

"We Are Heralds of the Lord"

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My dear friends in Christ:

The people of God in ancient Israel looked forward to the coming of a Savior, the Messiah. Possibly they were not too clear as to whom the Messiah would be or what He would accomplish; yet they had confidence in the prophets especially Isaiah and Nathan. "To us a child is born, to us a son is given." (Isaiah 9:6) "I will be his father, and he shall be my son." (2 Samuel 7:14)

We, who as Christians with two thousand years of history and tradition look forward to the anniversary of the birth of Christ and have a deeper understanding of the prophets, yet are touched by the same mystery and wonderment of God's concern for man and of His redemptive, all encompassing love.

Christmas is a mystery that calls for a response to the deepest longing and most fulfilling instincts of the human heart. Christmas proves to us that God is a loving Father who sent His only Son to share our pilgrim journey, to teach and redeem us. Jesus at Bethlehem and Jesus incarnate in the Church today helps us to understand something of God's love for man translated in human experience in the routine of life's decisions.

The Christ of the first Christmas is the same Christ living and working in today's Church; working in the lives of people who have willingly submitted their hopes to the promise of Christ effected within life's limitations. They, or should I say we, have accepted an invitation of Christ not to flee the world but to transform it. Christians today are called to help renew all things in Christ by prayer and life lived in the spirit of the Gospel. We are the modern counterparts of the prophets, of the angels, of the Shepherds of Bethlehem; we are heralds of the coming of the Lord and witnesses of His continued presence among men.

Christmas symbolizes a renewal of human hope and at the same time directs our thinking and understanding of hope which is divine in origin. Our hope is deeper than the beautiful sentiment we have concentrated on in the descriptive account of St. Luke: a "babe wrapped in swaddling clothes." We must go beyond Bethlehem and think with the affirmation of Christ in proclaiming His Gospel "Not every one who says to me, Lord, Lord shall enter the kingdom of heaven but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 7:21)

We of the Church of Baltimore during the past year have seriously tried to express our faith in Christ and in the affirmation of His coming and in the proclamation of His Gospel by becoming a leaven for the society in which we live. The epiphany of divine presence and divine grace has a formational and educational effect. It trains us "to live sober, upright and Godly lives in the world." (Titus 2:12). May I again share with you the preamble of our "Statement of Mission of the Archdiocese of Baltimore" which so beautifully expresses our hopes and desires at Christmas.

We, the Church in the Archdiocese of Baltimore are  
a community of Catholic Christians  
who are gathered by the Holy Spirit  
to recognize in the person of Jesus  
in His life and teaching,  
in His dying and rising  
the expression of the Father's freely given  
and continued love of all people, and  
to live out, as individuals and as a community,  
our commitment to Jesus and His mission:  
to proclaim and teach,  
to express and model, and  
to advocate and serve  
the kingdom of God  
as the Spirit brings it to reality in  
the whole of God's creation, more  
particularly within the hearts of loving people.

† William D. Borders

Archbishop of Baltimore