



CHRISTMAS 2021

CHURCH @ HOME

staying connected with God,
each other, and ourselves

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Merry Christmas!

I'll say it again because it's worth repeating: Merry Christmas! You can say it back if you want. Do it. It'll feel good to say. Right? It feels good. It should. Christmas is a big deal. It's the celebration not only of Jesus' birth but of the radical, revolutionary, liberating, and everything-changing truth: God is with us and for us, and this is God's world. God isn't far away, distant and detached, but here, near and close, reclaiming everything and everyone as good, beloved, and worthy. Beautiful, right? Staggering. Awe-inspiring. 'Merry' is kind of an understatement, isn't it?

One thing we wanted to do this year was try to make it feel like we were celebrating Christmas together. That's why we wanted you to wait til Christmas Eve to open this. Whether you're here flipping the pages at home, joining in on an online service, or at the church in-person, we're all here. All together. All embracing that light of Christmas together.

red deer lake
united church

... continued

... continued from Page One

So as you dive into this, may you be pulled into some awe and wonder at the meaning of it all, may you see the light that's shining on you, and may you become that light – becoming a source of hope, joy, peace, and love for all.

I so so so so wish we could be doing this in person but knowing we are in some beautiful way all together, let's do this one more time:

My friends, Merry Christmas.

grace and peace,

n.



CHRISTMAS BLESSINGS TO YOU!

I hope you are opening this right at Christmas so that, together, our hearts can be filled with some of the excitement and wonder of this time of year; even if at times you don't feel at all like this, particularly if you are grieving. Know that we are joining together as one with you in this celebration of light and love, as we celebrate the birth of the tiny Christ child.

What a year it has been! Many have shared the light of Christ in this magazine and poured it into the care packages for you, bringing our love and sparks of light into your homes. We thank all of you for being part of this great circle of love, for both receiving and for giving, for your generosity, support, and contributions. We are all in this together as one and what a magical feeling it is, ONE in this great movement of LOVE.

As the office will be closed over the Christmas holidays there will be no magazine or care packages created in the month of January. However, we look forward to resuming once again in February.

Please let us know how you are doing and we would love to hear any stories, etc. you wish to share with us.

Leo Tolstoy wrote: "Just as one candle lights another and can light thousands of other candles, so one heart illuminates another heart and can illuminate thousands of other hearts."

We too can be sources of this divine radiance that awakens our hearts with love. It's amazing, isn't it!

May the light and peace of the Christ-light illumine your hearts this Christmas.

In love,

Vi



EMBRACING THE LIGHT OF CHRISTMAS


Now that we have arrived at Christmas and the light we have been waiting for is shining upon us, we invite you to read this passage from Isaiah and let it draw you into the very meaning of Christmas. If you have an Advent wreath at home, use this to light that final candle.

“Behold,
You who have walked in darkness,
whose worlds and lives have become coloured by pain
and sorrow,
you who are longing for something new, look up!
A great light is shining upon you!
For all of you who live in a land of deep shadows –

light! Sunbursts of light!

God, you are shining in our darkness!
You are colouring over the pain and sorrow with
unimaginable beauty!
You have brought this world back from death and given
us life.

**We're so glad to be in your presence!
It's like the joy of a thousand births and weddings,
the joy of great celebrations,
of sharing rich gifts and warmest greetings.
Let us celebrate because a new day is here!**




A new hope is here!
The death grip of our oppressors and of tyrants has
ended;
all their weapons, schemes and words have lost their
power;
the boots of all their invading ideas and troops,
those things which haunt and occupy us,
will be piled in a heap and burned like garbage.

Why?

For a child has been born – **for us!**
the gift of God's very presence – **for us!**
He'll hold the world together and guide it forward.
**His name will be: Amazing Counselor, Strong God,
Eternal Father, Loving Mother, and Prince of
Wholeness.**

All will be welcomed and accepted by him. No excuses!
There'll be no limits to the wholeness he brings.
Through him justice, peace and harmony will flow.
Look up at the Light!
Bask in it.
Do not be afraid.
God is here."



OUR CHRISTMAS STORY

During the rule of Herod, God sent the Angel to the village of Nazareth to see a young woman named Mary who was engaged to be married to a young man named Joseph.

