

December 23, 2019

Dear people of God in Algoma,

“And she gave birth to her firstborn Son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” Luke 2.7



Last evening I bundled our adult children into the car and took them to Science North to see the Christmas lights and watch *The Living Nativity*, a Christmas tradition hosted by All Nations Church in Sudbury for the last 32 years.

There were hundreds of people there singing along with the carols and watching intently as the familiar characters in the beloved Christmas story made their way into the outdoor creche. Just in front of us I watched a young father telling the story to his little girl, and her eyes were wide with wonder as she took it all in.

That simple nativity brought back many memories of my childhood Christmases growing up in South Africa when my siblings and I would 'act out' the Christmas story for our dinner guests; of being a youth leader, a Sunday school teacher and a parish rector and preparing countless Christmas pageants over the last 40 years. Each one was memorable and each one delighted the children and those who watched the story unfolding again. There was something special in knowing that the old costumes made lovingly by parishioners that we hauled out of storage each year had been worn by generations of children in the parish.

By now your final preparations for Christmas, at home and church are in place. I imagine the gifts festively wrapped, piling up under the tree, your freezers and fridges stockpiled with enough food to feed several families. I know that our churches are looking glorious in their Christmas apparel. All we are waiting for is Baby Jesus to make His appearance in the manger, for the lights to be dimmed, the candles lit and that beautiful hymn – Silent Night to be sung. Then Christmas will be here.

This year you might be making new memories with your children, grandchildren and extended family as you continue the traditions of your childhood or create new traditions of your own. Others, with longing in their hearts, will be remembering Christmases past with loved ones no longer here.

Wherever you are this Christmas I pray that you will find yourself kneeling in Bethlehem filled with joy and wonder at the feet of the One who loves us with a love beyond our understanding.

The One who came to set us free.

Colin, Caitlin (Devan), Richard (Mina) all join me in wishing you a Blessed Christmas and New Year.

With love,

+ *Anne*

Against Our Better Judgment

We told her she couldn't go;

She was too young to stay up that late.

She told us Baby Jesus would be there and he was younger than she.

We told him he couldn't go;

He was too old to brave the cold night air.

He told us he'd rather greet heaven from the Christmas Eve service than be found slumped by the TV.

So we bundled them up against the extreme cold

Against their own defenselessness,

Against our better judgment and they went out with joy.

My prayer is that those of us who think that we're in charge of the world and the church

Will remember that the stable was filled with such as these;

Those who could not be kept from rejoicing.

(Ann Weems: Kneeling in Bethlehem)

Every Christmas Eve as I drove to the church for services I listened to "The Shepherd" by Frederick Forsyth. It's a beautiful Christmas story.....

<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/asithappens/friday-edward-greenspan-obit-from-our-archives-heroes-one-of-a-kind-as-it-happened-archive-stories-and-more-1.2902516/fireside-al-maitland-reads-frederick-forsyth-s-the-shepherd-1.2902519>



Caitlin and Devan, and Richard enjoying the Christmas lights at Science North. Mina arrives tomorrow!