

Text of Christmas Message from Bishop Bird
December, 2010

Watch taped version: <http://www.youtube.com/NiagaraAnglican>

It is wonderful to be here at Canterbury Hills today, a place that is very special to us in the Diocese of Niagara. Over the years, I have spent a number happy hours at this beautiful retreat centre in the Dundas Valley, where we have come together for so many different events: youth retreats, parish picnics, children's camps and student conferences to name just a few. It seems to me that no matter what we come to Canterbury Hills for, it is always inevitable that a group of us will find ourselves here at this fireplace and it is often in this circle that some of the most important encounters take place ...as we sit around the fire and talk and listen and connect with each other. And, in my experience, it is in these kinds of gatherings that the presence of God is felt so very deeply in our midst.

In the coming days, people across the diocese will be gathering together, as we prepare for and come to rejoice in the great celebration of the birth of Christ at Christmas. We will do this in so many wonderful ways. In our churches we will listen to the voices of John the Baptist and the Old Testament prophets in the season of Advent, there will be Lessons and Carol services, children's pageants, concerts, special dinners and parties, and as the season unfolds we will be surrounded by the sights and the fragrances of candles, evergreens and beautiful decorations. We will, of course, also gather in our homes and in many other places for all the ways this Holy season brings families and friends and loved ones together.

And because of the poverty and the injustice that is at the centre of the Christmas story, many of us will find our way to places where we will gather with and reach out to those who are less fortunate than ourselves... to those, all around us, who live in the shadow of need and want.

As we celebrate the mystery of the Incarnation, God coming among us in human form, perhaps the most important and profound thing we can do is simply to be together; to gather around the table of the Lord and to share in these joyous, hope-filled, and peace-proclaiming events and activities. For it is in the sharing of this holy season that we truly experience the blessing of the Incarnation, we encounter once again the living presence of God in our midst and in each other.

Churches across the Diocese of Niagara are preparing to welcome all who come to their doors to for services of worship on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, and for all the many wonderful events leading up to these celebrations. We invite you to come and join with us as we explore the true meaning of this special time of the year and as we encounter once again the gift of divine love so dramatically displayed in the birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

May God bless the many ways that we will gather with each other this Christmas and on behalf of my colleagues at Cathedral Place I wish you all the blessings of the season and our very best wishes for a happy New Year.