

Dean's Letter, 24-25 December 2019

Dear Cathedral family, Brothers and Sisters in Christ

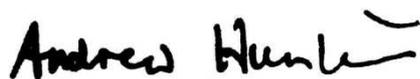
We extend a very warm welcome to all our visitors and all who have come to the Cathedral, or to Grahamstown (Makhanda) over the Christmas season. For many, this is an immensely happy time of gathering, spending time together, celebrating with family and friends. But for others, this is a tough, lonely time. Let's be aware of one another, of burdens being carried but not shared, of hidden pain and anxiety. Sometimes the "Christmas spirit" gets a bit much, in more ways than one, and this time of year can be one when there are arguments and conflict. Let's remember the reason for the season: the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; the coming of God into the world; the new possibilities and new life that God offers us.

Christmas is both wonderfully familiar and at the same time propels us into the unknown. So much of what we do at this time of year is predictable. A special meal with family and friends. Christmas presents (an ever-expanding list for the growing number of grandchildren). Christmas crackers. Tinsel and funny hats. Dreadful jokes and puns in the crackers. The annual Nativity play. The Christmas crib. Carols and the Christmas story. The baby in the manger, Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and the angels. We know it all so well. We control the narrative. We predict the outcome - or so we think.

But on another level Christmas and the birth of Christ propels us into the unknown. The birth of any baby changes our lives. This tiny human being is utterly dependent on parents and caregivers, who have to jump up to meet the child's every need. We don't know the future for ourselves or for this child. We cannot control what happens. The world we create spirals off in other directions. We become open to other possibilities, new ways of thinking and looking at life. We grow. We are transformed. We are no longer in control.

That is what happens at Christmas. We are invited into a new world. As we stand around the Christmas crib with the shepherds, sheep, angels (and later, at Epiphany, with the Magi or wise men) we are standing on holy ground; but we are also no longer in control. A whole new world is opening up in front of us. It's called the kingdom of God – a realm and a reality that is completely different from this world in which we live, yet a world that we inhabit that is just as real, a world that offers new possibilities, hope and meaning, wonder and joy, the glory of heaven, love that is overwhelming, mercy that embraces us. We are no longer in the driving seat. Instead, in the kingdom of God, we are part of this great picture of grace and hope and new life, where death does not have the last word, where nothing can separate us from the love of God. Frederick Buechner puts it like this: "This story that faith tells, in the fairytale language of faith, is not just that God is...but that God comes. Comes here."¹ Into our lives and into our dark and painful world. And offers us eternal life, a new world, hope and healing.

My love to you all

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Hunter". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.