



THE CALL

ST. ANDREW'S
EPISCOPAL CHURCH
WELLESLEY, MASSACHUSETTS

NO. 389
WINTER 2021

The Unexpected Gift of Christmas



The Rev. Adrian Robbins-Cole

THERE IS NO DOUBT that the celebration of Christmas this year will be different from any we have experienced. Personally, I have always enjoyed the “outward” celebration of Christmas and have always looked forward to Christmas parties, getting together with family, seeing Christmas lights, and I don’t even mind the endless Christmas carols we hear when we enter any shop which drive other people crazy! I know many people find that the commercialization of Christmas takes away from the underlying spiritual message of Christmas. For me though, these outward expressions of Christmas celebration warm my heart and have been a complement to the underlying spiritual joy of the birth of Christ.

But this year it will be different. It is not that the commercial elements of Christmas will be absent—in fact they may become more pronounced, to cover the loss we will feel about the most important outward element of celebrating Christmas—that of being together.

That’s true whether being together means being at a Christmas party, at a Christmas carol service in church or being with loved ones around the Christmas tree.

However, paradoxically, as one of our bishops pointed out, this sense of loss might propel us to reflect more deeply about the Christmas story and its spiritual meaning to us. It is a reminder to us that the birth of Christ in Bethlehem did not take place in the most promising circumstances, but rather in times of tremendous challenge.

Mary and Joseph had been forced by the occupying Roman government to travel far from their home in Nazareth to Bethlehem to be counted in the imperial census. Mary was heavy with child, and the Christ child was born in a stable because there was no room for them in the inn. This was no accident in God’s design. Christ’s being born in these most unpromising of circumstances reminds us that God is with us in all the times

of our lives, including the most challenging, like the ones we are living in now.

Christ being born in the most unlikely of settings in a stable also reminds me that the greatest spiritual gifts from God can come to us in places and circumstances we do not expect. Of course, we do encounter God in some expected ways—in church, in music, in friendships, and in family. That said, down the ages, many people of faith have said that their most profound experiences of Christ have come in situations they have least expected and sometimes in seemingly unhelpful circumstances. I know that is true in my own life.

I have recently been reading the much-loved poem “The Four Quartets” by the Anglo-American Episcopalian poet T.S. Eliot. In this poem, mostly written during the challenging years of the second world war, Eliot, who can be rather gloomy at times, proposes that it is only when our

continued on the next page



In This Issue

The Unexpected Gift of Christmas

Rev. Adrian Robbins-Cole 1

Warden's Message: The Novel Christmas

Paige Manning 2

Claiming New Birth

Rev. Margaret K. Schwarzer 3

New Christmas Spirit: The Spirit of Collaboration

Rev. Maria (Mia) Kano 4

Reflections on the Advent and Christmas Season

Jenny Sawyer, Sheila Kelley,
Pat MacKinnon 5

Interview with Joanne Butler

Betsy Millane 6

The Unexpected Gift of Christmas *continued*

comforts are stripped away that we discover what ultimately brings us well-being in the changes and chances of this life, and that is our Savior Jesus Christ. He reminds us in the words of St. Julian of Norwich, that with Christ, "all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well."

This Christmas I invite you to reflect upon what unexpected gifts from God you may have encountered during this time. It is a tradition in our household at holiday meals to go around the table and ask each person what blessing they have received since we last saw them. This year, this question might have to be asked remotely as we gather over Zoom with our loved ones. Our family is going to

modify the question this year and pose the question as "a rose and a thorn." For those of you unfamiliar with this term, it means saying what has been one good thing and what has been one challenging thing. The unexpected gift may be that in reflecting on the "thorn" we are reminded of what is truly important in this Christmas season and where Christ may be waiting to meet us.

God bless you and your loved ones.

Yours in Christ,



Warden's Message The Novel Christmas



Paige Manning, warden

ENTERING THE SEASON of Advent, when so much in our world of 2020 feels changed and stressful, we can find solace in slowing down, embracing the unchanging and spiritually soothing aspects of this period: hope, anticipation, and celebration, both for the first coming of Christ two millennia ago, and for the second coming of Christ in the future.

