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Dear Church Family,

“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”
Philippians 12:12

First, a very Happy New Year to everyone. On this 12th day of Christmas, I cannot help but look back on the past year with such mixed feelings. In the midst of so much that has been different, difficult, and disappointing, I am deeply grateful to God and to our church family. Thank you for your patience, long-suffering and faithfulness. Thanks be to God for the Incarnation – that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

We are about to begin a new season in the Church Calendar – Epiphany. Epiphany means “appearance” or “manifestation.” The feast of the Epiphany is tomorrow, the day when we remember the manifestation of Jesus to the Gentiles, represented by the visit of the Magi. One of the great themes of the Epiphany is that of the Church’s calling to be light to the world. The Gospel, the Good News of Jesus, is to be shared with all. Jesus is the light of the world. As St. John reminds us, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1:6) How might you share the light of Christ with someone this week?

I suspect we’ve heard the phrase, “The darkest hour is just before the dawn.” The phrase dates back to English theologian and historian, Thomas Fuller in 1650. While not actually true in terms of astronomy or meteorology, it is a phrase that is meant to illicit hope. We may be in, or approaching, the darkest hour of the pandemic. But there is hope. There is hope as the vaccines are rolled out. There is hope as treatments improve. There is hope because of the ongoing dedicated work of so many people. But, above all, there is hope because “The light [of Christ] shines in the darkness.”

After consulting widely, including with seven of our doctors, the staff, and church wardens, I have decided that it would be wise for us to be patient a little while longer before reopening Ascension for in-person services. I do not believe there is one “right” approach. Indeed, not all who advised me agree on the best way forward. I expect that some people will read this and welcome the decision with relief. Others will disagree and be disappointed. I ask you to bear with me in this. Please know that I have not come to this decision lightly. I long for us to be back together – to worship God and witness to the world as His embodied church. We will – soon. But not just yet.

We expect to keep things the way they are through Epiphany. Our hope and plans are to reintroduce in-person services in Lent, beginning on Ash Wednesday, February 17th. In the meantime, our weekly 10:00 a.m. livestream services will continue with Walk-Through Communion following. We will also continue with small, in-person baptisms, weddings and funerals. Additionally, there are many other ways for us to connect, grow and serve through our Community Groups, Prayer Ministries, Children’s Ministry, Youth Ministry, College Ministry, Music and Worship Arts Ministry, and Internationals Ministry.

As I have requested before, I urge you again to be in touch with other members of our church family. Pick up the phone, write a note, text or email someone today! Finally, in the words of St. Paul, be “joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”

Yours in Christ,

Jonathan Millard
Rector