



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP OF NIAGARA

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

The Feast of the Epiphany
January 6, 2022

TO THE PEOPLE OF THE DIOCESE OF NIAGARA

*They set out; and there, ahead of them,
went the star that they had seen at its rising,
until it stopped over the place where the child was.*
- The Gospel of St. Matthew 2:9

Dear friends:

In this sacred season of Epiphany, I find myself in a particular attitude of prayer: one that is a combination of Christological time and contemporary concern. Prayer, not as an act of desperation – although the tenor of these times might reasonably lead us in that direction – but as an attitude of deeply receptive listening.

This is an attitude that I imagine is similar to that held by the Magi. Their times were eerily similar to our own: they laboured under uncertainty about the future; listening for God's action in their world.

["The Journey of the Magi"](#) is a wonderful poem by T.S. Eliot to read this time of year. It is full of the otherness of the Magi who seek for God's truth and find it. In its concluding lines, one of the Magi, says "but set down this, set down this." These are words that announce a particular truth he's seen and heard in Jesus' birth. The truth is that they find that the birth they have observed discomfits them. It is more like a death than a birth.

Now that is a theological truth; one that we know well, because Jesus' birth changes everything. For the Magi, it signifies the death of their present reality but the birth of something new and as yet, unformed – a kingdom that is to come. And so, they return to their kingdoms, changed by what they've experienced: "no longer at ease, in the old dispensation" but yearning toward the change this birth - that feels like a death - promises. And the writer, concludes that he would "be glad of another death."

These are themes that reflecting on the season of Epiphany and the pandemic *together* surface for us: death and life.

What I want to hold up for us all in this time that feels so discouraging; in this season when we are feeling like all the old things that we thought we could count on have shifted, is our need to lay hold of the generous hope within our scriptures – the stories of God's promises to us - to sustain us and prepare us for the future.

And that hope is this: when things seem at their darkest, God is at work.
When things seem at their most confusing or discouraging, God is at work.
When the old ways seem to have lost some of their meaning, God is at work.

God is at work among us, revealing the light which will guide the Way. And we, as a people who search for truth and follow the light of Christ, and who are uncomfortable right now, must listen for where God is at work and leading us into the new dispensation that waits for us on the other side of this pandemic.

We are a death and Resurrection people. And quietly, we can say that there's a new mission emerging out of the old; and that we, like the Magi, are to listen for what that will be in our parishes and our diocese. We listen with hope, not with despair; with *expectation* that God is alive and revealing the light among us and with the knowledge that all will be well, all manner of things will be well.

So don't be afraid. Truly. Do not be afraid, though the darkness surrounds us. But as St. Paul encourages us in his letter to the Romans, in all things, let us "rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer." Let us continue to be the light, to be the face and hands of Christ by generously offering care, kindness, and hospitality to saints and strangers alike, and especially those who are lonely and isolated.

These are the ways that we meet this extraordinary time – called to life and compelled to love as we are – with hope in our hearts and the expectation of God's action among us.

May the peace of Christ be with you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Susan Niagara". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

The Right Reverend Susan J.A. Bell
Bishop of Niagara