Upon entering Mary's home, the Angel greeted her:

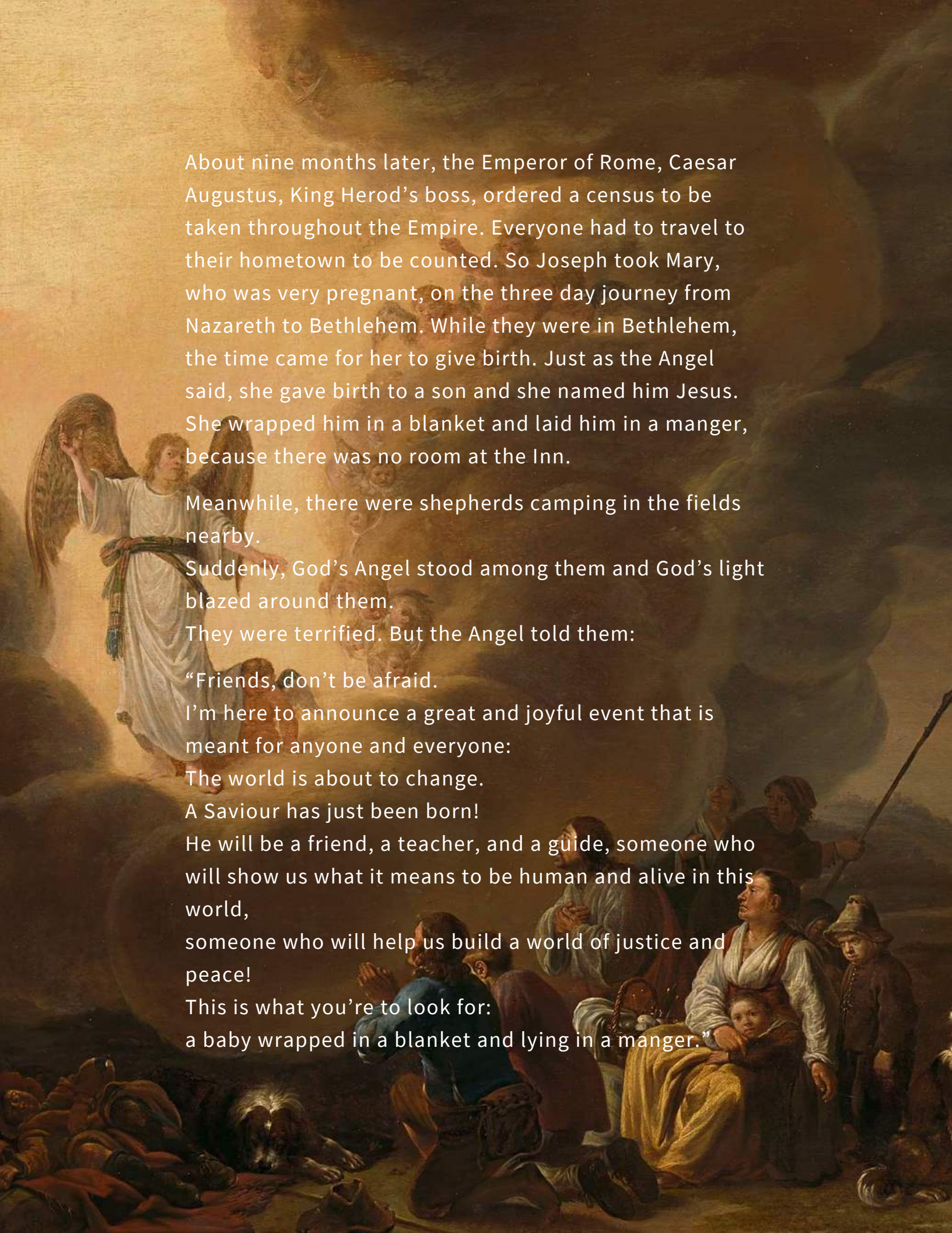
"Good morning, Mary!
You're beautiful from the inside out!
God be with you."

Mary wondered why an Angel would be visiting her. Before she could say anything, the Angel assured her, saying:

"Mary, you have nothing to fear.
God is about to change the universe and wants to do it through you.
If you say 'yes,' you will give birth to a son.
You'll name him Jesus which means 'God is with us.'
He will be the one who shows us how to live and lead us into a new kind of world."

Being a strong and courageous woman, Mary said: "Yes, I see it all now. Let it be with me, just as you say."

Then the Angel left her.



