



*a Faith Community in the
Anglican Church of Canada*

228 Pearl Street
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Dear Gathering Table Friends:

As we make our way to the Feast of the Nativity and the start of the 12 days of Christmas, I thought I would send a brief holiday greeting – remembering that the origin of ‘holiday’ is ‘holy day’. For many people, of course, Christmas has become more of a hassle and, before it’s even arrived. I frequently hear that people can’t wait for it to be over and life can get back to ‘normal’.

While I understand this state of affairs, I find it interesting that people experience this ‘holy season’ of Christmas as wearying and troubling but not necessarily for the reason it is really troubling. I must confess that I am a Christmas aficionado: I love the traditions and nostalgia and music. Nevertheless, a friend here in Gathering Table has said something that has also made me think in another way. He asks: ‘If we really think about it biblically and theologically, shouldn’t Christmas be the **least** traditional holiday?’

After all, in the birth of Jesus as Messiah (Christ) and Emmanuel (the sign of God being with us), didn’t God do something totally unexpected – totally new? I don’t see how we could say anything but ‘yes’ to this question. We know that historically there were lots of theories and expectations among the people, but whether people were expecting the Messiah or not, what God did in Jesus was most definitely not what they were expecting.

I can’t help but think of the reaction of the shepherds in one of the stories. Having heard the angels sing their announcement of ‘good news’, they say to one another: ‘Let’s go see this thing that God has done.’ They might well have said ‘this **new** thing – this **most unexpected** thing - that God has done’. This leads me back time and time again to the lyrics of what is perhaps my all-time favourite Christmas Song, Bruce Cockburn’s ‘Cry of a Tiny Baby’: *‘Like a stone on the surface of a still river/Driving the ripples on forever/Redemption rips through the surface of time/In the cry of a tiny babe.’*

In a way, this shouldn’t surprise us. A thread of this runs through all of our scriptures, Hebrew and Christian. God is doing a new thing. There is a new song to be sung. We anticipate a new creation – a new heaven, a new earth and a new Jerusalem. Whenever people have thought they had God figured out, God does something different and unexpected.

God still does. When we imagine we know the answer to **WWJD?**, God surprises us, doing something new or doing something old in a new way. Even beyond the surprise of children unwrapping gifts under decorated trees, God surprises the children of God with good gifts, beginning with the gift of the Word made flesh in Jesus through whom, the Gospel says, ‘all things were made’.

Already, in our life together as 'a Community of Faith in the Anglican Church of Canada', Gathering Table has faced many changes, many long hours of hard work, occasions of joy and celebration, of tears and mourning, of worship and prayer, of fellowship and play, and of mission and ministry. There have been more than a few surprises along the way.

I believe it's not too much to imagine that now, in the seventh month, as we celebrate this holy season, God's message to us includes the announcement that there are surprises yet to come. What else should we expect from a living God who truly is Emmanuel – God-with-us? And we can hear again the promise that, if God be with us, the Gates of Hell itself cannot prevail!

Happy Christmas and Godspeed.

George+