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My dear People,

At this holy Christmas season, I send you my warmest greetings for peace and joy in the Lord.

At this time of year, I always try to find a few quiet moments when I can open my bible and read again the Christmas gospel from Luke (2: 1-14). Each year, I am struck by the fact that the ancient story is ever new and each year I find new insight that seems to speak so well to the needs of our time.

This year, I have been reflecting on the angel's words to the shepherds: "Let this be a sign to you: in a manger you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes." The shepherds may well have been disappointed in such a strange sign. They, like all Jews, had long awaited the Messiah. But this was not what they had expected! How could a baby, a poor and powerless baby, save anyone from the great force of the Romans? Had the shepherds not been persons of faith, they might not have bothered to go looking for this infant Jesus.

Today, we have the same difficulty as the shepherds. The signs of littleness and powerlessness seem to have little to say to our big and powerful structures. We would find it easier if Christ could "fit in" to our culture. We wish He would do it our way — the American way!

Yet, like the shepherds, we must be willing to see Christ where we least expect Him. The whole life of Christ, from birth to death, helps His followers to affirm that littleness and powerlessness are most important. The sign of Christ in the manger is counterculture. It proclaims that life is not survival of the fittest. God, through Christ, loves all of His creation, none of which is insignificant in His eyes.

My prayer for you this Christmas is that you may grow in sensitivity. Let it be said that in the Church of Rochester, Christ is recognized in all persons — rich and poor, happy and hurting, powerful and powerless. Let it be said that we choose gospel values over against current cultural trends. If this be so, then we will be living out the real meaning of Christmas.

Devotedly yours in Christ Our Saviour,

Joseph L. Hogan
+ Most Reverend Joseph L. Hogan, D. D.
Bishop of Rochester