About nine months later, the Emperor of Rome, Caesar Augustus, King Herod's boss, ordered a census to be taken throughout the Empire. Everyone had to travel to their hometown to be counted. So Joseph took Mary, who was very pregnant, on the three day journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. While they were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to give birth. Just as the Angel said, she gave birth to a son and she named him Jesus. She wrapped him in a blanket and laid him in a manger, because there was no room at the Inn.

Meanwhile, there were shepherds camping in the fields nearby.

Suddenly, God's Angel stood among them and God's light blazed around them.

They were terrified. But the Angel told them:

"Friends, don't be afraid.

I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for anyone and everyone:

The world is about to change.

A Saviour has just been born!

He will be a friend, a teacher, and a guide, someone who will show us what it means to be human and alive in this world,

someone who will help us build a world of justice and peace!

This is what you're to look for:

a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger."

At once the Angel
was joined by a huge
angelic choir singing
“The Christ is born!
Hope, joy, peace, and
love to all!”

The shepherds ran
off and found Mary
and Joseph, and the
baby lying in the
manger.

As they experienced
it all, they knew it
was true and they
ran off, telling
everyone the good
news of Christmas.



ANOTHER CHRISTMAS STORY

There once were police officers who worked in a rural part of the province. Every Christmas Eve they had a tradition of going to deliver toys, cookies, and a turkey to the poorer families in the area.

One Christmas Eve, they had just one home left to visit, a family that lived outside of town. Not knowing how exactly to get there, they stopped by a small store to get directions. The store keeper said she knew the family and that she was concerned because she hadn't seen them for a couple weeks, probably because all the snow had kept them housebound. She gave the officers directions to the house along with some candy for the kids, but warned they don't plough the roads up there so they'd probably have to walk some of the way.

The officers followed the directions and sure enough, the road had been snowed in. So they started walking, trudging along with their sack of food and toys, the snow more than knee deep in most places, many times almost quitting, many times questioning whether it was worth the effort, many times thinking how much they'd rather be at home.

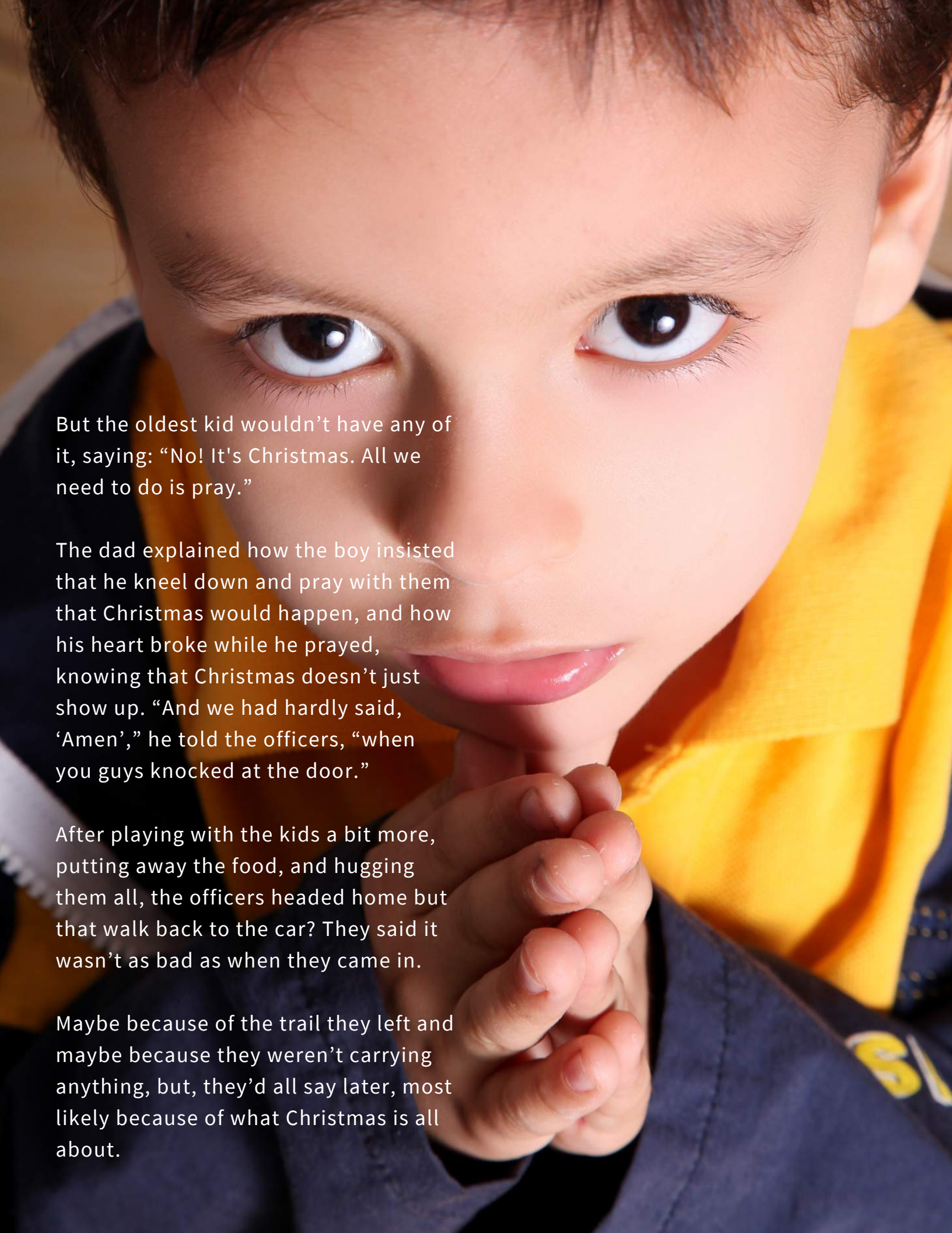
But every time those thoughts would enter their heads, something else would always keep them moving; sometimes the thought of their own kids, sometimes the other person encouraging them onward, sometimes they didn't know what. Maybe God, they'd later wonder. So they kept going, powered by whatever it was that was moving in the wind that night, and finally they found the house.



