***Merry Christmas***

*Dear People of God,*

*Advent is a time of watching, waiting, and believing in the promises of God. This Advent season finds many of us watching and waiting for this pandemic to end. It is difficult to think of anything else as our daily lives have been altered and changed by it. Our church has been altered and changed by it. As a result of isolation and distancing it is of no wonder that we find ourselves feeling removed from the church and removed from one another. Communication is limited.*

*I think of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. His daily activities as a temple priest changed drastically when the angel Gabriel stood before him at the altar of incense. Gabriel speaks on behalf of God declaring that he and Elizabeth will conceive a son. He proceeds to tell Zechariah that his son will be the last Old Testament prophet and will prepare the way for the Messiah. While this heavenly encounter is taking place inside the temple, the people are waiting outside… wondering why Zechariah is taking so long. When Zechariah finally exits the temple doors, he cannot speak. In disbelief of this God-given news, he is struck dumb. He cannot tell anyone what has happened. He cannot speak of this incredible, unbelievable good news. The last words Zechariah was able to speak was the response he gave to Gabriel, “How will I know that this is so?”*

 *How will we know when the pandemic will end? How will we know when it is safe to gather in person as church again? How will we know if we can make it through this financial crisis? We are struck dumb.*

 *Zechariah’s silence lasted for nine months. For nine months he could only motion and gesture his needs and wants. I would imagine he felt isolated and distanced from the normal way of life. After all, how can a priest administer a blessing if he cannot speak? It was nine months of his daily routine being altered. Communication was limited.*

 *It’s been nine months since Covid-19 was declared a pandemic. It has been nine months of minimal church attendance when we were open and nine months of minimal financial support. But while you have been waiting outside the church, waiting for the doors to open… God has been speaking. God has been speaking of the coming Messiah.*

 *Elizabeth did indeed give birth. When the time came to name the child John, Zechariah’s mouth was opened and his tongue was freed, and he began to speak. The first words out of his mouth… thanks and praise to God!*

“Bless the Lord God of Israel because he has come to help and has delivered his people. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in his servant David’s house, just as he said through the mouths of his holy prophets long ago (Luke 1:68-70). Because of our God’s deep compassion, the dawn from heaven will break upon us, to give light to those who are sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death to guide us on the path of peace”(Luke 1:78,79).

 *This Christmas, may the first words that come from our mouths be that of thanks and praise. The time will come when the silence will be broken. With one voice let us speak of the incredible, unbelievable good news found in Jesus Christ. We, as a church, are given this great joy to be God’s voice in the world. We do not do this on our own. With do this through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and through your financial support. Please consider a monetary Christmas gift to Holy Cross so we may continue to be a voice of help; a voice of light to those who sit in darkness; and a voice of compassion to our community and beyond.*

 *I give God thanks and praise for each and every one of you!*

 *I give God thanks and praise for your support in this ministry!*

*Advent Blessings to you all!*

*Pastor Julie*