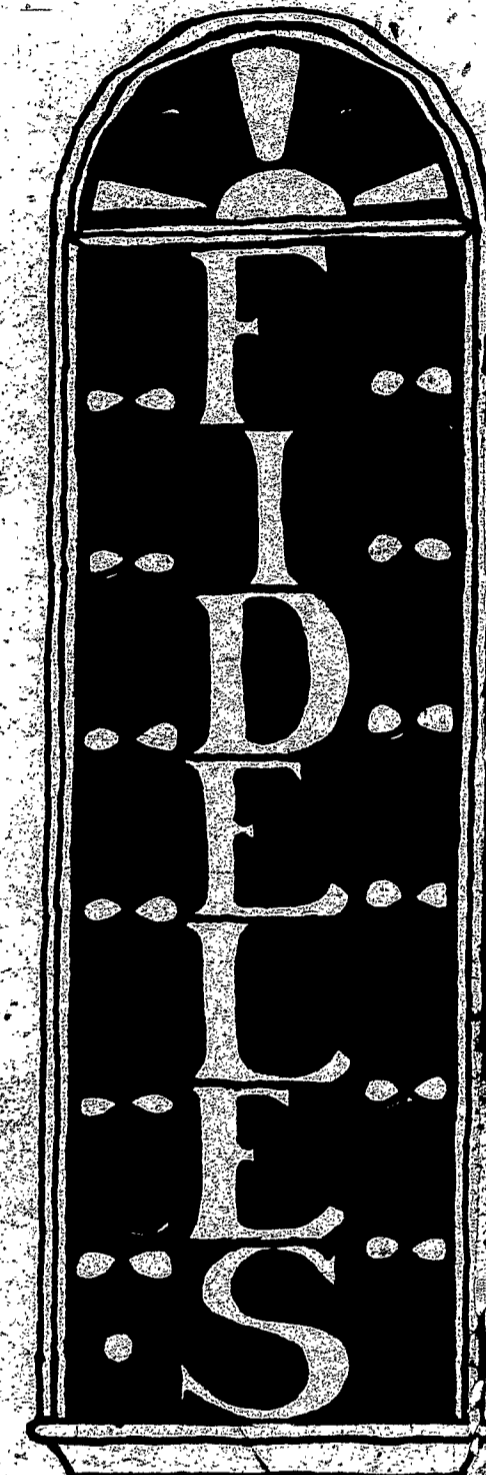
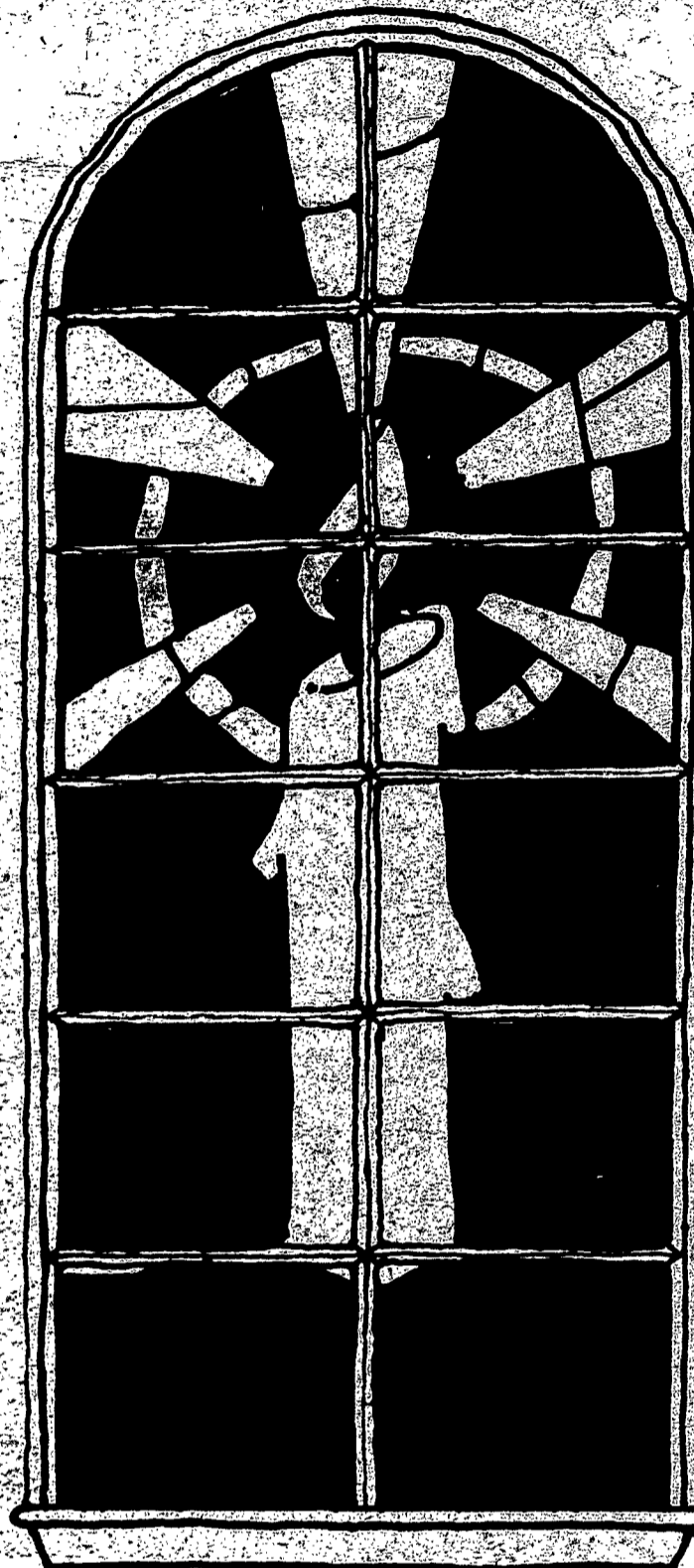


COURIER-JOURNAL



GOD IS TRULY WITH US!

Christmas 1973

My dear People,

Each year at Christmas time, I like to take time to pause in front of the Crib scene. Here I always reflect on the meaning of it for me. As I look at each of the figures represented there, I find myself focusing not so much on Mary or Joseph or the Magi. Rather, I turn my attention to the Shepherds, for I too am a Shepherd called by God and His Church to care for the flock of His People.

As I ponder, I hear in my mind's ear the words of Luke which describe the readiness and excitement of the Shepherds on that first Christmas: "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened." I am comforted by the words of Jesus who says, "I am the Good Shepherd." But I am sobered by the harsh voice of Ezekiel saying, "Ho, Shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the crippled you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them." Each of these passages from scripture is for me an examination of conscience. But they are also a source of renewed energy and prayerful hope.

And so this Christmas, I wish once again to give all of you a gift. The gift is myself. "Gladly will I spend and be spent." I commit myself once more to being Shepherd in the Church of Rochester, to lead as a Shepherd leads, sometimes going before, sometimes pushing from behind. I commit myself once more to the weak, the sick, the crippled, the strayed, the lost, the dominated. I commit myself once more to the risk of going over to Bethlehem in order that we might all see more clearly that God is truly with us. May it always be so!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Joseph L. Rago
Bishop of Rochester