

December 20, 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On the first Christmas night, an angel of the Lord appeared to poor shepherds living in the fields near Bethlehem. The shepherds were struck with fear. The angel comforted them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the City of David a Savior has been born for you who is Christ the Lord."

Jesus comes for you and me and for all people of all time as Love Incarnate. He is God's love which knows no limits. Jesus is the bearer of light and truth. Jesus comes as Savior.

Who of us does not need His good news, His message of hope? Whatever our faults and sins, Jesus comes to save us. He saves us from ourselves, from our selfishness, our pride and arrogance, our consumer mentality, from our self-pity and our insecurities. He saves us from our fears and all that would keep us from living joyously and confidently as children of truth and light. He gained victory over sin and death that we might live forever as brothers and sisters in the peace, joy, and love of the Lord.

As Light, Jesus casts out darkness, aimlessness, confusion, and despair. He reveals how deeply God loves us and the dignity and destiny that is ours as children of our loving God. He shows us the way to the heart of the Father and gives us the path to eternal life.

Jesus does even more than show us the path to deep peace and joy in this life and everlasting glory in the next. He remains with us as Emmanuel, "God with us." He remains for us the personal presence of the living God. Before returning to His Father, He constituted us, who believe in Him and are baptized, as His living Body, the Church. He is present within us through His Holy Spirit received in Baptism and Confirmation. He

is present to us through priests and deacons who minister in His name. He is present to us in Holy Mass and the other Sacraments. He is present to us where two or three gather in His name. He is present to us in His Word proclaimed. He is present to us in the sick, lonely, and all in need.

As we celebrate Christmas Mass and reflect upon the good news Jesus brings, let us take great joy and delight as did the shepherds. They returned to the fields glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen at the manger.

May we be filled with peace and deep contentment as was the elder Simeon when Mary and Joseph presented the infant Jesus in the temple. Looking upon Jesus, Simeon blessed God saying: “Now, Master, you can dismiss your servant in peace...For my eyes have witnessed your saving deed displayed for all the peoples to see: a revealing light to the Gentiles, the glory of your people Israel.”

Let us embrace Jesus who is the gift of our Father. As St. Bernard said, “What use is it to us if Christ be born in Bethlehem and not in our own hearts?” As Mary bore Christ within her womb, we are now Christ-bearers to our family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. We are bearers of His love to the hungry, homeless, sick, homebound, incarcerated, immigrants, and all who are in any way oppressed.

May you find comfort and peace, light and hope in Jesus, the love of God Incarnate. May you also be a bearer of God’s infinite mercy and love, a bearer of His peace and hope to those most in need of God’s Good News!

A blessed Christmas to all!

Yours in the Lord Jesus,

Most Reverend Dale J. Melczek
Bishop of Gary