

# Sharing a few insights about Christmas

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

I want to offer to you and to all of your loved ones my prayerful best wishes for a holy and happy Christmas season. I hope that this will be a special time for all of you; that your attentiveness to the mystery of the birth of the Christ Child will bring you a strong sense and acceptance of your own humanity and an ever-deeper regard for the dignity of every human person.

Let me share with you three characteristics of the Christmas feast that I have been thinking about, offer a brief reflection on each, and invite you to consider them in your own prayer these days.

## Inclusiveness

This pouring out of God's love for us in Christ is a mystery not limited by time or place or social circumstance. It is an act of love offered to all women and men of all times and all places. God became like us so that we can all become like God.

If we are to participate as honestly and fully in that mystery as God wants us to, we need to pray for the grace of heart never to close ourselves down to the dignity and worth of any other human person. Much

less can we ever do that to any group of people.

That doesn't mean that we can expect to feel great about everyone we meet or that we need approve of unacceptable conduct. It does mean that we can never de-personalize other human beings or groups of human beings as in "...that scum bag," "...that animal" or "...none of them are any good."

## Peacefulness

We can glamorize the birth story, and when we do so, we miss such elements as the cold, the poverty, the harshness that likely surrounded the real event. Mary and Joseph had nowhere to go and few of the resources that would increase the safety and comfort of the child's birthing. It was so poor. And when we tone down that reality, we miss the peacefulness of it all — a peacefulness born not of comfortable circumstances, but of a radical trust that God's love was available to them through every moment of the experience.

When we review the circumstances of our own lives during this season of grace, it's good for us to remember — whether we

are young or old, rich or poor, healthy or ill — that we live in a radical dependence on God's love and that God's love is with us in every moment. That realization can be threatening at first, but it can always give birth to a wonderful peace of heart.

## Hopefulness

A living memory of what God does for us in the person of Jesus can be an undying source of hope for us in a time when there is much darkness. The frailty of the infant, the poverty of his birth and the simplicity of his life place in a clear setting the great lessons Jesus teaches about — the ways in which the human spirit flourishes. He teaches the ways of love and forgiveness, of understanding and reconciliation. There is no violence, no condemnation in him. He never crosses anyone off his list, nor does he ever deny the human dignity of anyone.

All of that is hopeful to me. Even though we manage so often to go another way, we know that Christ's love is always available to us, that we can forgive others even when our hurt is great, that we can resolve difficulties without war or other violence,



that we can deal effectively with the severe problems that face our world. If only we could trust as Mary and Joseph trusted.

Be assured of my Christmas prayer for you. I'll be celebrating the feast according to my usual pattern: midnight Mass at Sacred Heart Cathedral, morning Mass at the Monroe County Jail, and then to my sister's home for one of her wonderful dinners. You'll be with me in all of those places.

Peace to all.

# Joyful presence of a child turns battlefield into place of peace

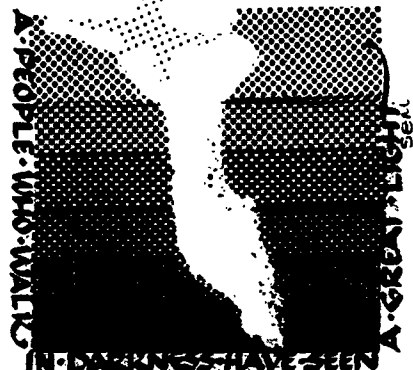
By Father David Joseph Faraone  
Guest contributor

Father Richard Mattie, ordained a priest of the Rochester diocese in 1959, has served the U.S. Navy as a chaplain for 18 years.

Like so many of our sons and daughters, brothers, sisters and friends, he is currently stationed in the Persian Gulf. While walking along a passageway on the U.S.N.S. Mercy during Thanksgiving week, a young sailor handed him a poem that she asked him to read at the Eucharist.

Written by her friend, James Morgan, it reflects the possibility of war and a vision of peace:

"As night falls on the desert sands,  
the stars fill up the sky  
We sit and watch the time bomb tick,  
as another day goes by.



Far away from life and home, we've come to do our part  
To sit and wonder when it ends, or will it ever start.  
'We're here to keep peace' we say, a 'show' of strength and might  
But do money, greed and power con-

rol this 'show' tonight?

Like pieces on a chess board, we're here to play the game

On one side sits the world, on the other Saddam Hussein

And so we sit and wait and watch, and hope deep in our hearts

That somehow this will end before it ever starts."

On Christmas Day and throughout the season, priests will pray in many languages the words of the Preface at Eucharist: "Today, in Jesus, a new light has dawned upon the world: God has become one with us again and we have become one again with God."

With deep faith and enduring hope, these words boldly proclaim the heart and soul of the Incarnation. "Born in time, Jesus has come to lift up all things to himself, to restore unity to creation, and to lead us from exile into the heavenly kingdom."

A friend who served in World War II recently shared with me the events of a new

day that had dawned on a battlefield in Northern France. The fog was thick, hindering visibility. Between the French and German camps was a French farmhouse where a small family lived. As the sun rose and the fog lifted, the guns started again.

But suddenly, both sides stopped firing. There was utter silence and the soldiers held their breath. Right out there in the middle of the battlefield was a baby crawling! The baby stopped, sat down and picked a flower and laughed with delight!

Both sides were so tense, fearful that the other side would start shooting again and endanger the life of that baby. The child seemed perfectly content and happy, and that little laugh carried clearly to both sides. Not a shot was fired for some time!

It wasn't long before a soldier jumped from one of the trenches, ran out to the middle of the battlefield and lifted the baby in his arms. A great roar of cheering and applause went up from both sides, followed by shouts of joy as the little baby was carried to safety. That place of war somehow had become a place of peace because of the presence of a child.

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