

Dear Friends,

“So, this is Christmas” goes the popular song. And here we are. Somehow time warps during Advent, and I find that time seems to speed up as Christmas approaches. After so much anticipation Christmas is upon us. Whilst the glitter soon fades and the pine needles soon litter the carpet, and the mince pies eventually grow stale, let us enjoy the full Christian season of Christmas, and bathe in the glow of God’s love which prompted Him to send His only Son for the salvation of the world.

By Christmas the shortest day is past, and the hope of springtime and new life will begin to blossom as days gradually lengthen, so we know that the joy which Jesus Christ plants in our hearts, inspired by His love, does not depend on outward circumstances but on inward grace.

Some of us remember when Christmas weather was really cold, and the frost would sparkle on the evening pavement. I recall as a boy still in itchy short trousers going with a brass band to play carols in the streets, moving from the light of one lamp post to another in the days before double glazing insulated residents from the sound. On one memorable occasion the valves, or pistons, of my tenor horn seized solid, as ice formed inside the casing and I knew it was time to go home, with a heart warmed by the Christmas spirit and overflowing with seasonal joy.

We don’t know what frosty winds may lay ahead of us before the winter ends. Nowadays, brass bands can generally play their carols without fear of freezing up. Indeed, playing in residential streets has largely been made redundant by better glazing. However, whatever the weather, it would be the greatest tragedy if the cares of the world were to chill our hearts or freeze our devotion to Christ or dampen the joy of celebrating Jesus’ birth.

I encourage you to focus on those things which you are grateful for: cards from loyal friends who have remembered us again this year, the love of family who cannot visit but who hold us in their hearts, the simple pleasures shared within our households made precious by loving intentions. Nor do we take for granted comfortable homes, tasty food, uplifting music, and old movies that remind us of other Christmases we have previously enjoyed in other circumstances.

We cannot have our 'usual Christmas' but we still have Christmas! Indeed, an old song says, "Christmas can be every day for you". I have looked fruitlessly online for the lyrics, but to the best of my recollection here they are:

Christmas can be every day for you,
and this year be the best you ever knew,
if the love this Child imparts can remain within your heart,
Christmas can be every day for you'.

So, this is Christmas – it is about the transforming love of Christ, Son of God and born of Mary. We cannot understand the miracle of the incarnation any more than we can understand the phenomenon of love. What we can do is open our lives to our Saviour Jesus and provide a home for Him in our hearts as we receive and radiate His holy love.

Hilary and I both send you our warmest greetings for this holy season and our best wishes for the new year. We pray that it may be filled with love, joy, and peace as we look forward with hope. As time passes by, may we rejoice in the vision of eternity.

May God richly bless you,

Keith.

Keith C. Beckingham, Superintendent Minister.