This past year has been one of the most challenging in our memory. We pray for those who have

died, for those who suffer from the virus, for those who have lost family members, friends, and colleagues. We pray for all whose lives have been disrupted and challenged by illness, by job losses and slowdowns, by closed schools, and suspended plans of all sorts.

But our society and the church have weathered worse pandemics, worse civil discord, worse economic downturns over the millennia, with help from God's love and Christ's presence in our lives. With regards to the current pandemic, I have faith that, in time, this too shall pass—hopefully sooner rather than later, with the help of new treatments and vaccines, and old-technology standards of face masks, social distancing, and hand-washing. Society will return to normal, perhaps a little different and, hopefully, a lot better prepared for future outbreaks.

In the meantime, this Christmas season will differ in many ways from what we are used to. Last year at this time I wrote about



A publication of
St. Andrew's Episcopal Church

PARISH OFFICE: 79 Denton Road,
Wellesley, MA 02482-6404
781.235.7310 | FAX: 781.235.0067
standrewswellesley.org

PUBLISHER: Dan Dent
EDITOR: Katharine Clark,
Parish Administrator
kate@standrewswellesley.org

Christmas traditions and the joys of gathering together with friends and family. I wrote about the joy and beauty of St. Andrew's wonderful pageants, music, and Christmas Eve services. This year, due to restrictions on large gatherings and other constraints for social distancing, we will do our best to continue our celebrations remotely, through a mix of live virtual gatherings and recorded services on social media like Zoom and Facebook. Gatherings with family and friends outside of church will also be affected—smaller, more intimate gatherings with immediate family and our “pods” of closest friends will be this year's safer alternative to large parties and dinners.

Make the most of the opportunities to help make this novel Christmas season extra special! Although different in the details, these limitations on our celebrations need not dampen the joys and the peace that the Advent season brings to us. There is no social distancing between us and God, for He is always with us. Use the extra peace and quiet to connect, to contemplate the birth of Christ, and the promise of his return! Embrace the intimacy with your loved ones and enjoy the holiday time you spend together, with less noise and less hectic Christmas pressures. Make time for holiday phone calls and video chats with those you can't see in person. Take advantage of the

inspirational worship services and remote gatherings that our clergy team tirelessly puts together for Christmas (and every other week of the year)!

And, in this Advent season, let us focus on hope, including hope for control of the viral pandemic in the near future, for the restoration of our ability to work, travel, dine, and especially worship together again. And focus on anticipation—including the joys of getting together again in person and enjoying the fruits of the church renovations underway while we are closed for services.

Merry Christmas! God bless you, every one!

Claiming New Birth



The Rev. Margaret K. Schwarzer

EUGENE PETERSON, a Presbyterian minister, said, “The gospel is always about actual persons, actual pains, actual troubles, actual sin; you, me; who you are and what you've done; who I am and what I've done.” In Advent, we anticipate Christ's birth. We are waiting for holy life and new hope to come into the world. Advent is the season of expectant waiting as we prepare to celebrate the nativity of Jesus Christ. But Peterson is also right; the gospel passages that tell the ancient story of Jesus' birth also invite

us to think about the new life that is breaking open in us.

Where have you been growing in Christ this year? Where has new life been taking root in you? A funny spiritual truth in human life is that we often feel smallest when we have grown the most. We feel small because our awareness of the landscape that surrounds us has expanded. But the very fact that we recognize a larger landscape means that we ourselves have grown. This pandemic has demanded that all of us grow—both spiritually and pragmatically—in ways we would not have chosen for ourselves. We have taught ourselves detailed protocols on handwashing, mask-wearing, and social distancing. Most of us have had to hunker down and increase our technical know-how for Zoom, Facebook, YouTube, Dropbox, or Google Calendar. Acquiring those skills has been hard work.

Even more importantly, however, we have watched our soulful capacity grow:

- We have grown in grit; we have pressed on in the face of substantial adversity.

- We have expanded our own capacity for suffering, and so we have deepened our own capacity for compassion.
- We have become more aware of our own vulnerabilities and more alert to our world's fragile interdependence.
- We have chosen kind actions and moments of gratitude to sustain ourselves and build up the people around us.

