

The Parish Light

Trinity of Parishes – Parishes of Athabasca, Lac La Biche and Northern Lights

January 2021



So much has been said and written about the difficulties that have been part of 2020. As we now stand on the brink of 2021, there is every reason to be enthusiastic about this new year that lies before us.

I was reading some material from one of my favorite authors, J. Lee Grady. He was commenting on what we know for sure about 2021. Here is what he shared:

1. ***We have a powerful Savior.*** Christmas is Christmas, whether we have big dinners together or celebrate alone. God became flesh and dwelt among us. Rejoice in the fact that Jesus came to earth and that He has saved you from sin and death.
2. ***His blessings are overflowing.*** Psalm 103.2 says, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.” Have you thanked Him this year for health, protection, financial provision and all the other ways He was cared for you?
3. ***The church has thrived in a challenging season.*** In spite of cancelled services and empty church buildings, we’ve learned to use technology in 2020 so that our outreach extends farther than ever. We would never have learned these new methods of ministry if the pandemic hadn’t forced us to change.
4. ***God’s people are praying in unprecedented ways.*** The challenges of 2020 drew many Christians into their prayer closets. We went deeper in intimacy with God. Prayer is arising like floodwaters all over the world, preparing us for a great spiritual awakening.
5. ***The Holy Spirit is still moving.*** God’s Spirit has not been social distancing during this pandemic. He has been drawing people to faith in Christ during these dark times. In 2020, I led an immigrant to Jesus, and he is now sharing his faith with his friends in India.
6. ***His light shines in the darkness.*** Relationships were severed this year because of strife; even families have been divided. Yet we know that when the darkness gets darker, God’s light shines brighter. We can rejoice that in the midst of chaos, confusion and moral depravity, the message of the gospel will become even clearer in contrast.

2020 wasn’t easy, but we will find many sweet surprises in this bitter year if we learn to rejoice in every situation.

..... Paul Barnes, Madison Christian Church, Ohio



TIMELESS TREASURES

A winter's portrait, so bountiful, Nature's gift indeed...

Though lurking are the lifeless flowers returned to earth as seed.

All sacred gifts sent unto us are made by God's own hands -

And always, they are precious ones to love just as He plans!

While lilies in the valley rest, and clad are crystal trees...

A lifeless day revives the soul through snowflakes on a breeze.

These heavenly troves to come our way, so beautiful, big or small...

Will touch our lives through each new day - God's gifts... they're best of all!

Dianne Cogar

Stop looking for a perfect church.

It does not exist.

Join an imperfect church and serve

In every way you can make it

Nearer perfection

A Message from Bishop Larry Robertson

Life can not be said to be monotonous with the same thing over and over and nothing ever changes.

Definitely not in the year 2020. We began the year with 3 separate parishes working in isolation and we are ending the year a Trinity of Parishes working together under the same leadership. We began the year realizing that none of us would be able to afford our own ministers and not sure what we would do when what little money we had runs out. We began the year wondering how we would survive and figuring nothing could get worse. Then Covid19 came along and guess what - things got worse. Well, at least 2020 was not boring - depressing maybe, but not boring!

We can see 2020 in this way and we would not be alone. Most of the world looks at 2020 as depressing, disastrous, deadly and frightening.

Or we can choose to look at 2020 through different eyes, the eyes of faith. Although God did not cause these disasters, he also did not abandon us to them. Although at times, it seems that we are alone and that Covid19 seems to constantly bring us down, we know that God walks with us through these trying times and that we are never alone.

We can choose to believe that though problems still exist, God who loves us will not only just hold us up, but will use the circumstances around us to make us stronger. We can despair that we are so weak that we have to join others to survive, or we can realize that together we are stronger, together we have more resources, together we can serve God and each other better. Together we can and will be better able to share God's amazing love to the world around us.

I choose to see 2020 through the eyes of faith. At the beginning of this year I was planning of spending at least 6 months in Belize starting in September. I chose to believe that God has better things for me to do right here for the next 2 years. It is a matter of how you choose to see 2020. Through the eyes of the world or through the eyes of faith.

November has brought with it high Covid19 numbers. I am proud of our Bishop, that after listening to the clergy and seeking advice of learned people, he made the hard and unpopular choice to suspend in person meetings. I am proud of our Bishop who put the health and care of the people of this diocese first, even though other denominations have not followed suit.

If I were to ask who preferred being together as a tri-parish over being on our own, I think that I would get no takers and I would have to duck the shoes that were hurled at me for asking such a stupid question. But I will say that because of the closure of in-person meetings this group has been forced to work together. I have watched people begin to cooperate and seen the advantage of what the two groups might do for God's work together. This relationship has only just begun. I believe that if we choose to see through the eyes of faith we can begin to tear down walls that the past has built. I believe together we can overcome the financial issues that seem to plague us and that Covid19 has aggravated.

