

SHARING CHRISTMAS (Jn 1:1-18)

MERRY CHRISTMAS!!!

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad. We come here today because **this** day, unlike any other, truly is the day which the Lord has made. We have been waiting for this day and preparing for it for the past 4 weeks. In actuality, the first time we heard the word “Christmas” this year was probably back in July, so it has been more like 6 months of thinking about the coming of this day. On this day God has come down from heaven and become one of us, beginning human life as a little baby. **That** is what we celebrate. And this little baby will show us the way to God, the way to true life, the way to true joy and happiness.

God did not come into the world at the perfect time or under the most ideal circumstances, according to human standards. Jesus was conceived out of wedlock, born to a poor family, born away from home in the midst of strangers, in a land under foreign control and domination, to a people who weren't ready for him and who would try to take his life --- and some of us may think that our childhood circumstances weren't the best! The reason why he came under these circumstances and in that situation was so that **no one** would feel left out from the love of God, unless he/she chooses to reject that love. And, thus, we call Jesus “Savior” because he came to save us from ourselves --- from our greed, our lust, our pride, our self-centeredness, from those things which promise life but instead bring death. He saves us by taking us out of ourselves into what looks and feels like death but is really life, eternal life on this earth and forever in heaven.

As a child growing up in a poor family, I looked forward to Christmas like no other day. I'm not sure what I was looking for at the time, deep within my soul, but now as I look back I believe that I was looking for a better life, a life where we wouldn't have to struggle for life's basic necessities, a life where love overflowed from everyone, a life without sickness and tragedy, even without death. For, as a young child, I was exposed to all of those things, and Christmas seemed to promise more than all of that. Of course, my dreams were more along the lines of presents under the Christmas tree, wonderful toys that would fill my life with happiness. But more often than not, those presents were simply clothes to wear which my mom had lovingly sewn from feed sacks, but which I looked down upon because they weren't “store-bought” like what all of the other kids were wearing. So Christmas day was often a disappointment after the excitement of waking up on Christmas morning. And for years afterwards, even through much of my adulthood, Christmas was a disap-

pointment in satisfying my expectations after all of the waiting and wishing and hoping. But I was looking in the wrong places at the wrong things for a way into a life of peace and joy and love. What I have since found is that life exists not in satisfying my own wants and desires but in going out of myself to care for others with the love of God leading me. Jesus came to lead me to the Father, and I am called to follow him.

If I reflect back on the birth of our children, there was a long period of preparation and waiting and anticipation for that special day on which our son/daughter would be born. And after the child was born, our lives were changed in ways we never could have imagined --- nights without much sleep, days of worrying about the health of our child when they got sick, endless diaper changes, times of confusion not knowing what to do for a crying child. But there were also those tender moments when I would look upon our peacefully sleeping baby and see all the love, the warmth, the tenderness, and the innocence that a human heart can hold. And peace and joy and love would fill my whole being as I smiled upon our sleeping child. And I knew that I would do anything in the world for that child. That's what love is about.

That's what this tiny baby, who was called Jesus, came to earth to tell us --- that love is about doing anything in the world to care for our brothers and sisters who are in need, who can't do for themselves, who have been tossed aside by society, who have fallen upon hard times due to no fault of their own. On this most special of days, there are people who are hungry, people who are homeless, people who experience the death of a loved one, people who are in prison, people who are old and alone. But it's not just the physically poor who need to see and feel the love of God, it's also the poor in spirit, those who are searching for meaning in their lives, those who think God has abandoned them, those who have never felt loved (and, yes, there are many people in that situation). This may seem like an overwhelming list of people to tend to, but the only ones whom we are called to share our love with are those whom God places in our paths and on our hearts.

I doubt that Jesus ever received a Christmas present from his parents. But what he did have was a father who protected him when Herod wanted to kill him as a baby, parents who searched for him for days when he was lost, parents who taught him about his faith and the love of God, a mother who pointed out to him the way into his ministry at Cana, a mother who walked with him through his darkest hours. We, as parents, have all kinds of hopes and dreams for our children, and the most important gifts we can give them are safety, faith, love, guidance and ourselves throughout all of their lives.

After we are done opening our presents and filling ourselves with a great meal and drinks, let's not forget the poor among us, not only today but throughout the year. That's where we will find Jesus; that's where he has been since the beginning of time. That's what Christmas is about --- God sharing His love with us in order that we might share His love with each other.

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

May you have a blessed Christmas the whole year through.

Deacon Mike Richard

December 25, 2008