Out of necessity, we have all cared and cried, worried and laughed, built-up and shared, and grown in Christ. As we have done these things, we have also moved a bit closer to the loving, unyielding mystery which is God Godself. As an ordained friend of mine likes to say, “God is making more of us.” I'm thankful for the moments of joy and laughter we have found this fall. I'm also thankful for the ways we have risen to the challenges set before us with grit and grace.

Glory to God, whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine; Glory to God from generation to generation. (BCP, p. 102)

New Christmas Spirit: The Spirit of Collaboration



The Rev. Maria (Mia) Kano

WHILE THE STRAIN of the pandemic-era work and ministry has certainly taken its toll, I have also noticed that the need to innovate and re-create church has birthed a new collaborative spirit in our diocese. Of course, the most obvious collaboration for St. Andrew's parishioners has been the beautiful partnership between St. Michael's and St. Andrew's. I had been lucky enough to work with St. Michael's youth minister and the church's teens throughout last year in preparation for our summer mission trip, but now our parishes' collaboration spans liturgy, preaching, and music. Working with Rev. Sarah Robbins-Cole has been an absolute joy. It feels like

a such privilege to learn from her gifts of ministry, leadership, and humor! It has also been delightful to get to know St. Michael's families, especially their courageous kids who have been reading for us at services.

This collaborative spirit has also been nourishing me behind the scenes. Since the very start of the pandemic, the churches in the Diocese of Massachusetts have pulled together to help one another. Clergy began meeting with diocesan leadership for guidance and advice. The children's ministry and youth ministry leaders across our diocese, both lay and ordained, began to meet every other week to share ideas and problem-solve together. There, I learned how many of us were facing similar challenges: Zoomed-out kids, stressed-out parents, and a complete restructuring of how we teach the faith.

Infused in each of those meetings is an overwhelming sense of gratitude, generosity, and the free sharing of ideas, encouragement, and advice. And from those meetings, I have begun working more closely with other youth ministers from around the diocese as we re-imagine what youth ministry and confirmation looks like on screens.

In the field of youth ministry itself, there is a new push in youth ministry to move away from competitive games to collaborative, team-building challenges, and puzzles. It is a deliberate attempt to set the youth group space apart from the rest of teenager's lives, which are filled with competition, points, grades, and rankings. Competition is an easy way to engage kids, pump up the energy level, and create a bond (at least with the others on your team!). But there are hidden costs to it as well: exclusion, resentment, and losing sight of simply enjoying being together. The harder, slower work of community building based on trust and mutual support is longer-lasting—and truer to the work of the church. Finding creative ways to have fun and bond without winners and losers is part of taking teenagers seriously as ministers in the church.

When Herod hears of the birth of a new king in fulfillment of the prophecies, he immediately slips into a competitive mindset. There can only be one king and this infant has come to take his place! He plots to kill the child, and when that fails, he murders all the male children under two for good measure.

Contrast this to the mysterious figures we often think of as the three kings. These powerful, wise men put aside their short-term goals of power and success to travel together to a far-off place. They choose to see the infant Jesus as a sign of promise, not a threat. And they offer what they have to the future king and new mother in need. This collaborative spirit of Christmas calls us to set aside our own familiar patterns of competition to give and give freely.

I wonder what aspects of your life are yearning for the collaborative spirit of Christmas. Where can you let go of competition and give into generosity, trust, and mutual support?



Photo: Sixth century mosaic of three magi, Ravenna, Italy

These kings put aside their short-term goals of power and success to seek Jesus.



Reflections on the Season

The following are reflections on the Advent and Christmas seasons from our fellow St. Andrew's parishioners, collected so that we can take a moment to reflect and be thankful for our church community and the faith that sustains us giving us strength.



Jenny Sawyer

AS AN OFFICE VOLUNTEER at St. Andrew's, I am witness to the enormous amount of work that goes into preparing for the Christmas season. The altar guild caring for the ceremonial objects used in worship, the flower guild beautifying the sanctuary, the church school committee organizing Cookies and Carols and the Little Angels' Gift Shop, the fellowship team getting people together for the gathering of the greens, and the outreach committee planning the Alternative Gifts Fair. So many joyous events and so many volunteers. I interrupt them constantly. I can't help it. I love seeing them all. It is my favorite part of the job.