As they finally approached the front door they could hear small voices inside and they knocked. The voices stopped and they waited in silence for a bit until the door was slowly opened by three young kids. You can imagine the family's surprise to see, on Christmas Eve, these policemen at their door but once they saw all the gifts and food and heard the reason for their visit, their expressions went from surprise to amazement and then to joy.

"See, Dad!" the oldest kid cried out as they opened the gifts, "Santa did find a way to come!"

The dad, inviting the Mounties back into the kitchen as the kids opened their gifts, fought back tears and hugged them, saying: "Wow. You guys aren't going to believe this, but you're an answer to our prayers." The father told them how he had just finished explaining to the kids that because of all the snow on the trees and ground Santa wouldn't be able to find the house and there wouldn't be a Christmas Dinner either.



But the oldest kid wouldn't have any of it, saying: "No! It's Christmas. All we need to do is pray."

The dad explained how the boy insisted that he kneel down and pray with them that Christmas would happen, and how his heart broke while he prayed, knowing that Christmas doesn't just show up. "And we had hardly said, 'Amen'," he told the officers, "when you guys knocked at the door."

After playing with the kids a bit more, putting away the food, and hugging them all, the officers headed home but that walk back to the car? They said it wasn't as bad as when they came in.

Maybe because of the trail they left and maybe because they weren't carrying anything, but, they'd all say later, most likely because of what Christmas is all about.

A CHRISTMAS SERMON

REV. NICK COATES

So the other week I was hanging out with some friends and we ended up having this impromptu contest about who received the strangest present for Christmas, the kind of present that made us go, “What am I supposed to do with this?!”

Anyone know those kinds of presents?

One of my friends, a life-long vegetarian, got an Alberta beef cookbook.

Another was given the boxed set of the Fifty Shades of Grey series.

And another, and I'm pretty sure they won, received a children's car seat . . . despite the fact they don't have kids.

**And get this,
and this is the best part,
every. single. one.,
literally every single one of the presents we named had been given to us by our
parents.**

Now, I don't know why that is.

Maybe it's just a universal truth that parents are bad at gift-giving, or maybe it's something parents all do to mess with their kids – like it's this game of torment that each generation passes down . . . who knows.

When I was growing up my parents had this really bad habit of buying us clothes for Christmas.

Like, the worst clothes.

And I'm not just talking socks or even off-brand clothes; it was worse than that.

I'm talking about the kind of clothes you'd get at an airport gift shop.

Like a shirt that had “Down Under in Australia” embroidered across the front.

That is an actual-real-life example of something I opened Christmas morning.

Anyone know these kinds of presents?

**Yah, we all have those stories of opening something up that makes us say:
“What am I supposed to do with this?!”**

I think Christmas can be a lot like those presents.

