

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Are you ready for Christmas?

Seasonal small talk. I was asked that yesterday waiting in a doctor's office. It's December 5, so NO! I am not ready for Christmas. There is not a single decoration up in our house, the tree is still packed away and not a single stocking is hung with care.

I also have not heard the words of the prophet, I have not heard the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, I have not heard the words of John, I have not heard the magnificat. I am not ready.

Are you ready for Christmas?

Sometimes it feels like we are sliding out of control into Christmas. The roads of Advent are icy, so grab hold of John's beard, and head for the sweet singing of Mary's magnificat. Trust that you will land at the stable, angels singing overhead and shepherds jostling you out of the way. This is not a silent night! But it's a good night. We are together as church, traveling this icy road together, trusting in the promise of hope, peace, joy and love. Trusting that at the end, the baby Jesus waits for us in the place where animals usually feed.

We are kind of an Advent church, aren't we? As a national community we are waiting for some new manifestation of church to arrive in our faith lives - some young, creative and hopeful church that doesn't recognize the pain and tethers of history. One who sees only the freedom and strength in that historical framework. It's true, we are awaiting a less expensive version compared to other years. We hope that she won't be tired and we hope she will still have all the gifts and parts that she needs to take root, to grow and share the good news of Christ's love with a hurting world.

Are we ready for this Christmas? I hope so!

Whatever that new baby looks like, whatever happens in our national conversations around remits and boundaries and church courts... whatever!! The church will still be here at Christmas and beyond, surrounding you with love and belonging even when you are feeling lost. Even when you are facing a first holiday without someone you love. Even if you are facing frightening medical appointments. Even if you suffer, tremble and weep. The baby Jesus will be born again into our lives, compelling us to love, challenging us to trust even through the chaos of life.

So my brothers and sisters in Christ, welcome to Advent, and I pray that your waiting is fruitful. I pray that you find quiet time each day to ponder this new arrival in your hearts and in our church. I pray that you come to understand the peace of Christ in profound ways as you journey toward Bethlehem yet again, whether the road is icy or comforting.

I wish you a merry Christmas.

Wanda Stride
President, Bay of Quinte Conference

