



United Independent Catholic Church

Office of the Presiding Bishop

Dear Friends:

The world is in bad shape. In the Middle East, there is a war against terrorism and no one knows where they will strike next. The people there are either very rich or very poor. The governments do not care about the well-being or needs of their people. Radicalism is rampant and assassination is the order of the day. The major occupying power is there to keep peace, only to make matters worse. The religious leaders are more concerned with the letter of the law, rather than the spiritual needs of their people.

That was the historical situation that Jesus was born into. The Jewish people were under the occupation of the Romans and the Zealots were killing Romans every chance they got. Our Jewish forbearers were very poor and had levels of society that was almost set in concrete. The very poor were ignored and had to fend for themselves. It was the poor that were receptive to any good news that came their way.

Things have not changed much in over 2,000 years and the world has gotten worse. Terrorists could obtain the materials for a nuclear bomb. Our environment is being destroyed for the sake of the few over the many. Our own country is divided and many religious leaders use fear to keep their flocks in line.

At Christmas Services, we will hear of the Shepherds who heard the angels announce the birth of the Savior and how the angels sang of good will and peace. It was the marginalized, the Shepherds, who first responded to the angelic message and went to encounter a Child who was born of poor parents in an animal stall.

Let's face it - - we are in such need to hear and experience good news. Our ears prick up when we hear of a weeping icon or an apparition of the Virgin Mary. We are excited when we hear of a miracle. We are searching for a light in the darkness of our days. Our hearts tell us that there is more to life than what we have, and so we search and look and reach. We are a broken people in search of wholeness, and we look in the places that promise it all but give us nothing. We think that money, power, relationships, health, knowledge, and security will make us happy. What are we looking for? Why does that story in Luke's Gospel draw us to that manger scene even today? We have a lot in common with the shepherds. We need to know that life has a purpose, and that there is a God out there who cares about us and has not left us to our own designs. They went to see this Child and walked away changed. They knew that the world would never be the same again and praised God for the love that he bore His people. They knew that this Child was a sign of this love and they told everyone they knew what they had experienced. The wholeness that they were seeking was given to them. While they were outcasts in the Jewish society of their day, they saw the Glory of God through that Child. They knew that this Child gave them the ability to live life in hope and faith. They knew that this Child embodied the love that God had for them. They knew that this Child would one day help them carry their burdens and put their lives into perspective. In short, their hearts were lifted up and they were given the ability to live a life of faith

Today, we search for no less. It has always been with us, but we let the noise of our lives drown out the Angelic message that a Child was born to save us from despair and hopelessness. We need to stop and consider that the message the angels sang about is in the here and now. We need to listen carefully to what is going on around us - - to what God is saying to us each and every day. There are times when we hear love expressed through our families, friends, and those to who we work with. We hear words of

comfort and unconditional love through our own children if we listen hard enough. Yes, God speaks to us every day, telling us that we are loved and that He is with us.

We, like the shepherds, go to see this Child that will give us hope to face our everyday flawed and painful lives. The Child who was born in Bethlehem over 2000 years ago is still calling us to the manger to behold the love that God has for us all. If we listen carefully, we can still hear the angels sing, "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth".

May God Bless you and your families as we, like the shepherds look to the star of hope and walk to see our salvation.

Sincerely,

Bishop Jerry

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