November 2020

“The world waits for a miracle

The heart longs for a little bit of hope

Oh come, oh come, Emmanuel

A child prays for peace on Earth

And she's calling out from a sea of hurt

Oh come, oh come, Emmanuel”

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

How does one write an Advent greeting to the church in the middle of a pandemic? As I searched my heart for the answer to this question, I was drawn to one of the names used for our Messiah: ***the light of the world***. When the prophet Isaiah wrote to his people who were feeling lost and abandoned, he shared the following words from the Lord:

*“The people walking in darkness*

*have seen a great light;*

*on those living in the land of deep darkness*

*a light has dawned.” Isaiah 9:2 NIV*

And when the author of John’s gospel wanted to express what changed when Jesus entered the world, he did so by using the following words:

*“In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.**The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” John 1:4-5 NIV*

And when recording artist Lauren Daigle wanted to express her deepest longings during difficult times, she chose the refrain that Christians have sung for centuries, “Oh come, oh come, Emmanuel.” Light of the world, Emmanuel, God with Us, come and dwell with us. Come and make things right. Come and be the light in our lives.”

As we enter this holiday season, with its celebrations of Thanksgiving, Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany, we are all needing a little light in our lives. There will be no (list here regular events) during Advent and Christmas to look forward to … and yet…  And yet, once again, as it does every year, the light of the world will come streaming into our hearts and remind us that there is always hope in Jesus Christ.

It is often said that light shines brightest when it is surrounded by darkness. As you journey through these uncertain times and uncharted waters, how are you experiencing the light of Christ differently? What hope are you finding in the scriptures? Where do you find joy? What is bringing you peace? How are you expressing love to God, to yourself, and to your neighbors?

(This section can be omitted or think about preparing your own Advent/Christmas care package for members of your congregation).

*As we prepare to celebrate Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany a little differently this year, we thought we would offer a token of our love for you in the form of this care package. Enclosed you will find all you need to celebrate the seasons with us including:*

* *An Advent devotional and worship guide to help you explore the scriptures*
* *A Christmas songbook to use as you sing along*
* *Candles for Christmas Eve*
* *A prayer card to remind you that you are not alone*
* *An ornament to shine light in the darkness*
* *Hot chocolate and candy cane to keep you warm.*

*But wait, what about the Advent wreath? Well, here’s where you can let the Spirit lead your creativity. This year, we encourage you to transform the room where you worship into your own Advent wreath.* *Place four candles around the room - perhaps in four different corners. Have one candle represent your hope, one peace, one love, and one joy. Put decorations and pictures around each one that remind you of these things. When you join us for worship, or do your daily prayers, light the appropriate number of candles to symbolize the Light of Christ coming into the world. When we gather for worship on Christmas Eve, you can light these candles and use them to light your hand-held candles as we sing “Silent Night” together.*

*One last idea to share with you: enclosed in your care package is a Christmas pamphlet with information about our church. We hope that you will share this with someone who needs encouragement this year and invite them to join you virtually for our Christmas Eve service at 4:30 or 8:00 p.m. on Zoom or Facebook.*

My prayer for you this year is that you will experience the light of Christ in new and profound ways. Enclosed with this letter is a Christmas Offering envelope. If our ministry has been a blessing to you and you are financially able, we invite you to share a Christmas gift with our ministry, so that we can continue to be a beacon of Christ’s light for the world.

Happy Advent and Merry Christmas. May God’s richest blessings be upon you.