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A Christmas message—1981

The birth of Jesus Christ—'God's plea in human flesh to tr

By ARCHBISHOP WILLIAM D. BORDERS

Waiting in line, waiting in an airport lounge, or waiting for a light to change when I'm late for an appointment have never been among my favorite occupations. Yet most of our lives are spent in waiting.

What makes tiresome waiting bearable is the anticipation of attaining our goal. If that anticipation is grounded in Christian faith; if it is allowed to penetrate our being, our daily lives, then the weariness, the anxiety, the fear in waiting pass away like shadows before a sunrise.

With each study that researchers do about those who do not go to church, I become more convinced that growing numbers of people rarely feel God's presence in their day-to-day lives.

Some would even say that unchurched people have given up the search for God; that they have lost hope. I disagree.

Who among us — even faithful Christians — have not heard ourselves pray an Our Father that was only empty words; felt a moment when the body and blood of our Lord seems only bread and wine; feared that the Church does not communicate God's presence?

And if we who are faithful Christians have felt moments of doubt about God's presence, what can be said about those who have never consciously experienced God's goodness in their lives?

Can we expect those who go to bed hungry each night to live in hope? Can we expect those in the Middle East, who live where Jesus was born and who see violence and bloodshed exploding about them almost everyday, to live in hope? Can we expect Poles, who wonder whether they will share *opiatek* with one another while anticipating Russian soldiers patrolling their streets, to live in hope?

If we hear God's Good News — then the answer to those few wrenching questions, and all the other questions that remind us of the presence of evil, is yes.

The Good News I refer to was first proclaimed to all people two thousand years ago — Jesus Christ is born! Notice — the Good News is not for Christians only. It

was not announced to the Jews of Jesus' time alone. It came instead to all people who would hear it.

Such Good News says to us that in Jesus Christ, God is with us: God is present and active everywhere. Snow does not fall, nor do flowers grow, without Him. Without God there would be no children to lend us their smiles, no birds to warm our springs, no mosquitos to mark our passing summers.

God is here.

This reality transcends all human weakness, international conflict and personal failure. It is the central gift of Christmas — the Good News in which all people can rejoice.

Some would ask how I can write about Good News when a steel mill at Sparrow's Point closes down temporarily and puts people out of work; when the unemployment rate in Maryland reaches 7.4 percent and young blacks in Baltimore have a staggering 40 per cent unemployment rate.

I can speak of Good News because God's gift to us of His Son is living proof of God's love. In the midst of a seemingly hopeless world, when Rome ruled Israel and freedom seemed a forgotten dream of the Exodus, God stepped in and gave us Jesus Christ. That step into history witnesses for us that we have a loving God; a God who never forgets His people.

God never steps away from us. We are the ones who step away from Him. God's fidelity proves to us that His way is a way of hope.

Because we are made in God's image and are free, we can use our freedom to choose God's way. When we do this, we live in hope because we acknowledge that we are not helpless victims thrown about willy-nilly by fate. When we choose God's way, we choose a life of trust — trust in God and trust in other people.

This is not to say that living God's life in our lives is a guarantee of security against human failure. It says, instead, that we must go beyond ourselves, and overcome the fear that backs us into the blind avenues of despair.

The Jews of the Exodus realized the need for hope. Eventually, trusting their God, they got beyond themselves, fled their captors and found freedom. God's way

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ple helped them to turn their world around.

Christmas is God's plea in human flesh to turn our world around.

ent In our day-to-day living, when love so easily becomes lust, when peaceful
m. words so often are misunderstood and become hostile action, when the search for
m freedom becomes an excuse for martial law, God's plea in human flesh begs us to
change our hatreds into love and give ourselves to Him so that our world can
change.

er- Hope means doing just that — surrendering ourselves to God, to the in-
o- calculable, infinite and eternal Will that He is. In taking on human flesh at
Christmas, God's Son lived hope.

at No unaided human reasoning could have predicted such a birth. In surrender-
he ing himself to Golgotha's pain and death, God's son lived hope.

in Which of us would plan such a death for a son? In rising from the dead, God's
son, Jesus Christ, made it possible for you and me to live the same hope in which
He was born, died, and rose again.

of For the Christian, hope is not just the courage of the healthy and strong. Nor is
el it the often empty promise that "the sun always shines tomorrow."

a For the Christian, hope is based on the One Who, by His "hopelessness" on the
cross, by His surrender to God, pave the way to the future. Jesus saved the world
n. by His cross, giving us the hope of a new heaven and a new earth.

to So, there is Good News at Christmas, but we will probably not find it in
at headlines. We will find it instead in the words of the Scriptures, "Today in the town
's of David a saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."

y We will also find it in the hearts and minds of men and women who believe
d enough to accept that message; who hope enough to give their lives in freedom to
God's incalculable love; who can live with the agony and doubt, as well as the peace
and joy of trusting God and the people who live around them.

ir My prayer for each of you at this holy time is that God will give you the joy and
y peace of living in hope this Christmas, throughout the New Year, and all during
your "wait for God."