



The Presiding Bishop's Christmas Message Advent 2024

To All Clergy and Laity of the Anglican Province of America and our
Communion Partners.

*O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel. Rejoice, rejoice,
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

Dearly beloved in Christ,

If one lives in the American South, one will inevitably notice the many church signs that dot the landscape of city, suburb, and country lanes alike. Such signs appear throughout our entire nation, however, and one is sure to see such a sign on any given drive. The South has more! Church signs are actually significant and express without demur what in fact goes on inside of a church building. We Anglican Catholics should keep that truth in mind. The medium is always the message. Churches tell us who they really are by the way they present themselves.

Years ago, there was nearby a Baptist congregation which met in a neat, clean, and appealing house. It enjoyed a prominent sign. And as far as that sign went, the message was the message. The message on the Baptist sign one Christmas read in bold, red, plastic letters, 'The Baby in the manger is God.' The Baby in the manger *is* God.

If one accepts the proposition that a church sign points to what a church is honestly like, then let us suggest that Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Sign of God. The Lord Jesus reveals who God is, what God is authentically like. God is a Communion of Persons. We are exuberant on Christmas Eve because God begins His life on this earth with all the sense of love, joy, gratitude, promise, hope, and limitless possibilities the birth of any baby boy brings.

The Immaculate Ever-Virgin Mother and holy Foster-Father in the cave at Bethlehem, and the shepherds abiding in the field by night, were formed by most profound and advanced religious culture in the history of the world. They lived a divine revelation, the true Religion which was organised and imparted by direct contact with God Himself.

The challenge with God, as He was at that time revealed to them, was that His people could not literally get their hands on Him. He spoke, and He acted, and He moved, but He never remained. Contact with Him was entirely unpredictable. His people were so fearful of being perceived as attempting to control Him that they could not even utter His Name – much more trace His picture or carve His form.

It was a deep, robust, and intensely transcendent system, but it could not finally work. What was missing was not a sense of God, God above us, or God beyond us, or God greater than us. No. What was missing

was a sense of Emmanuel, God with us, God within us – the God who would live with us and abide within us.

The Lord Jesus Christ is Emmanuel. He has been with us ever since Bethlehem. He has never left us, and He is never going to abandon us. He is with us forever. Saint Paul calls Our Lord, ‘the image of the invisible God.’ (Colossians 1.15). He is the image of the One who could never be imaged. He bears the Name of the One who could never be named. Jesus Christ says of Himself, quite simply, ‘He who has seen me has seen the Father’ (Saint John 14.9).

‘That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us; That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ’ (I Saint John 1.1-3).

The Baby in the manger *is* God.

May the Incarnate God bless you and all you love in this holy Christmastide!

In Our Blessed Lord,

+ Chandler Holder Jones SSC

The Most Reverend Chandler Holder Jones, SSC
Presiding Bishop, Anglican Province of America