Was it a rough year? Undoubtedly! But I choose to look beyond the problems and look to what God can do with us if we surrender ourselves to His will. I choose to see 2020 through the eyes of faith and give thanks that He has shown us, and will continue to show us, a way to overcome the world together. Each of us will have to choose how we see 2020 and the future.



As we mark the end of the 2020, it marvels me of all the things we have experienced in the past year. I normally enjoy looking back and see all the changes whether they be good or bad: Who got married, who had babies, who stuck to their diets, who changed careers, etc...? I remember recalling at the beginning of 2020 this feeling that this year was going to be a year of changes. Never could I have imagined the understatement of those words/feelings. I recall feeling this urge to start sifting through my belonging and creating three piles. The items I wanted to keep, the items that were to be given away (because I never sell anything), and items that were for the trash. I knew a change was coming but what it exactly looked like was hidden from my sight. By the time we arrived at the month of March, I really began to wonder if I was simply conjuring up my imagination of change. COVID-19 came in and changed the landscape of everything we did. I could never imagine that we would not be allowed to go to church; not allowed to have services, not allowed to share a meal together, not to give someone a hug, or sit with a friend as they grieved the loss of a love one. Never mind moving to a new community and beginning a new chapter in ministry. Nope, not Me!!! Oh my, that was a lot of negative words strung together.

On a positive note, we as a human species have learned how to adapt to our new reality rather quickly. If we wanted to carry on being the body of Christ in a dark world, we needed to put aside our bewilderment and find a new way forward. And oh, how we did! This has always been the way of God's people. Zoom and Facebook media streaming became our new way forward. Much to our dislikement, we are sometimes forced down a pathway of the unknown. Following in the footpath of Mary and Joseph who escaped with the Christ Child to save his life, or like the first disciples escaping with their lives after the Resurrection. They were forced to leave their comfort zone to find a place to worship Christ in freedom and peace. Ironically, the Gospel message went with them and so the gospel was spread wider and farther than anyone could hope for.

See, I passionately believe that we are creatures of habit. We typically do not want to be pushed out into the great unknown. We want to stay within the comforts of our own homes, families, communities, or churches and God knows that about us. To make His will known, God must allow us to become uncomfortable to get us right where we are supposed to be. Before I go any further, I am not saying that God gets a kick out of causing us stress, sickness, disease, or hardship. God loves us and only wants the best for us. However, He will take full advantage of all these things when they come. And I might add - what He leaves behind in the wake of these tragedies are the blessing of hope, faith, and love. Nothing, and I mean nothing is wasted with God. He will take every disaster that the world throws our way and bring forth life.

Even though this past year was riddled with sadness, pain, sickness, and/or loss there are still moments that we can be thankful for. I am thankful that God called me here to walk alongside you, to lead you, to encourage you, and to lift your heads up to see His glory. I am thankful that my family and friends are safe from the Covid virus and I will continue to pray that they remain so. I have been saying it right from the beginning of 2020 that God has something amazing in store for His church and we get to see what He is doing.

If I could sum up the year of 2020, I would have to say this is the year of irony! What was meant for evil God is bringing out the value of life. We are putting our family and friends above our own needs. When we see someone, we get excited. We are truly and earnestly praying for the safety and welfare of all people. We are being the Church! For all these things, I am Thankful.

So, what will this next New Year 2021 bring? Will we continue as much the same as last year? We will have to wait and see. I do hope and pray that the things we have learned will be carried forward and that the Church will rise and make a difference. We will have to come to the end of 2021 and look back much like we are now.

A special thank you from George and me for all the wonderful Christmas cards, gift cards and money. These gifts are much appreciated!

*Happy New Year
2021*

Associated Priest,

The Rev. Rose Howell

IF TODAY GETS DIFFICULT, REMEMBER...

the smell of coffee,

the way sunlight bounces off a window,

the sound of your favorite person's laugh,

the feeling when a song you love comes on,

the color of the sky at dusk,

and that we are here to take care of each other

..... Nance Hoffman

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## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETINGS**

**Parish of the Northern Lights: Feb. 10<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 pm via Zoom**

Deadline for all Parish AGM reports - January 30<sup>th</sup> – sent to Jan Overacker

**St Thomas, Perryvale: Jan. 11<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 pm via Zoom**

**St Andrew's Zion, Colinton: Jan. 17<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 pm via Zoom**

**Christ Church, Wandering River: Not set yet**

**St Paul's, Boyle: Not set yet**

**All Saints, Athabasca: January 12<sup>th</sup> via Zoom**

**St Andrews Living Waters, Lac La Biche – Not set yet**

*A Blessed and Happy New Year to you and your families ....Jan Overacker, publisher*