

# Readers share their faith

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The *Courier* asked readers to share their feelings about two Scripture passages centering on hope in Christ. Some of the essays we received appear on this and the next three pages.

## An open heart allows people to appreciate mystery of Bethlehem

Twenty-two years ago, while in Jerusalem, I heard a remarkable Christmas story. It's about a couple who years ago lived in a home that was built over the Damascus Gate of the Old City. They were a well-to-do couple, Christians. And it was Christmas Eve.

They locked the door of their home and set out for Bethlehem. They would get there in time for the midnight Mass. As they took the road to the bus that would take them to Bethlehem, they came upon a young couple walking slowly and hesitantly toward the gate. They were obviously poor, and the woman was obviously pregnant.

The older couple who were on their way to Bethlehem were moved with compassion for them. "Can we direct you to wherever you are going?" they asked. The young man said: "We are poor and we don't really know where we are going." He and his wife moved on. The older couple hesitated. But if they didn't hurry they would be late for the midnight Mass.

They started walking toward the bus station. All at once they stop-

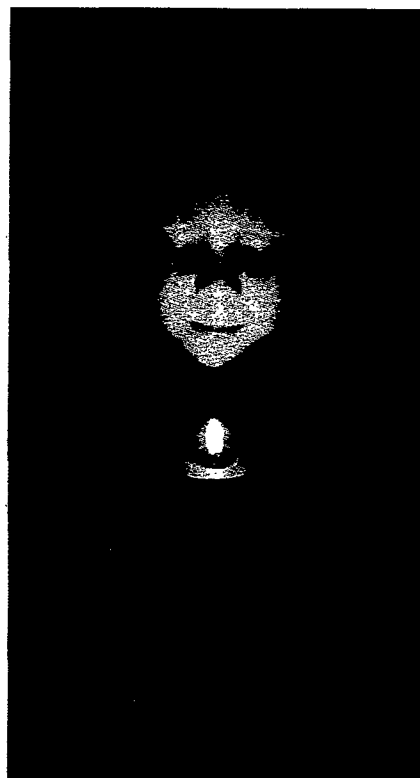
ped. As if in unison, they said to one another: "What are we doing? We are not going toward Bethlehem. We are going away from Bethlehem. Bethlehem came to us and we didn't even recognize it." They turned about and offered the young couple the hospitality of their home. And there in the house at the Damascus Gate, the woman gave birth to her first-born son.

Christmas is a feast that we can appreciate only if we allow the eyes of our hearts to be dilated. We have to hear Paul telling us, "The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all." We have to look beyond surface facts and see mystery — the mystery of a tiny Child just born who is older than the universe.

We have to expand our vision. Like the older couple in Jerusalem, we have to open the eyes of our hearts to see that the mystery of Bethlehem is never far away. We will find Bethlehem in the poor, in the lonely, in those for whom our world has no more room than it had for Mary's Child who was also God's Child.

I recall one past Christmas when a mother, filled with sadness and feelings of helplessness, told me about her unmarried daughter who just a few days earlier had given birth to a baby. Her husband was upset and refused to allow their daughter to come home for Christmas. Sadly, there are many such young women for whom there is no room, as there was no room for God's Son when he came into our midst.

Thomas Merton has written:



"Christ's place is with those others for whom there is no room. His place is with those who do not belong, who are rejected by power because they are regarded as weak, those who are discredited, who are denied the status of persons, tortured, exterminated. With those for whom there is no room, Christ is present in this world. He is mysteriously present in those for whom there seems to be nothing but the world at its worst ... It is in these that he hides himself, (the people) for whom there is no room."

Msgr. William H. Shannon is professor emeritus of Nazareth College in Rochester.

## Take time to find the hope in Christ

It is my belief that people who seem to see only darkness, especially at this time of year, need to take time with our Christmas readings and see the blatant hope that pours out of them. We have all experienced walking or running in darkness these past months and weeks, yet the light is still triumphantly in our midst. What we need to do is turn our backs from the dark and face the ever-present light of our God.

The prophet Jeremiah speaks of a future full of hope. Our task is to look toward that future, our future, with outstretched hands and hearts. We need to take each others' hands and journey together into the future and not fall back into the past.

The light of Christ is now shining if we but have the eyes of the heart to see it. We may need to let go, to forgive, to believe that our past has taught us great lessons that we now need to teach others. We need to therefore go where that light beckons. We may have to change the ways we used to travel with Christ's light. We may find new companions along the way. We may even find that Christ is indeed in our midst, gifting us with the hope, the joy and the peace we so clearly long for and desire deep within.

Do we DARE to let the light in? Can we dare not to?

Mercy Sister Rosemary Sherman is a parishioner at St. Louis Church, Pittsford.

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