I mean, what do we do with it?

And I don't just mean all the incessant Michael Buble,
the lights and decorations,
and the forced socialization and consumerism . . .

I mean all *this* stuff:
all the churchy stuff.

Especially the story we heard earlier:

**that ancient and sacred story about a pregnant virgin,
wise people following a star,
shepherds, angels, and an evil king,
and Jesus being born.**

I mean . . . really?

A virgin?

Angels?

A star that doesn't move with the rotation of the earth?!

Really?!

I mean, what are we supposed to do with that!?!

Anyone ever ask that before?

Me too.

And while I'm sure we do ask that because the story is just so out there and surreal,
deep down,
what I think we're really asking is:

**Is this just a nostalgic kids' story . . . some seasonal decoration we put up once a
year,**

or

is there something more to it?

Does it actually have a reverence and a weight to it?

Does it actually have something real and meaningful to say to all of us today?

Are ya with me?

In Ireland during the late 20th century there was a period of violence and instability called "The Troubles."

During this period, the IRA had this thing they would do where they would go put a bomb somewhere

and then call the place up and say:

"We've planted a bomb in your building, you've got ten minutes to get out!"

It was a way of causing terror without actually hurting anyone.

One of my favourite teachers,

Peter Rollins,

talks about how during this time there was this parable floating around about a guy in the IRA named Shamus.

And the parable tells how one day Shamus dies and he goes to Heaven.

It's all bright and beautiful,

and he's there waiting at the Pearly White Gates reading a magazine when St. Peter shows up.

And Peter has this big dusty book that he opens up and begins to look through for a bit,

and then he looks at Shamus, saying:

"Hey, your name isn't in the book.

I mean, you were in the IRA man, you're not gonna be able to get in."

And Shamus replies:

"Oh no, you misunderstand.

I'm not here to get in.

I'm here to say you've got ten minutes to get out."

I like that story because I think it helps point to what Christmas is ultimately about; it can help us answer that question of 'what are we supposed to do with this?!'

Cause the thing is,

everything else going on,

sometimes Christmas does come across as being just about Jesus' birthday,

or this nostalgic kid's story – this play we put our kids in that make us think everyone in the first century shopped at Bed Bath & Beyond;

this thing that really has no lasting impact on how we see ourselves, each other, and the world around us.

But what I love about that Shamus story is that it can help us move beyond all that, to see something bigger, something that transcends and includes that, something that has a weight and reverence, something that can totally transform how we understand ourselves, each other, and the world around us.

**Cause if Christmas is about anything,
it's about the belief,
this sacred idea,
that God,
that Something Bigger Than Ourselves,
that Source of our Life and Ground of our Being,
that Spirit and Mystery Underneath it All,
isn't up there,
but,
in the most real and intimate of ways,
is here.**

It's about how God got out.

It's about how,
out of pure and endless love,
God has entered into our lives and our world,
into our earth and our humanity,
right into the very mess of it all,

and reclaimed it Her own,
renaming it as good and holy,
repairing and restoring everything back to the way it was always meant to be.

If all this is about anything,

**it's not about the music,
it's not about the decorations and lights,
it's not even about Jesus' birth,
it's about everything that Jesus represents:**

It's about a liberating new way of seeing ourselves, each other, and the world around us.

It's about the radical idea that our church steeples shouldn't be pointing up to the heavens,
but should be bent down towards the earth,
because it's here,
it's here we can find God at work,
reordering everything until our world is one where everyone has enough and everyone has a place,
renaming everything and everyone that's ever been called 'good for nothing,' 'unwanted' and 'crap' as 'beautiful, needed, and good,'
and repairing everything with extravagant and indiscriminate love.

So if Christmas is about that . . .
if *that's* what this story is trying to tell us,
what do we do with it?

We do the only thing we can:

We say 'yes.'

Cause that's the thing about Christmas.

It's not simply a celebration of something that's happened,
it's a celebration of something that's happening,
it's a celebration of truth and a reality that love is here.

