

**First Sunday After Christmass, 2007 [A]: St. Frances,
South Fork**

**In the name of The One who sent His Son to be our
Savior and Redeemer. Amen**

“And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the lord appeared to them.”

And so begins the accounting of the most wonderful story of all, the story of the Birth of Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer. We began to relive this story four weeks ago in Advent. At that time we recalled the many intertwining themes of this complicated season. For Advent is truly a season, rich in traditions that have been developed over the centuries to help us prepare for the joyous happening that we call the Christmass Event: the birth of a child more than 2000 years ago in a small town, in a small country so far away. But this is a Birth that has transcended time and space and today we celebrate an event which not only gives meaning to

creation, but it also gives meaning to who we are as individuals, as a Child of God, and as followers of Christ.

One sure sign of recognizing an Episcopalian is our *appropriate* insistence to keep on wishing everyone a Merry Christmas – days **after** Christmass Day, in fact right up to January 6, The Feast of the Epiphany. We truly celebrate the Twelve Days of Christmass. For us Christmass is not just a day, but it is a season, a Holy Season. So it is our practice to continue to contemplate the Mysteries of the Birth Event and the significance of this Holy Time.

There are so many possible themes with which we could deal during this Christmass season. However, let's see if we can identify just one easy handle, one symbol, one reality that will guide us on this First Sunday after Christmass as we continue our celebration of the Birth of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

There are so many concepts and images from which we could choose. For this rich season provides us with such a long list from which we could make a selection. For example – we could focus

on the characters **or** a character of the Advent and Christmass Seasons. There are Zechariah and Elizabeth and of course their son, John the Baptizer, who is without a doubt an important player in the Christmass and Advent drama. There is Mary and Joseph and the drama of the Annunciation, which leads us to the Bethlehem event. Certainly their stories warrant consideration. Joseph provides us with many lessons as he considers what he must do when he finds out that his betrothed is pregnant. His response of love, trust, and the acceptance of responsibility is a mighty Christmass lesson and example. Mary's story, of course, can and does fill up many books: her confusion in meeting the angel and hearing the angel's message and then her response of obedience – providing us with the *first* example of what the Christian life must be – a response of unquestioning obedience.

Then there is the cast of all the characters who play out the Birth Event, the Christmass Story: the angels, the shepherds, the innkeeper, and eventually the scholars from the East. All of these provide us with a wealth of examples and lessons. And finally, we

should expect that there is a rich message as we contemplate the *meaning* of the birth of Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Savior.

But let us come back to our quest for just one easy handle, one symbol, one reality that might lead us to a higher celebration of Christmass this year.

I remember, once reading a short devotional article that I since have lost. I would have liked to share it with you in its entirety, but I will have to be satisfied with just recreating the concept of that article. Perhaps, it holds a possible focus for our celebration of Christmass this year.

The author of this meditation shared a point that I think is meaningful and significant. He pointed out - that throughout the Church's year that the reality of our life in Jesus is that **He** cares for us; **He** loves us; **He** holds us in **His** hands. In our relationship with Christ, we are dependent upon **Him**. It is **His** love and **His** care that brings us through both the high points of our life *and* the low points. That in our celebrations during our liturgical year, we recognize and acknowledge that our blessings come from **His**

hands and that in the deep, dark times of confusion, doubt, and periods of despair it is then that we recognize that is **His** hands that carry us through.

As Christians, as followers of Jesus Christ, we depend upon **His** love and strength to bring love, caring, and meaning to our lives. We are within **His** arms – **He** carries us – **He** holds us. This is the reality of our Christian life.

But – in Christmass, we find that as Jesus bursts into our world as a child – as an infant, **we** have the opportunity to **hold** Him, to **love** Him, to **protect** Him. As a child, as a baby in the manger, *He*, for one brief moment in history, is dependent on **us**.

It may well be that the love and care that we give this Holy Infant marks the richness of our own life in Christ. If our hearts, our love, our concern goes out to Him in a strong, outpouring of love and service, then, maybe, we set the pattern for our lives -- and perhaps we create the example of how Jesus will return His love to us.

Think of it, does our response of love and care for the Christ Child during this Christmass season provide the pattern in which He will return His love and care to us for the rest of our lives? For me, this is a most sobering question. I know, theologically and in my heart, that the love of Christ is full and unconditional and that it does not depend on what I do. -- But -- is it possible that my response to the Christ Child is the catalyst that prompts the richness of God's flow of love to me? -- I think perhaps that we have found our focus, the handle that we are seeking as we celebrate this Christmass Season.

This year let us hold the Christ Child close with love in our hearts that His birth may mark a new birth in each of our own lives and in the life of our world. This year let us hold this Holy Infant in our arms and in our hearts. This year let our love for this Christ Child pour out in love and service to others. This year as we celebrate the Birth of the Prince of Peace, let us pray that peace that passes all understanding will flow from each of us in an ever-

widening circle that will encompass the whole earth. “Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.”

I pray that each of us will hold and protect the Christ Child in this season as a mark – as a symbol of what our life in Christ will be for the rest of the year and for the rest of our lives.

Amen

And, oh yes, “Merry Christmass!”