



AND THE

*Word*  
BECAME FLESH  
AND  
*dwelt*  
*among us...*

JOHN 1:14

*“How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given.”*

*Christmas 2016 at the Church of the Ascension*

**December 24<sup>th</sup> Christmas Eve service times:**

*Family service at 4pm with Holy Eucharist*

*8pm Holy Eucharist.*

**December 25<sup>th</sup> Christmas Day service at 11am.**

**January 1<sup>st</sup> New Year's Day service at 11am.**

**All Welcome! Come and greet the New Born King.**

Dear friends in Christ,

Gifts, given and received are at the very heart of Christmas. Whether they are store bought or hand made, wrapped in paper and sealed with bows, or wrapped in love and sealed with kisses, much of the joy of giving and receiving is how it makes us feel inside.

Part of the fun of anticipating Christmas is the choosing and selecting of gifts, the wrapping of them and then placing them under the tree for the time when they will be unwrapped. I remember when our children were small how they used to return to the Christmas tree over , and over again to feel the gift to see if they could guess what was inside it.

Each gift is wrapped in a unique way, depending on who it's for or who its from. When the moment of gift opening arrives there are some presents that beg to be torn into right away, but others that are opened slowly and with great care. You don't want to tear or wrinkle the paper any more than necessary. Once opened, you carefully take the gift out of the box, admire it, and when you are ready hold it up for everyone to see.

Have you ever received a gift that was something you've wanted your whole life? When you receive such a gift you just want to hug it and hold it in your lap. Perhaps there was a gift that you received which came as a complete surprise. But it turned out to be the most wonderful, most beautiful gift you've ever received. You don't know it yet, but it'll be one that you cherish all of your life. And the feeling you have now is one you'll want to pass on and share with everyone you know and love.

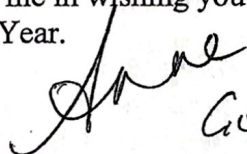
That's what happened, that first Christmas morning. The most wonderful Gift of all, the Gift of Gifts, Jesus, was born and wrapped in swaddling clothes. And with Him came an abundance of gifts for all humankind – gifts of faith, peace, love and hope. Gifts of mercy and compassion and forgiveness. Gifts of healing and wholeness. Gifts of joy and laughter and friendship. These are the gifts that Emmanuel, *God-is-with-us* brought to us that first Christmas.

God intended us to share those gifts with others. Not to hoard them or keep them to ourselves; but to give them away freely. None of these gifts come wrapped in paper or tied with a bow. They are mostly given in kind words, thoughtful deeds, and generous acts. Often they are given so quietly that no one even notices. This, we are reminded, in the well loved hymn "Oh Little Town of Bethlehem" is how Jesus came – *'How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given. God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven.'*

My hope for each one of you this Christmas is that you will receive this amazing Gift and that when you gaze at it and hold it in your hand you will know that this is the best, and the only gift you've ever wanted or needed. And then, I pray that you will take the Gift and give it away to someone else so that they may be blessed.

This will be my final Christmas greeting as your rector. Next year I will take up a new office as the Bishop of Algoma. You are all invited to join me for the Ordination on February 11<sup>th</sup> at 9:30am at St. Luke's Cathedral in Sault Ste. Marie. Words cannot begin to express the love and joy that I have experienced these last sixteen years as we have ministered together at the Church of the Ascension and beyond. My wish for you this Christmas and in the coming years is that your lives in Christ will continue to shine as radiantly as the Star that announced the Christ Child's coming. And that the love of Christ that has been given to you will continue to be given to others.

Colin, Caitlin and Richard join me in wishing you every blessing of love, peace, hope and joy this Christmas and in the New Year.

 God Bless!

**In addition to your regular givings, there is an envelope in this letter for a Christmas offering which will be used for Outreach in the parish in 2017. Thank you for your generosity and concern for the needs of others.**

**If you wish to place flowers in the church at Christmas as a thank offering or memorial, please call Anne Trimmer (705.566.8127) by December 19<sup>th</sup>**