

Christmas

December 25, 2010
Saint Margaret Parish, Bel Air

Maybe I do not even have to suggest this, but let's all turn our attention for a moment to the nativity scene here in church. Please notice especially the image of the infant in the manger. And notice that his arms are outstretched. It is almost as if the infant Jesus is reaching out or even embracing us. I have looked at a number of nativity scenes this past week. In ours and most that I have seen, the infant's arms are depicted as outstretched. This evening I have a number of reflections centered on the infant and his arms.

First and most obvious, God comes to us and enters our world as an infant. In this, Jesus in Bethlehem identifies with children and youth and all those growing to adulthood. Jesus calls us to do all we can to protect and nurture the life of children and to foster good growth opportunities for our youth. When we do this, we are at our best as Christians and as Catholics.

Then, God comes to us and enters our world with poor shepherds attending him. In this, Jesus in Bethlehem identifies with the poor in our midst and throughout the world. Jesus calls us to provide shelter for the homeless right here in Harford County, to make sure that families have food and clothing and health care and even some gifts at Christmas, and to be concerned for anyone in need. When we do this, we are at our best as Christians and as Catholics.

God also comes to us and enters our world with wealthy magi from the East attracted to him. In this, Jesus in Bethlehem identifies with the affluent and the influential and the educated. Jesus calls us to use as fully as possible the gifts and talents God has given us and with them to care for the common good so that everyone will have the opportunity to develop their potentials. When we do this, we are at our best as Christians and as Catholics.

Then God comes to us and enters our world simply as a person like us, a human being. In this, Jesus in Bethlehem is one with us in our humanity and takes us where we are. Jesus calls us not to hold ourselves above others and not to judge and condemn, but rather to take each other where we are, as fellow travelers on the journey to God, and then to journey humbly with one another. When we do this, we are at our best as Christians and Catholics.

And to go back to where I began, God comes to us and enters our world with arms outstretched. In this, Jesus in Bethlehem accepts and includes everyone. Jesus calls us, as he repeatedly does in his adult life, not to shun or exclude because of differences in faith or way of living, but to accept and

include everyone in God's family and realize that this is the way to personal wholeness and holiness. When we do this, we are at our best as Christians and as Catholics.

There is something magnetic about every infant or baby. They attract us to themselves. We want to hold and cuddle them. May Jesus in Bethlehem also attract us. May we be drawn to him. May we be formed and fashioned by who he is and how he relates to us and to all persons. Then we will be at our best as Christians and Catholics.