

A 'new' way to celebrate Christmas

In just a few days, dear friends, we will celebrate the Nativity of the Lord, the great feast of Christmas. We will rejoice that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." We will find fresh hope in our faith that, in Christ, God became like us that we might become like God.

I extend to you and all of your loved ones my love and my prayers for a Merry Christmas and a new year filled with many blessings.

Above all, I express the hope that all of us will have some time to think about this feast and what it means in the life of one who loves the Lord. I know that finding such time is not an easy task at this time of the year. There are just so many claims on our time and energy, so many good and kind things to be done.

Yet, we all know that prayer, thought and conversation with loved ones about things that truly matter bring a new dimension of life to all of us. They help us to appreciate more deeply the gifts God gives to us each day. Such activities help us to see one another in truer light; thus,



along
the way

BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK



they draw us closer together.

Prayer, thought and conversation about the important things help us to understand better the flow of the years and the relationship between seemingly unconnected experiences. They help us to draw new meaning from past events and deeper meaning from what happens today.

Let me make a couple of suggestions along these lines that you might find helpful during the Christmas season:

1) Take some time during the season to remember the Christmases of your life. Go through them slowly, remembering all who were part of them, how you celebrat-

ed, where you were, what was happening in your life.

2) Consider the events, experiences and relationships of your life that have affected your appreciation of this feast. What about Vietnam? The death of a loved one? The birth of a child? The horror of September 11?

It is healthy to consider the feast — this whole season — in this way. After all, it is a feast of the flesh, of our humanity, of our relationships to Christ and one another, of our great possibilities and our incompleteness.

In sum, Christmas is a roll-up-your-sleeves kind of feast. We do it no honor if we merely repeat past patterns without allowing the mystery of it all to engage the deepest part of our spirits. When that occurs we have a better sense of the Christ and of how precious a gift his humanity is to all of us. We also come to a better sense of who we are, of how God wants us to make the gift of our own humanity to others.

Peace to all.

On the cover:

For this year's cover, Graphic Artist Linda Jeanne Rivers illustrated *The Rule of Immanuel* from Isaiah 11, verses 6-9:

*Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the kid.
The calf and the young lion shall browse together,
with a little child to guide them.
The cow and the bear shall be neighbors,
together their young shall rest;
the lion shall eat hay like the ox.*

*The baby shall play by the cobra's den,
and the child lay his hand on the adder's lair.
There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy
mountain;
for the earth shall be filled with knowledge
of the Lord,
as water covers the sea.*



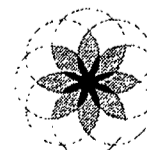
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