

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas

When we look around, what signs of Christmas do we see? What are the things that capture our attention? What are the signs that Christ is with us?

In the gospel according to Luke, the sign of Christmas given to the shepherds by the angel would be a baby wrapped in bands of cloth, laying in a manger. That's hardly an exciting description – a baby wrapped in cloths in a rustic shelter for animals. But don't worry, Hallmark sentimentalized it enough to capture the imagination.

Having just returned from a four month sabbatical – I hardly need an angel to proclaim the wondrous signs of what God is doing in the midst of St. Andrew's. It's most evident to me that Christ is with us.

The first sign to me is that our place of gathering and worship reflects Jesus' words to the woman at the well (Jn 4:21-24) – "a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... the time is coming and *has now come* when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth." For this completed move to a sustainable place of worship at The Haven allows us to focus more on mission and partnership, less on building. And I need not remind the St. Andrew's community, who for over 60 years has never owned a building, that Church isn't about the building but the people and the mission of God.

Times and circumstances change. And St. Andrew's has faced it with resilience, courage, and determination; to continue walking as the people of God serving God's mission.

The second sign is a spirit of concern for those in the wider community. St. Andrew's has consistently sought to support outreach particularly through scholarships, food banks, and community agricultural shares. But we're taking it to the next level in creating a community garden where people can have a place to learn how to grow food for themselves. Jesus must be pleased about this!

The third sign I see is the desire to build relationship within our faith community. Exciting plans are underway to offer a once-a-month *Koinonia* meal following worship. The Women's Guild is planning a Fellowship Meal to follow our Annual Meeting slated for January 28th, and later, a Valentine cookie baking gathering.

The fourth sign is continuing evidence of hearty discipleship practices including ongoing twice weekly morning meditations, twice weekly Bible study, and regular lay led Morning Prayer on 4th Sundays. We've got a reasonable 'almost' balanced budget in the works. Gratitude to all who have pledged for 2023. And lastly, members have stepped forward to present a full vestry slate for our upcoming Annual Meeting.

I believe that St. Andrew's walks in the way of Christ: in the breaking of the bread, prayers, teaching and fellowship. (Acts 2:42). Am I proud of our beautiful little parish? My moisty eyes as I write this would be another sign for me.

Lest I forget, it *is* beginning to look a lot like Christmas in our humble, light-filled sanctuary with fresh greens, sprigs of berries, the Advent wreath, a Christmas tree soon-to-be-setup, a new generously donated Clavinova piano on-the-way to provide beautiful music, a gorgeous hand written (painted) icon of

Rublev's Holy Trinity created by member Carol Oakes. These are just a few to name of my favorite things!

I look forward to us worshiping together in the Spirit of Christmas.

Faithfully,

Amma Susan