



Hello, my name is Michael Bird and I have the privilege of serving you as the Bishop of Niagara.

It seems that winter has settled in for us in this part of our country. There's a dampness and chill in the air!

But we are also experiencing a winter of sorts in many aspects of our life together. I know that some of us are feeling the pain of an economic slowdown and that many others fear that that kind of pain may be a reality in the near future. There is no question that we in Canada are also experiencing a political storm which might also be considered the winter of politics. And sadly, Our Church has not been spared its own storms over the past year and it sometimes seems that there's uncertainty, worry and a lack of stability all around us.

I believe, however, that even in the face of such uncertainty this Holy season allows us the time to take a much needed step back.

Undoubtedly the people of Israel were feeling much of what we feel and more. In the midst of a society that was unstable and impoverished God chose to bring hope to the world through the gift of his Son. The world would never be the same. The child became a man and that man brought hope and a special kind of peace to anyone that crossed the path of his life. That man – Jesus, the Lord, the Son of God – continues to be incarnate among us.

Christmas reminds us that the child whose birth we celebrate had so many doors shut against him and we hear in the familiar Christmas story that there was no room for the Holy family in the inn. In my charge to synod last month I reminded us all that we need to push hard and push together to open the doors of our Church out onto the world and to make sure that doors are opened for people everywhere. Our celebration of Christmas reminds us that God will never abandon his people. It also challenges us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ and to offer that precious gift of hope to one another.

Let us give thanks to God for the wonderful gift of the birth of the Christ-child and for all the many ways we continue to experience that birth in our midst. Christ lives within us and asks us to continue to bring hope to the world. In our diocese, let's make this Christmas count – let's open the doors of our hearts, giving and receiving the great gift of love and hope that comes from the God who is, once again, born in us today.

Please accept my blessing and prayers during these holy days. My wife Susan and I and the entire staff of our diocese wish you a very happy and Christ-filled Christmas season.

+ Michael Bird

Bishop of Niagara

Christmas Message December 2008