

CHRISTMAS STIRRINGS

This year I share with you what is deep within my heart. Words invoke entranceways. I feel strongly about God longing for our imperfections to be seen as the very place where His Grace can most make a difference in the world of our own hearts. I share with you my latest reflection

PEACE WITHIN US

Purest stillness is never still
Deepest silence is never silent,
In the journey of Openness
distinctions always become defined.

Sounds uninvited, images unimaginable
enter our chaos struggling for perfection.

Spoken to Shepherds
now proclaimed again to us,
Imperfection is the feeling
most able to receive,
Incompleteness is the dwelling
most able to embrace.

Sung by Angels
now preformed anew for us,
Glory is always Glory
welcomed in or not.
Salvation is always Salvation
invited in or not.

Vulnerable and broken
is the soul that
stirs of this reality.

Break us and humble us, O God,
that this reality
may be ours.

Rev. John J. Ouper
Christmas 2021

THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH

Family is precious and messy. It is at times filled with tension and frustration. Communication can be amplified and at times it can be nonexistent. No matter how complete or how broken, the importance of the foundation is of value. Holiness dwells in the love shared and poured into our families. Imperfect as it is and can be, most families began with dreams of possibilities and hope. The family God chose for me was stable and loving. Expectations were high to finish college and freedom was given to pursue what we found as our passion. I am grateful to have been given such a special foundation and I know it is not the experience of all. Today we lift up all families to be open to a holiness that is of divine origin. A simple couple, Mary and Joseph, had their lives changed completely by God's plan. The plan of God continues as the world continues.

May this day find us lifting up the importance of family and the openness to God's continuing plan.



Fr. John

GOD'S NEW STARTING POINT

In a story we all know, with details we have gone over time and time again, we celebrate Christmas. In the chaotic movement of our lives, God redefines for us His plan and His purpose for the salvation of the world. We live in a world on the move. Our lives have been inundated with places to be, events to plan and people to see. This movement is the foundation of the season. In the time of Caesar Augustus, he gave a decree that the whole world was to be enrolled and counted. Everyone was on the move. When an emperor made a decree it was called "good news" just because the emperor decreed it. So as a response, a young couple makes a journey to Bethlehem. Joseph and Mary were on the move. In the midst of their time in the city of David, Mary gives birth and wraps her child Jesus in swaddling clothes. The real Good News has come into the world! Angels break forth to tell shepherds of this new decree. What prophets foretold is now real, what was awaited for has now come.

The challenge for us is not all of the movement and chaos within our lives, but it is to embrace the real Good News of Salvation. God is on the move. Beyond political decrees and advertising blitzes, the real Good News enters the world and still does. To recognize it, and to choose it, one must go to the place where promises are fulfilled and the hunger for more is found in the midst of the realization of our incompleteness. There is nothing like a rapid heartbeat of a child squealing in the unwrapping of a gift, or the contentment of a family that for the first time in a long time can have second helpings of food because of the generosity of others. There is nothing like seeing a loved one come home for the holiday or the magic of lights lit, presenting for a moment a transcendent memory. Good always overcomes evil because of the Incarnational Love we proclaim today.

In our haste to get it all done, God is never done. In our desire to get it right, true righteousness was placed in a manger because there was no room anywhere else. God redefines the entire world with this Good News! His movement from heaven to earth, His movement from chaos to peace can make its dwelling within us, but we must choose it and allow it to choose us. To be a vessel of this kind of reality we must be aware of our own vulnerability, brokenness, and incompleteness. When we feel unwelcome, not good enough or don't fit in, it is God's starting point. Accept those feelings and allow yourself to be loved by God. His healing will bring completeness. When we can't do it alone, we are exhausted or overwhelmed and need help, that is God's starting point. Embrace that place and allow it to be embraced by God. He accomplishes His most when we accomplish our least trying to do it on our own. Rely on Him to finish what is essential to His plan. When we feel what faces us is insurmountable, what we have done or not done defines us, and our failures are always before us, that is God's starting point. Admit the imperfections and allow the perfection of our Savior's sacrifice to do its transforming work. Jesus entered our world to save us. When He came there was no room. His birth announcement was sent by the angels, and the shepherds watching in the fields who never expected to see what they saw. His starting point cannot be controlled by logic, science, or even theologians—it is pure and simply Divine.

May this day find us allowing God to find His new starting point within us.

Merry Christmas,



Fr. John J. Ouper