



**A Gift of Love**  
*By Rev Jessica Stryco*

Growing up, my family would often drive up into the San Bernardino mountains on Christmas morning to play in the snow. It was a treasured tradition, and it was just my parents, my sisters, and me. We would build a snowman, make snow angels, and go sledding – which was always a treat for our Southern California family! Now, as my husband and I raise our young family, we too are finding ways to celebrate, and traditions to form among the four of us. Due to the pandemic, I have been reminded that quality time is a gift. Slowing down not simply to be together, but to enjoy time together, is a gift. I am grateful as I remember those Christmas mornings in the snow. I realize the effort it took for my parents to prepare our snow gear and winter clothes, to pile us all in the car, and make the drive up the mountain. They so clearly prioritized that time together over any possible material gift they could receive. And they were helping us see the preciousness of that love as well. The gift of Emmanuel, of God with us, resonates all the more deeply when we know the gift of time spent with those we love. That God loves us so much that God chooses to be with us is the hope of this sacred season to me.

