

COME AND SEE  
LUKE 2:1-20

Dr. J. Howard Olds  
Christmas Eve  
December 24, 2005

“Our hearts are forever restless until they find their rest in God.” A brilliant, articulate university professor made that statement more than 1,600 years ago. In September of this year, a cover story in Newsweek magazine on “Spirituality in America” came to this conclusion. “There is a hunger in the human heart for a transcendent experience of God.”

It’s Christmas Eve. The bars are closed; churches are open. Whether or not it is clear to you, you have found your way to church because you are spiritually needy. Some of you know that. Some of you are surprised by that. You who doubt that need to hear it the most. Right at the core of our being there is a hunger for something that is hard to define, almost embarrassing to confess, but which still remains when the world has given us its finest things and every tangible fear has been driven away. There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every human being.

The least likely of all visitors to the manger that first Christmas had to be the shepherds. They were not star gazers. They were not worship attenders. They were not the religious leaders of their day. They were tired, old sinners trying to earn their dinners by tending sheep by night. But when the glory of the Lord came upon them, the angel of the Lord told them the good news of our Savior’s birth. Even the shepherds had sense enough to go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened. Will you join the shepherds at the manger tonight? Come and see.

**COME AND SEE THE PRINCE OF PEACE.**

Once more we gather for worship amid the great noises of war, dramatic descriptions of misery, and sensational expressions of human cruelty that leave us numb. I don’t know why, but the sound bites of soldiers sending home Christmas greetings from Iraq have tugged at my heart this Christmas. The culture wars of “Merry Christmas” versus “Happy Holidays” make me sick in my soul. The fact that we lament murders on the evening news then turn to crime for entertainment later in the night worries me.

Of course there are battlefields of our own making. There are families that won’t gather this Christmas because they can’t get along, and families who will gather in such tension that it becomes uncomfortable for everyone. As a person wrote recently in the Tennessean “Every holiday at Grandma’s house is the same. Although I look forward to it, after three days with my sister’s family I am ready to strangle someone.”

Ultimately I've got me on my hands. The tug of war that goes on in my soul does not declare a truce for Christmas. In fact, the conflict deepens as I struggle with my addictions, my disappointments, my hurts and my fears. Hear the words of the Prophet Isaiah tonight. *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

The peace of God comes from peace with God. Meet the Prince of Peace tonight. He will give you a self you can live with, a love you can relate with, a hope you can dream with.

Come and see the Prince of Peace.

### **COME AND SEE THE LIGHT OF LIFE.**

"Get a life!" Exactly how do we accomplish that imperative?

Mack Wayne Metcalf thought money would give him a life. He won 65.4 million dollars in a Powerball Jackpot. He left his wife, built a big home up in Corbin, Kentucky, and proceeded to live a life full of trouble. Shortly before dying from unknown causes Mack lamented to a friend "Money is the worst thing you could ever want in your life."

Pistol Pete Maravich thought fame would give him a life. Some of you remember his dazzling basketball performances at LSU. In his autobiography Heir to a Dream, Pistol Pete wrote: "I considered basketball to be the ultimate supplier of all my needs. I was wrong. Only a personal relationship with Jesus Christ brings true meaning."

Eighteen-year-old Will Hinds could not find a reason for life, so the kid who could jam with the best of bands took his life without a word of explanation. Every 18 minutes somebody in this country commits suicide. Many of them are teenagers.

John said, *In Him was life, and that life was the light of all people.* Life is small, fragile, tender, vulnerable. No plant will survive without tender loving care! What is more helpless than a baby? There in a tiny manger lies the Lord of lords and King of kings! He is the Savior of the world. Let Him bring you life, abundant life, meaningful life, eternal life. To live is to ask the questions, ponder the possibilities, consider the options. But most of all to live is to embrace the present. Because of that baby, I can embrace the moment, without the oughts and shoulds of yesterday loading me down. Because of that baby I can face tomorrow, not asking "What if" but rejoicing in "Who is."

### **COME AND SEE LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT.**

If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it.

Our granddaughter Ella is a bundle of energy and an inferno of curiosity. She has her set rituals at our house. She has to get our sculpture of Jesus down, where

she can rub him on the nose and sing “Jesus loves me, this I know.” Then she wants to be held as she points to her picture on the refrigerator and gleefully calls her name. Remember how simple it all was back then?

Reveling in the joy of grandchildren, I found myself praying at bedtime the other night:

Be near me Lord Jesus, I ask you to stay,  
Close by me forever, and love me I pray.  
Bless all the dear children in thy tender care,  
And fit us for heaven to live with thee there.

Isn't that all we really need? To be loved, and to know it.

In my business, I get my share of letters and e-mails. Some are meant to set me straight on some blunder I've made in the pulpit, or to question some leadership decision I have made.

A different kind of letter appeared on my desk this week. In part it went like this: “My last few years have been empty and held no hope. Then I discovered BUMC, where I am loved, and lifted, and given the word of God. Here I can relax, learn, and receive the fellowship of others. Thank you.” It was signed “A lost sheep now found.”

A young girl, excited by the scenes of Bethlehem on display in our Multipurpose Room, came running up to me yesterday afternoon saying “Dr. Olds, Dr. Olds, we've been to Bethlehem.”

O, that all of us who hunger for God, could find our way to Bethlehem tonight and have our hearts strangely warmed by the One who loves us no matter what—even Christ our Lord. Amen.