And because Christmas is that,
it's also an invitation ...

it's the invitation to do something pretty bold and badass:

**It's the invitation to embrace the light that's shining,
to say 'yes' to what God is doing in this world,
and let it change how we see ourselves, each other, and the world around us,
showing us a new way to be human and alive in the world,
a way where everything and everyone is seen as holy,
where we do what we can to defy and resist darkness and division,
and create a world that hums with reverence,
the kind of world where anyone and everyone is welcome, wanted, and accepted.**

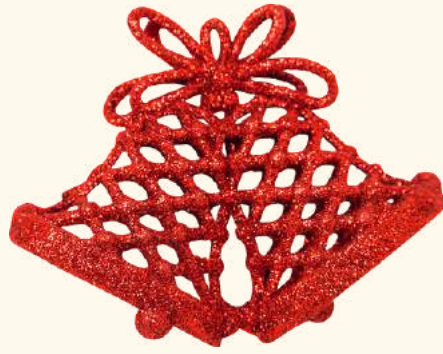
That's what we do with Christmas.

That's what this is all about.

So if I can encourage us to do anything tonight . . .

it'd be for us all to feel the weight and reverence of Christmas,
and to trust that God,
that Spirit and Divine Mystery,
isn't up there, far away, distant, and detached,
but is here,
with us and for us,
and to let that change *everything*.





CHRISTMAS BLESSING

BY JOYCE RUPP

May you give and receive love generously.
May this love echo in your heart like
the joy of church bells on a clear December day.

May each person who comes into your life
be greeted as another Christ.

May the honour given the Babe of Bethlehem
be that which you extend to every guest who enters your presence.

May the hope of this sacred season settle in your soul.
May it be a foundation of courage for you
when times of distress occupy your inner land.

May the wonder and awe that fills the eyes of children
be awakened within you.

May it lead you to renewed awareness and appreciation
of whatever you too easily take for granted.

May the bonds of love for one another be strengthened
as you gather around the table of festivity and nourishment.

May you keep your eye on the Star within you and trust
this Luminescent Presence to guide and direct you each day.

May you go often to the Bethlehem of your heart
and visit the One who offers you peace.

May you bring this peace into our world.

A PRAYER TO BE FREE FROM TIZZIES

BY JOYCE RUPP

Dear God,
you who did not invent tizzies,
be with me when I get caught
in the wild worrying of my mind,
and the needless scurrying around
in my fearful heart.

Trip me up when I fret and stew
so I can see the trap of tizzies,
with their schemes to keep me
bunched up in stress and strain.

Let me fall headfirst into the truth
of your never-ending presence,
wrap your kind arms around me
and calm my doubts and fears.

Shout loudly in my spiritual ear
when my nerves get knotted,
my mind feels cramped,
and my stomach screams.

It may be difficult,
but do try to get my full attention,
because tizzies are not healthy,
and they definitely chase peace
out the front door of my heart.

Dear God, you did not invent tizzies,
I did,
and only I can send them on their way,
and I will,
if you strengthen me
to let go of my anxious hold
on what is nonessential.

A tizzy is a "state of frenzied excitement or distraction, especially over some trivial matter" (Webster's New Unabridged Dictionary). Submitted by Jackie Walters.



WALKING WITH GRIEF

In the Waves

There will be more
swells of grief that tug
me into their gray embrace,
and swirls of lament,
and great rollers of loss,
and rising waves of ache.

But for now,
the morning sun
slips low through the window
in a major key
and the cat finds a home
in my lap and purrs
and the tea in my cup
is warm and full of bright notes
and I'm here, in this
peace, in this sunlit
octave, I'm here.

- Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer



When I am an old woman I shall wear purple

With a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me.
And I shall spend my pension on brandy and summer gloves
And satin sandals, and say we've no money for butter.
I shall sit down on the pavement when I'm tired
And gobble up samples in shops and press alarm bells
And run my stick along the public railings
And make up for the sobriety of my youth.
I shall go out in my slippers in the rain
And pick the flowers in other people's gardens
And learn to spit.

You can wear terrible shirts and grow more fat
And eat three pounds of sausages at a go
Or only bread and pickle for a week

And hoard pens and pencils and beer mats and things in boxes.
But now we must have clothes that keep us dry
And pay our rent and not swear in the street
And set a good example for the children.
We must have friends to dinner and read the papers.
But maybe I ought to practise a little now?
So people who know me are not too shocked and surprised
When suddenly I am old, and start to wear purple.

© Jenny Joseph, *SELECTED POEMS*, Bloodaxe 1992.

