

## LOOKING FORWARD

I am writing this message on the morning of October 25th. It is hard to believe that two months from today we will be celebrating Christmas. It is beginning to look a lot like Christmas right now, at least to me. We went out Saturday afternoon to Michaels to get a shirt for my daughter's Halloween costume. I expected to see the store decorated in fall and Halloween decorations but much to my surprise the whole front display was all Christmas decorations.

After finishing at Michaels, we drove over to Lowes. As I was walking in, I was remembering when my daughter was a little girl and was scared by the Halloween decorations Lowes would often have on display. I was thinking as I was entering, I did not have to worry about that this time now she is 15. Once inside, instead of seeing Halloween decorations, I was immediately confronted by their Christmas decorations on display.

It was not only while we were shopping that it felt like Christmas to me. The W network began showing their Hallmark Christmas movies this weekend. I admit that I watch some of these Hallmark Christmas movies even though the endings all seem to be the same having the main characters fall in love. My daughter happened to come down the stairs, and when she saw one of the movies on said, "I just love Christmas."

To top it all off, my mother walked over to the Dollar store and another favourite store of hers on Saturday to buy Christmas gifts. When I asked her after church on Sunday what she would do that afternoon, she told me she was going to pull out her Christmas gift bags and start filling them with the presents she has already bought. Now you can understand why it is beginning to feel a lot like Christmas to me.

A lot of us look forward to Christmas just like my daughter. It is a very special time of year. There are some things about Christmas that we do not look forward to, however. So many people comment how they never look forward to the busyness of the season when it comes to gift buying, shopping at the malls, finding time to wrap presents, and so on. This Christmas may provide

added stress to many people. We are already being told that we should be looking forward to some of these things this holiday season:

- a shortage of items on the shelves to buy this Christmas especially when it comes to children's toys
- many of the gifts we want to purchase may not be available if we do not purchase them before the U.S. Thanksgiving in November
- higher prices for food we want to buy for our holiday celebrations, or for the gas we need to drive to celebrate with family or friends

As economists, analysts, and other experts look ahead they are warning us to expect these shortages and higher costs as we get closer to Christmas and experience another Canadian winter. Unfortunately, a lot of these higher costs are due to shortages resulting from the pandemic, because supply is not able to keep up with the demand as economies reopen. As much as we look forward to Christmas, people will not be looking forward to these rising costs and the strains it will put on their already tight budgets.

It is not easy to look forward to special times like Christmas when we are going through uncertain times like we are seeing right now with inflation and rising prices. One thing that can help us stay calm and joyful in these uncertain times is to focus on the same thing as the Jewish people were as that first Christmas approached. Prior to Jesus' birth, there was much anticipation amongst the Jewish people that God's appointed Messiah would come soon. Their focus was on God as they lived out each day with this anticipation and hope. The events leading up to Jesus' birth and shortly thereafter show that God not only faithfully keeps His promises but is in complete control despite the world's circumstances at the time. This is a powerful reminder for us as we face the uncertainties of rising costs, and shortages as this Christmas season approaches. The lesson we can take away from the Israelites is to live each day focusing on God who always faithfully keeps His promises, and knowing He is in complete control no matter what is happening in the world. As we do these things, we will also be reminded that better times are ahead for us thanks to God. The psalmist David understood this, even though he lived well before the birth of Christ. This is what David acknowledged in Psalm 4: 6-8:

**Many people say, "Who will show us better times?" Let your face smile on us Lord. You have given me greater joy than those who have abundant harvest of grain and new wine. In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, O Lord will keep me safe.**

As we journey closer to Christmas over these next two months, we will be doing so with difficult challenges still before us due to this pandemic. **By focusing on God**, we will be completely assured, like David was, that **God is not only smiling upon us and taking care of us but will also lead us to better times ahead.** We can count on this each day leading up to December 25th, and every day afterward as we await the day for the effects of this pandemic to come to an end.

I imagine you are surprised to read a Christmas message this week. Me too, but it is beginning to look a lot like Christmas out there. May this lesson from long ago, help each one of you as we approach this Christmas with the uncertainties and challenges we are seeing.

**Keep Safe and God Bless**

**Pastor Dean**