

The Anglican Church of Canada



L'Église anglicane du Canada

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Christmas 2014

“The glory of the Lord shone round about them”

Luke 2:9

In Bethlehem there is a beautiful chapel known as The Church of The Shepherds Fields. Built in the round it is lovingly tended by Franciscan monks. In the midst is an altar given in 1954 by devote Canadian pilgrims with a heart for Bethlehem. Carved in the stone is a simple maple leaf. The chapel is surrounded by several magnificent murals. One portrays the angel of the Lord announcing the birth of Jesus to the shepherds, another their adoration of the Christ Child, and a third, their telling others of everything that had been told them concerning the Child.

Five years ago I sat in that chapel pondering the announcement of the birth of the Messiah to such lowly people as the shepherds were. Often looked upon by those in high places as poor and dirty, these were the ones to whom an angel's message came and a heavenly chorus sang. They were the first to know the glory of the Lord's birth shining round about them.

In all the ages since that holy night many have known that same glory and been drawn into its holiness and love – that love that flows from the heart of God, that love that goes to such a length as to take upon our flesh and lie in a manger. The incarnation is the supreme manifestation of the pure intent of God to love the world into redemption, to love the nations into reconciliation and lasting peace, and to love us all into lives that are good and holy.

In today's world many of us are able to celebrate this love of God in Christ openly because we have the freedom to worship and to bear a public witness to our faith.

Many others celebrate this faith in the face of oppression and at the risk of persecution. This year the world has witnessed horrific persecution of Christians in many places –

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churches torched, school girls kidnapped, people beheaded. Many including children have swelled the ranks of the martyr throng because they confessed the name of Jesus and would not recant. In our prayers this Christmas let us remember them as numbered among “the choirs of angels” and the “citizens of heaven above” who bid us with the shepherds to bend our joyful footsteps in making our way to the manger, there to kneel and adore the Christ Child.

My prayer this Christmas is simply this – that the glory of the Lord that shone round about them, might shine round about us. May it enlighten our hearts and brighten our homes. May it shine in the streets of our communities – be they large city centers or tiny rural places scattered across this land. May it illumine our neighbourhoods and shine among the nations. May this glory of God’s love in Christ renew our hope in the song of the angels.

“Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth good will among all.”

(Luke: 2:14)

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