Truth be told, I don't get much work done, especially around the holidays, but I do get something better, the opportunity to connect with the friends I have made at church. And when everyone's work is done, and my family and I attend the "standing room only" 5pm Christmas Eve service, I am overcome with emotion as we all take our turn at the communion rail. It's really something to behold.

We will all miss that this year, but I know that someday we will be back in our beloved church. Until then, I will light a candle on Christmas Eve, close my eyes, picture myself in the sanctuary, and sing "Silent Night", knowing that I am part of something bigger.



Sheila Kelley

I BELONGED TO ST. ANDREW'S as a child in the 1950s and now belong to a church in Athens, Georgia. The one good thing about this pandemic for me has been the chance to reconnect with St. Andrew's. The daily prayers from St. Andrew's and St. Michael's have been a great comfort for me in these seemingly unending pandemic months. You have given me a connection, albeit online, to a loving group of prayer warriors and clergy who have shared my prayer concerns and taught me so much as well. I always look forward to these times each day.



Pat MacKinnon

I AM THINKING ABOUT the lovely Christmas Eve services in the darkened sanctuary when everyone is holding a candle and singing "Silent Night" and we know that Jesus Christ is with us and loves us always.



Photo: Sandra Rigney

Interview with Joanne Butler



Betsy Millane

SAT DOWN with my voice recorder back in early March 2020, and asked our new financial administrator, Joanne Butler, a few questions. We had a great conversation, and I learned a quiet a few things. To start, here are a few fun facts about Joanne:

1. She's mad about jigsaw puzzles.
2. She met her husband Thomas in a pool hall.
3. Her father walked her down the aisle to the music of a kazoo.
4. She has a son named Sam who is 13 years old and is 6'1" tall.
5. Her husband works as a first responder and has been for over 15 years.

What does she do at St. Andrew's?

Joanne is the financial administrator. She keeps the financial records straight working with Adrian and the treasurer, Harry Condon, as well as occasionally consulting with Ruth Hubert, the former financial secretary.

Where did she get her training?

It would seem she picked it up as she went along. Joanne loved mathematics and thought engineering would be her thing, but decided early on at Worcester Polytechnic Institute that it was not. She left school and spent almost 20 years in Washington, D.C., moving up the administrative ladder from being a word processor to an office administrator. After Thomas returned from Iraq, they moved back to New England to be closer to family and in hopes of starting their own family. After the sale of the computer services firm where she worked, she had a fortuitous lay-off, giving her the freedom to stay home with Sam, then seven, while his father deployed again for a year. Returning to work, she went to the billing department of an engineering firm a mile from home. When the company's move to Westborough

coincided with severe family health issues (not hers), she knew her priority was to take care of her family, and so she left that employment.

Since 2007, Joanne has volunteered at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Natick, where she and her family are members. When her husband was deployed, she donated additional time there, taking over as treasurer and later running several stewardship campaigns. Joanne said, "I had time, so I thought, 'Yeah, I can take on a bunch of stuff. I'll be a Monday morning counter. I can do that. And we're going to clean the church for Easter. I'm there.' I was very plugged in to all the programming and work at the church."

Ready to return to the workforce, she shared her list of the five most important criteria for getting back to work.

1. What I'm doing; the day-to-day work.
2. Location, location, location.
3. How much I'm being paid.
4. Who I'm working for—are they doing what is right and good?
5. Work/life balance.

"Flexibility is very important, because I am in that sandwich generation. Between the parents and the kid and the husband's crazy hours, I have a lot to juggle. Being able to slot into work at off-hours is immensely beneficial both to me and for the job."

She thought it be ideal if she could get a church job "... because I know the church!" Joanne didn't have to wait long. "When I read the job description for this post at St. Andrew's on *Indeed.com*, I was like "... Boom! Financial administrator! Oh my God, this is my job." I talked with someone who was doing the initial screening on the phone and I was like, "Dude, this is me. I was born for this, this is what I do."

