect so many others. Our sacrifices are small, but they are for the greater good, for the bigger picture, beyond us.

Now, I know this message from my daughter has lost some of the “reason for the season” but let me assure you, she looks to the sky every night we are outside for that “Jesus star” and LOVES her nativity scene that plays “Away in a Manger” over and over. So kids have a way of living with both Santa and Jesus. But sometimes, over time, we grow up and lose that

childhood magic. To me, however, I see so much magic and delight! This is a favourite church night for me – even if I'm preaching over zoom.

It's important to remember that Jesus came as a tiny child, and also, this year, not only does Jesus come to us once again as a tiny child of hope, but science is bringing to us a vaccine that comes in tiny vials of hope. The virus has been our dark shadow, but we are seeing new light, new hope, new life. Surely, 2021 will be better. I have hope. I have faith.

So many of us are alone, so many others are suffering and battling Covid alone, and so many have died alone, but Christmas is a time of hope and can bring us together, even if it is over Zoom or YouTube. We have a long road ahead of us, but at least we know that healing is ahead of us. Our Christmas story this year is about delivering hope.

Jesus was born as a helpless baby and we had to wait and hope in anticipation of his leadership. And we've spent 2020 waiting and hoping in Dr. Bonnie Henry's leadership, trying to comply, trying to be patient. We also have to remember that 2020 wasn't all bad though. My family, in particular, has some great memories to cherish. I also think of communities banging pots and pans to recognize the hard work of health care workers and other essential workers. I've seen windows painted with countless

messages of joy and gratitude. There have been numerous cards mailed, grocery shopped for on behalf of others, food delivered to shut ins, take out and meal deliveries to help small businesses stay afloat. Also, many zoom and FaceTime chats along with texts and regular phone calls. I'm sure many puzzles have been completed, knitting or crocheting projects have been well underway too. I also remember giving my boys "covid hair cuts".

We've had to wait, and in this waiting, in anticipation, we've found ways to connect, to persevere, to hold up one another and feed the spiritual souls of ourselves and each other, in creative and meaningful ways. This, to me, is what Advent is about: the hope of getting to this evening of celebration and incarnation; the peace of finding comfort in the darkest moments; joy in little things; love in the good deeds and messages from others. These four weeks have brought us to worship tonight, in a method we never dreamt of a year ago. We as clergy have had to think on our feet, learn new ways of meeting people's needs in creative ways and embrace technology in ways we never thought we'd have to. But here we are. Embracing the love of Christ in a birth in the times of chaos and noise of provincial health orders, vaccinations, physical distancing, live streaming. Doing things different.

That's much of what Mary and Joseph found themselves doing in those days so long ago. Mary and Joseph faced great chaos finding a safe place for Jesus' birth. In a lowly stable, out in the cold, with only a feeding trough for the tiny babe, destined to be king. Lately, as we watch the news, its also been chaos in several malls and even with this rollout of the vaccine. Will it be okay we ask? Where is God's hand in it all? Where is the hope? How do we feel peace? Will there be joy? And are we held in love? Tonight, we celebrate Christ's day, and as a tiny babe, he is the beacon for us all, that one day he will be the most humble leader of all, the most radical, inclusive leader we've ever known. And thus, to this day inspires us all. That is the Jesus I believe in. That is the Jesus that has got me through 2020, this advent, and will carry me through the long road ahead in 2021, because the journey is not over yet. God came to us, in this world, as a tiny human, in the first king size bed, for the sake of Love. This is the Christmas birth that is delivering hope.