



## Where will we find Him?

A Christmas 2007 Message

From

The Rt. Rev. Leo Frade

If Jesus were to be born into our world this December, would we know where to find him?

Maybe we'd look for such an important person at the White House or the National Cathedral. Maybe he'd arrive with an entourage of bodyguards at the airport, or be surrounded by glittering Christmas trees on a richly carpeted stage in the center of the mall.

Or would we think to look somewhere simpler and more unlikely? Perhaps near the trash bins at any mall, or in an alley behind a shelter for the homeless; maybe under a bridge; in a treatment center for drug addicts; a home for abandoned children; a hospital for the severely disabled; a nursing home; perhaps in the desert near the Mexican border, or in a boat drifting at sea, filled with men, women and children on a journey of desperation and hope.

Where would we find the one who comes to transform us and our world?

Maybe it was easier for the shepherds who heard, *"This will be a sign for you; you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger."* Luke 2:12

What a simple clue it was. The shepherds were first afraid when the angel of the Lord appeared announcing the birth of our Savior in Bethlehem, the city of David. Now they were told how to recognize him: Just "look for a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." Right after that innocuous clue is given, the shepherds and the messenger angel are joined by a multitude from heaven, praising God with the chorus that is so familiar to us during the Christmas season: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to all persons of good will."

A multitude of the heavenly host is bound to catch anyone's attention, and especially such an extraordinary angelic presentation. School and church plays depicting Christ's birth are blessed by having a heavenly host of characters, allowing every single child to be part of the presentation. Angels are always a hit, and I must say that I enjoyed photographing my children with those beautiful wings.

But at that first Christmas the shepherds headed for Bethlehem, and following their clue, they found Mary and Joseph with baby Jesus, their firstborn, resting in a manger. There were no angels in the stable, no multitude from heaven, no angelic singing--just a father and mother with their recently born son, wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger. Frankly, what the shepherds saw was nothing extraordinary--just a

simple picture of parents with their newborn. It was a scene probably repeated around the world at that same time, though perhaps without the manger.

I wonder how many of us would have noticed that anything out of the ordinary was happening if we had been in Bethlehem that night. The shepherds knew because the angel had informed them. Later three wise men would come to adore him and give him gifts, but they also had been forewarned, and they had been following a guiding star.

But what about the neighbors, the innkeeper, all of those other people in Bethlehem--and what about you and me? If we are not going to get any help from a mapquest.com angel, or the best Christmas Angelic Chorale ever presented, to find the right place, then we may need better clues than just to “look for a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” I don’t think that it is too much to ask; after all, we have become so conditioned to respond to so many glitzy secular marketing messages that such a small and simple clue will not attract our attention.

One has to wonder how many people get completely exhausted doing all the things we do during these holidays. We will be busy putting up the tree with all its decorations, sending the Christmas cards to family and acquaintances, getting the turkey and all the trimmings, and of course, shopping--patiently supporting all the Christmas music beamed by our merchant friends since Halloween and praying for a parking space in a crowded mall.

But during this holy time let’s remember that it is with precisely the simple clue the shepherds were given—to search for the Savior in a simple and unlikely place--that we will also be able to find him.

One of my favorite saints of the Church is able to make this point succinctly. Julian of Norwich (1342-c.1416) wrote in *The Book of Showings: Revelations of Divine Love* about the greatness of what may seem small and unimportant. She tells of one of her visions in which she is asked to hold something no bigger than a hazelnut. As she begins to wonder what it is, God answers her, saying: “It is everything that is made.” She marvels that this small thing continues to exist, so small and so delicate, until she finally realizes that it exists and continues to exist because God loves it.

We will find the Christ in the small things we do during this time, and not necessarily through the material things we may give and receive, or even those wonderful, well-cooked meals that we will be sharing with family and friends. Our Lord is going to be in the telephone calls to those that we somehow don’t reach often, in a visit to someone who is now unable to get out as they used to, in the forgiveness that we may show to someone who has offended us, or in our willingness to listen to someone with whom we may disagree.

Maybe we will find the Christ when we spend less time at the mall and instead, dedicate that free time to enjoying our children, or to giving a sweet tender caress to someone we love. Or perhaps we can find baby Jesus this Christmas by being generous with those in need, whether we assist those who will spend Christmas in a shelter for the homeless, make a contribution to Food for the Poor for victims of hurricane disasters in the Caribbean and Central America, give to Episcopal Relief and Development for the relief of suffering from the floods in Bangladesh or for the prevention of malaria and HIV/AIDS in Africa, or support an orphaned or abandoned girl at Our Little Roses in Honduras.

If you are not one of the three wise men with a star to guide you, then you will have to follow the same clue given to the shepherds and to the rest of us: Look for something simple. Just “find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” Find our infant Lord by daring to make a difference to someone in this hurting world that needs all the help we can give. In the midst of war, prejudice, xenophobia, homophobia, misogyny, hunger and ecological disasters we must remember that this is still God’s world and that he is counting on us to make it better.

Don’t worry that what you may contribute to make the world better this Christmas is too small and will not be enough. Our Lord himself came to us that first Christmas as a tiny, helpless baby, and He is always enough for all that we need. Be assured that God is still in control and continues saying most comfortingly, as St. Julian reminds us, “I may make all things well, and can make all things well, and I shall make all things well, and I will make all things well, and you will see yourself that every kind of thing will be well...”

Merry Christmas,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Leo Frade", written in a cursive style.

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