

December 2026



As a little girl, I remember the excitement of Christmas Eve – knowing there were presents under the tree waiting for me to open in the morning. And, truthfully, I was never disappointed. The gifts were always wonderful. But, of course, the true Christmas gifts are not presents but presence. The presence of Jesus among us – incarnate, embodied, enfleshed. Emmanuel. God-With-Us. As we hear in the first chapter of John, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

Isn't it a mystery that Jesus took on skin and bone, hunger and weariness, laughter and tears – for us and for the world? Isn't it a wonder that Jesus, Word made Flesh, drew near enough for us to touch, to hold, to know – and for us to be touched, to be held, to be known? Isn't it a miracle that the One who breathed life into the universe became human and healed those others rejected, fed those others left hungry, and welcomed those others despised? Isn't it the most precious gift that, through Jesus, God gives God's very self to the world because God so loves the world?

At the heart of Christmas is the presence of Jesus.

Stop for a moment. Read that sentence again. And, if necessary, read it one more time.

I confess, I sometimes forget the mystery, the wonder, the miracle, the gift of Christmas. I get caught up in the lists, the things I think I should be doing, the tinsel-joy I'm supposed to be spreading, the responsibilities that seem to multiply, and the grief that somehow feels more acute this time of year. In the midst of Christmas, I forget the greatest present of all – the presence of Jesus.

Yet the gift, the presence, is still here. And, thankfully, even if we forget, even if we mess up, even if we are messy, it doesn't change this amazing truth. After all, we are promised that this gift is given freely. We receive this gift because God loved humanity enough to become human and to dwell with us – always – as forgetful or messy or messed up we might be.

And with this gift, we respond to God's calling – to live as Christ's body in the world. To live generously, to love our neighbors, to share what we have, to stand alongside those who are vulnerable, and to be present with those who need us. As we hear in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it."

As I travel throughout the synod, I am so grateful for God's presence amongst us. I see how you are embodying Christ's love in tangible, everyday ways: feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, laughing together, praying together, building together. Every day ministry is happening. Why? Because God chose human flesh as a dwelling place, and in response to this gift, you are the living body of Christ – making God's grace visible, touchable, and real.

I thank God that in the incarnation, God's love took on flesh. And I thank you, as the body of Christ, for how God has called you to make Christ's love visible in the world. May we rejoice and delight in the present of Christ's presence this Christmas … and always.

In Christ's Incarnate Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love,
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