A 1996 BBC survey identified this as the UK's most popular post-war poem, beating Dylan Thomas's "Do Not Go Gentle Into that Good Night." It's called "Warning" and was written by Jenny Joseph (1932-2018). She composed "Warning" at age 29 and continued writing throughout her adult life. But this one poem has defined her, despite a large and rich body of work. It has inspired thousands of women to wear purple—but she hated the color herself. Submitted by Anne Welsh Baskett.



A Note from the Care Cooking Team:

We are trying something new (again)!

For those who receive our monthly meal packages you will have already noticed a change.

We needed to change from using donated margarine & / or yogurt containers & decided to purchase (recyclable) plastic dishes with lids for our Care meals. At that time we sent out a challenge to see what people could do with their emptied food containers, & we received some great suggestions.

But, we thought we should do more to help reduce our recycling, to better help look after our environment . After some research & talking to some people who already use the method, we decided to try a Sous Vide style of packaging / cooking for some of our meals.

Our Sous Vide style for Cooking -

- * *Meals are lovingly prepared & fully cooked at the church.*
- * *They are then sealed in vacuum bags & frozen.*
- * *The food can be cooked by placing the bag in a large pot of water until it thaws & is hot.*
- * *Food prepared & cooked this way is great for Consistency & Taste*
 - *it heats in its juice or gravy & stays moist & tender.*
- * *Food packaged using this method -*
 - *creates less waste - less costly plastic containers to clean & recycle*
 - *is convenient to make in large batches to freeze*
 - *is easy to heat - no dried out edges - doesn't need attention & can't be overcooked*



Another option — the bags of food can be thawed & cooked as usual.

We hope that everyone is enjoying their new “Meal Bags”. (Our new bags are saving money & reducing our recycling.)



*Hospitality
Care Cooking Team*

More busy helpers



Gravy's ready



Adding labels - carrot soup



Stirring Soup

Sous Vide Assembly Line



Washing up again



Christmas Dinner

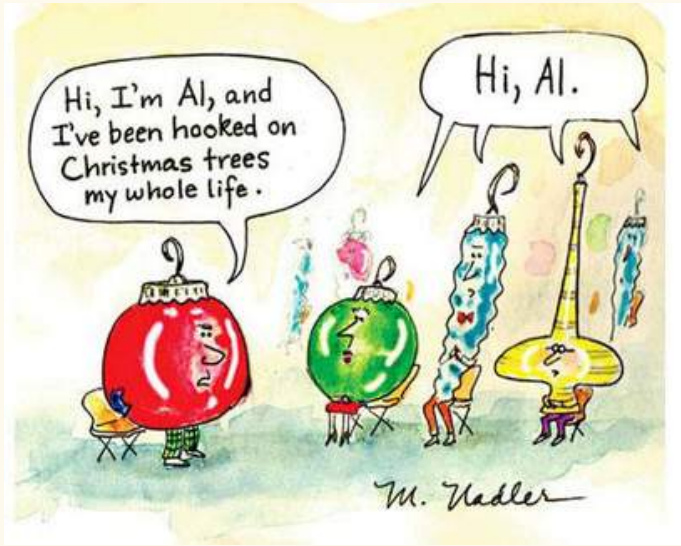


Containers for Leftovers

Busy "Elves" getting ready for Christmas



YOUR SMILE FOR THE DAY



GREETINGS FROM SISTER FRIENDS



The women of RDLUC have been meeting monthly on Zoom and plan to continue meeting in the New Year. They warmly invite you to join them!

We are grateful to Joyce Conley who has created 100 butterflies for gifting with our Christmas cookies. Joyce and her team continually create prayer shawls and baby quilts, which are very much appreciated.



Do you have a story to share?
A memory? A poem? A photograph?
We would love to publish it in the next issue of this magazine.
Please send your submission to info@reddeerlakeuc.com or call us at
(403) 256-3181.

**The next submission deadline is January 15, 2022.
This will be our Lent issue.**

WE ARE RED DEER LAKE UNITED CHURCH



We are an inclusive and affirming community of faith – people of all ages, perspectives, and stories, who gather to connect with God, each other, and ourselves, and find in Jesus a new way of being human and alive in the world.

**you're welcome, wanted,
and accepted. join us on
the journey.**


Red Deer Lake United Church


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CHURCH OFFICE HOURS:

Monday - Thursday

9am - 3pm

*The church office will be closed from
December 23 to January 3.*

Front Cover Photo:

Katherine Matiko



*Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace, good will toward men.*

artwork by Larry Stilwell