

A Christmas Message From Bishop Pederson

Most of us will be in worship on Christmas Eve. We'll listen to Luke 2, the nativity account beloved by most, and we will envision a manger scene with animals and angels and three gift-bearing kings. Our tradition creates a glow around this scene — star light illuminating the baby Jesus surrounded by the adoration of various players in a holy drama.

Our tradition has made it somewhat crowded around the manger. Our tradition tends to favor a cattle feeder in a wooden shed, not the possibility of a cave commonly used as animal pens. Never mind that the angels left after announcing the birth; never mind that no animals are mentioned in the story; never mind that gift-bearing men are not identified as three or kings or that they wouldn't make an appearance until much, much later. Yet, we crowd all of these details and characters into a sentimental image we hold about the birth of Jesus.

Confession: I am not that sentimental. I am perfectly content to remove the animals and angels and three kings, and all the other unattested, pietistic additions to the scene of the manger, *so that there can be room for you and me!*

You see, it's very comforting to crowd this Christmas scene with all kinds of pretty images that make us feel good. But the danger is that we fill that scene so full that we don't really have to get ourselves into the picture. I want *you* to get in there!

The traditional image might be cherished and lovely, but the sentimental image is not necessarily what we need, even though it may be what we like. The *child* is what we need, and it may be that many of us who celebrate the birth of Jesus *need* to unclutter our picture of the manger a bit, so that the Christ who came to save us can actually get close to us; *close enough to allow the newborn Jesus to unsettle our lives.*

For Jesus has a habit of embracing the lost, the least, and the last, and calls us to do the same.




For Jesus completely claims us as his own, and invites faith and commitment completely in him.

For Jesus reveals God's grace in his self-giving, and bids us to share this same

unmerited love with all, even the most undesirable or difficult to love.

There is no guarantee that this child is going to bring you the warm fuzzies many of us look for when we hear the Christmas story, light the candles, and sing of a silent night. But this child *will* bring you a sense of God's nearness, a promise of love that will never end, and meaning for your life that sustains through thick and thin. Note that the story itself doesn't do that. The child does. A story crowded with pietistic, sentimental notions will not do this. The Christ who calls you unto himself does.

Merry *Uncrowded* Christmas!


Bishop Duane C. Pederson