



Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador

THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

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Bishop's Christmas 2021 Message

As we journey closer to Christmas, there are indicators that this is indeed a festive and joyful time of the year. There is a kind of routine or ritual we enter into at this time of December.

By this time, most have put up the Christmas tree, decorated the house, been to at least one-holiday party, and gotten a good jump on Christmas shopping. We expect to hear the peaceful and jolly Carols on the radio. We want to see the bright lights illuminating our neighbourhoods. We hope to feel the joyful Christmas spirit all around us. As the song goes, "It's the most wonderful time of the year!"

But this is not true for everyone. Even with all the festivity around us, many feel this is the worst time of the year.

Physicians report increased requests for counselling, and admissions to mental health facilities rise during the holiday season. It must be hard to be merry, bright and joyful when your world and your faith can come crashing down all around you.

And so, try as we might to deny the darkness of the season and our spirits by adding candles to the wreath or presents under the tree; all it takes is the loss of a friend or a job or an unexpected diagnosis to burst our bubble. And when this happens, we end up being disappointed - with ourselves, the world, and God, which feels all the worse at Christmastime.

When this happens, what are we to do? What happens when we look in the heavens and ask God, "Why is this happening to me?"

I want to let you know that it is perfectly normal and acceptable when you feel this way. It is perfectly normal to be disappointed with God - the Bible is full of people angry with God. I've been frustrated with God on more than one occasion. But our God does not want to leave us this way. That's because God never abandons us. When we feel the angriest or hurt or lost, God is closest to us in our moments of darkness.

When we are disappointed or our expectations of God are not met, perhaps we need to adjust our view. It is like wearing glasses. Without my glasses, you are all a blur to me. But once my vision is corrected when I put on these glasses, I can see you all. Perhaps we can adjust our view of the world we live in and the situation we may find ourselves in. Maybe, by changing our perspective, we will see God with us instead of God against us.

And that is what Christmas is - when the baby was born in a Manger at Bethlehem - his name was Emmanuel - which means "God is with us." Imagine that! God no longer is distant, removed, and otherworldly. God has a face and a name. God has an identity and a purpose. God became flesh, just like you and me, and dwelt among us.

And that is a blessing of the Advent season. A time of quiet waiting, listening and preparing our hearts. A time to open our lives to how God is working in the world around us, not in ways that we might necessarily expect or always recognize.

I want to share a story:

"In January of 2007, The Washington Post videotaped the reactions of commuters at a D.C. subway stop to the music of a violinist. The overwhelming majority of the 1000+ commuters were too busy to stop. A few did, briefly, and some of those threw a couple of bills into the violin case of the street performer: no big deal, just an ordinary day on the subway.

Except it wasn't an ordinary day. The violinist wasn't just another street performer; he was Joshua Bell, one of the world's finest concert violinists, playing his multi-million-dollar Stradivarius violin. Three days earlier, he had filled Boston's Symphony Hall with people paying \$100/seat to hear him play similar pieces.

You see, outside of expected contexts, many people did not expect to encounter beautiful music in a subway station. Similarly, can we expect God only when stained-glass windows and organ music surround God? Can we only expect God when things are going well? Or do we expect God to be with us when things get worse in our lives?" (Source:<https://tinyurl.com/2zfj44f9>)

Perhaps we need to adjust our view to see the signs of the presence of God that are all around us. Look in unlikely places and expect to be surprised. I often think back over my day and see where and how God showed up. In the past number of months, I've seen God sitting with a scared and anxious patient in a doctor's waiting room. I've seen God smile at someone who felt no one cared about them. I've heard God speak words of love and acceptance to a heart that was broken. I know it was God because that anxious patient, and the one who felt no one cared, and the person with the broken heart was me. God was with me each time and more. I do not doubt it!

Perhaps you have seen God in other ways? Or maybe you are still wondering where God is? Wherever you are in your faith, God invites you to take another look and be surprised. In the good times and the bad - no matter what happens - God is with us, and that is Good News.

I offer this prayer:

You gave your all to the world in the bleakness of that stable.

Love was born that day

Pure love Undiluted

Poured out for all who call on Your Name

Such Grace Undeserved deserves a response

in the life that we lead.

Forgive our ingratitude

for all you have done,

draw us to your Word,

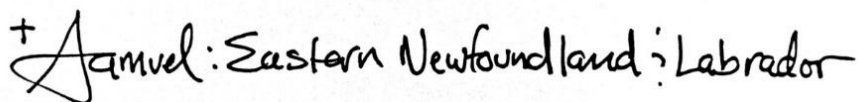
give us a new song to sing,

that will resonate throughout this world.

And begin with us today. Amen. © John Birch

On behalf of my family and our Diocesan Family, I wish you a Blessed and Holy Christmas.

Christmas Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Samuel: Eastern Newfoundland; Labrador". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Right Rev. Samuel Rose
Bishop of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador