



Apartment of the Grand Prelate



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Right Eminent Grand Commander and Lady Jodi,
Grace and Peace to you and to those you hold dear!

As I thought about writing this Christmas message, a verse from "O Little Town of Bethlehem" began running through my mind:

"O holy Child of Bethlehem! Descend to us, we pray; Cast out our sin and enter in; be born in us today. We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell; O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!"

Wouldn't it be great if Jesus could be born in us, in some new way, each and every day? Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary once. But Jesus can also be born in us, again and again. I think it depends on whether we have what Stuart Brisco calls "The Spirit of Christmas" or "The Spirit of Christ". Now some might say well, "What's the difference?"

The "Spirit of Christmas" is that warm, fuzzy feeling of "peace on earth and good will to women and men" that we usually get around the holidays. We place, not just our leftover change, in the Salvation Army bucket, but whole dollars! We give generously to other charities, clothing and food banks, as well. We even smile at strangers, sing Christmas carols, and are generally uplifted. We don't even get angry when someone pushes in front of us in line at the gift wrapping station! (Sometimes.)

The "Spirit of Christmas" is powerful. But it passes. "The Spirit of Christ," on the other hand, "Emmanuel," "God with us" can be a daily event. What can happen to you and me is similar to what happened to Mary. The Holy Spirit came upon Mary. Christ was born in her.

What Mary felt, the biological bonding with the Christ Child, you and I can never feel. Still, "The Spirit of Christ," the Holy Spirit, can be born in us today, and every day. Some experience the Holy Spirit as overpowering, like the wind and fire at Pentecost. Others experience the Spirit as "a certain, emotional uplift, stillness, a still, small voice. But whether the Spirit comes to us as Wind and Fire or as a still small Voice, Jesus promised us the Holy Spirit as our Helper. If we don't experience the Spirit, might it be because we haven't invited the Spirit in?

Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me today according to your word." Mary was inviting the Spirit into her life. But do we make time to invite "The Spirit of Christ" into ours? Have we established a place where we can meet the "Spirit of Christ" in our daily life? Who knows what the Spirit might do in us and through us, if we gave it half a chance.

What that means is putting up in our lives one of those signs you sometimes see in stores: UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT. We're under new management if we invite the Spirit of Christ into our lives. Our circumstances may not change. The Shepherds went back to tending their sheep – good thing for the sheep! Their circumstances didn't change, but their attitude did. From then on, they were under new management. Their life belonged to Christ.

Howard Thurman, a great African-American preacher from another generation, puts it another way:

***"When the song of the angel is stilled, When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home, When the shepherds are back with their flocks;
The work of Christmas begins; To find the lost, To heal the broken, To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner, To rebuild the nations, To bring peace among people, To make
music with the heart...."***

***"O holy Child of Bethlehem! Descend to us, we pray; Cast out our sin and enter in;
be born in us today. We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell; O come to
us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!"***

Christmas is not just about December 25, and parties and presents. Christmas is about a Living Presence, "The Spirit of Christ," "Emmanuel," "God with us," every day. Today you and I can make a place for the Christ Child. He doesn't have to stay "Away In A Manger" in a "Little Town Of Bethlehem." He can be born in us, and live in us, and work God's will through us, every day. If we establish a place of peace and quiet, if we put ourselves under new management, if we say daily "Behold we are the servants of the Lord. Let it be to us according to your word."

I would invite all Sir Knights this Christmas to look beyond the trappings that our society has heaped upon our Christmas celebration. Invite the Spirit of Christ this Christmas into your life and experience for yourself the awesome moment when God- the Creator, is here among us.

So, on behalf of the Sir Knights of the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of Pennsylvania, may you both be blessed this Christmas season with hope, love and joy! May the Spirit of Christ lead you on through the balance of your year and may all our commanderies join in defending the faith and giving glory to God.

Joy and peace to you and to your families this Christmas.

**S.K. & Rev. Robert A. Witmyer
Grand Prelate**