A Note from the Finance Office Regarding Year-end Pledge Payments

BECAUSE THE CHURCH OFFICES ARE STILL CLOSED, we will not be accepting in-person payments at year end. If you still have payments to make on your pledge, please make sure to mail it by **December 15** to account for possible holiday mail delays or pay online at <https://standrewswellesley.org/online-giving>. Online payments should be made by December 23 to allow time for bank and credit card processing. If you have any questions, please contact me. With my fervent thanks and best wishes for a joyful Christmas season.

—Joanne Butler, joanne@standrewswellesley.org

What do you think of the job, so far?

“I absolutely adore it. I do. There is a learning curve, but it’s easier for me because of my exposure at St. Paul’s. Knowing that there are different accounts for different things is very much a bookkeeper kind of thing. But knowing the inner workings of a church has helped me to get up to speed fast.”

What do you do for fun?

“I like going out for dinner. I like to go to church activities. We have a lot of social events at St Paul’s. Sometimes fun is as simple as going to a service, and then having breakfast with a friend. I love board games and jigsaw puzzles. My favorite thing—and this was going to be a retirement project, but I might need to kick it off a little bit sooner because my eyes are aging—is an 18,000-piece jigsaw puzzle that assembles to six feet by nine feet.” Her husband got it for her for Christmas one year.

How does you relax?

“For Christmas and Mother’s Day, I always say, ‘I want a jigsaw puzzle and the bandwidth to do it.’ So, a jigsaw puzzle in the box and a four-hour period where there’s nothing else on the agenda, is a wonderful gift for me.”

It is, for this interviewer, a wonderful thing to know that Joanne is upstairs, toiling with her financial puzzles for St. Andrew’s, and that she is pleased to be here among us. Although her door may be closed at times, she enjoys interacting



Photo: Joanne Butler

The Butler family: Thomas, Sam, and Joanne

with everyone who stops by and encourages each of us to pop our head in and say hello!

Update from Joanne seven months later. . .

“Well, who knew when I sat for this interview that less than ten days later I would be setting up a remote office for St. Andrew’s in my home, and would still be there! When I first arrived there was talk of social isolation because I was the only employee on the second floor. Now, I’m miles away from that second floor and everyone else who is working from their home. Hallway interactions have been replaced by Zoom and a bi-weekly visit from Steve Killeen with the

incoming mail; a shared lunch with Kate Clark is a thing of the distant past but we video chat on Microsoft Teams.”

“My feeling of connection and being part of such an incredible team have taken root and grown in our time apart. It has been amazing to see the clergy, who never trained for technical adeptness, stretch and grow into their new roles on the airwaves. And I am so lucky to still have Ruth on call to help guide me through my process questions and help me with the one-off oddities of things that happen in a church.”

“I feel really blessed to have found the answer to my employment prayers here at St. Andrew’s.”

St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church, Officers, and Staff

- Warden** David Hamlin wardens@standrewswellesley.org
- Warden** Paige Manning wardens@standrewswellesley.org
- Treasurer** Harry Condon treas@standrewswellesley.org
- Clerk** Joanna Horobin clerk@standrewswellesley.org
- Rector** Rev. Adrian Robbins-Cole adrian@standrewswellesley.org
- Associate Rector for Adult Formation and Membership**
Rev. Margaret Schwarzer margaret@standrewswellesley.org
- Assistant Rector for Youth and Family**
Rev. Maria (Mia) Kano mia@standrewswellesley.org

- Pastoral Associate** Rev. Karen Vickers Budney revkar7@comcast.net
- Parish Administrator** Katharine Clark kate@standrewswellesley.org
- Music Minister** Helen Ward Mannix wardie@standrewswellesley.org
- Financial Administrator** Joanne Butler joanne@standrewswellesley.org
- Christian Learning Coordinator**
Susan Jackson susan@standrewswellesley.org
- Director of Youth Choirs** Amanda Kern amanda@standrewswellesley.org
- Sexton** Stephen F. Killeen steve@standrewswellesley.org
- Assistant Sextons** William Clover and Matthew Killeen



ST. ANDREW'S
EPISCOPAL CHURCH

79 DENTON ROAD
WELLESLEY, MASSACHUSETTS 02482

Non Profit Org
U S POSTAGE
PAID
Boston MA
Permit No 54023

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



THE
CALL