



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP
NEW JERSEY SYNOD
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.
1930 Highway 33, Hamilton Square, NJ 08690

***The Word became a human being and lived here with us. We saw his true glory,
the glory of the only Son of the Father. From him the complete gifts of
undeserved grace and truth have come down to us. John 1:14 (CEV)***

December 2022

Dear Friends in Christ,

During the month of December, I watched as our congregations gathered to observe a variety of cultural and ethnic traditions. While lighting Advent wreaths every Sunday, congregations have also celebrated St. Nicholas Day, Feast Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe, St. Lucia Day and more. It has been fun to see pictures of the ways these cultural traditions are being passed down to the next generations. Bright red bishop's robes and gifts of gold-wrapped coins, colorful flowers and mariachi bands, saffron buns and crowns of candles all make an appearance during these December days.

In our homes, additional traditions are carried out: Christmas trees are decorated, cookies and treats are baked and served with love, Advent calendars are opened each day, colorful lights and wreaths are put up outside, manger scenes are brought out and put on display.

It is a joy to live in a place where so many different ethnic and cultural traditions are shared and celebrated. Diversity and respect are two core values of our synod which are embodied during these December days. Being invited to learn about and participate in a tradition different from one's own is a gift.

At the heart of all these celebrations and traditions lies the reality of God's incarnation – God coming to us in the flesh and blood of Jesus. God chose to be born into a particular time and place in history, a place with its own cultural and ethnic traditions. And in doing that, blesses our celebrations.

I encourage you this Christmas to invite someone to experience your celebrations and to share your traditions with someone new this year. It's not too late to bring a neighbor or family member to church with you on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day so they might receive the blessing of your faith community joined in song and prayer. It just might be that in your sharing you find that you are actually receiving anew the gift of God's love made real for you.

Merry Christmas, dear friends,

Bishop Tracie L. Bartholomew