

Or perhaps we may realize that we are the ones who need to hear the Good News. To realize that we are one of those living on the fringe right now and that we have gotten very skilled at hiding it. Maybe some here have given up on God, or given up on ourselves, or are so overwhelmed with challenges that we are just going through the motions. God has the name word for us: Good News of great joy. If only we would realize it.

The fact is we all live in Bethlehem. Just as the Lord was born in Bethlehem, so the Lord wants to be born in our hearts. There were people who were in Bethlehem for that first Christmas and yet they still missed it. They were so preoccupied with their daily tasks and problems (while perhaps simultaneously crying out to God for the long-awaited Savior He had promised) that they were oblivious to the fact that he was right there in their midst! St Joseph even knocked on some of their doors, but they did not have room. They could have had the Lord under their roof but they missed out.

We do not merely celebrate what happened two thousand years ago in Bethlehem. We celebrate what began in Bethlehem. The Lord has come to us. He knocks on our door.

The Lord wants to come under our roof. As we say at Mass before Communion, Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof, but the One whose birth was announced to shepherds living with animals in the fields wants to come to all.

On Christmas morning children hurry to the tree to see the presents. The first thing they will do is look for the name tag. Who is it for? Is it for me? Who is the gift of a Savior for? The angels tell the shepherds: for you and for all. This gift has your name on Him, my name on Him, our names on Him.

We do not merely celebrate an historical event, but instead a reality here and now. Regardless of our emotions this evening, whether we are in the spirit of the season or not, unto us is born a Savior who brings Good News even to those on the fringes. He brings peace of mind and heart which the world cannot give and cannot take away. He brings purpose and meaning to our lives. He brings strength to the exhausted, comfort to the sorrowing, healing to broken hearts, reconciliation to sinners and He brings the Good News that we are offered eternal life.

I pray that God will bless you and your loved ones and that each of you will have a merry and holy Christmas.

Sincerely in the Lord,

Most Reverend Thomas J. Rodi
Archbishop of Mobile

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT 2019
MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF MOBILE

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

Each year, on the Fourth Sunday of Advent, it is my privilege to speak to you, the people of the Archdiocese of Mobile, and to wish you God's blessings as we prepare in a few days to celebrate that God became flesh in order to bring us salvation.

We will listen to the familiar story of the Nativity. The babe was born and angels appeared to the shepherds to bring them the Good News.

In many ways we have made the story of the Nativity antiseptic, a charming pageant for children to perform. The real story of the birth of Jesus was far from the clean and lovely scene depicted in our churches.

The glory of angels appeared to shepherds. But the shepherds were rough and dirty. Decent people looked down upon them. Shepherds were not considered good for anything other than to live with the animals in the fields. Due to their absence from the towns, they were not able to keep the precepts of Judaic law and were considered ritually unclean. They were certainly physically unclean. They were not considered trustworthy and in the law of the time no shepherd could be a witness in a court of law. No one would have believed their testimony anyhow.

The Good News is that the angels did not appear to those at the highest levels of society, instead they appeared to those on the fringes of society, the shepherds.

The incredible Good News of great joy grew from there. Throughout His life and ministry Jesus continued to speak the Good News of great joy to people on the fringe of society and on the fringe of faith. He spoke this Good News to lepers, cut off from family and friends. He spoke this Good News to the woman at the well in Samaria, who had been married five times and now living with a sixth man. He spoke this Good News to Jarius regarding his daughter who had died. He spoke this Good News to the paralytic let down through the roof of the house where Jesus was teaching. He spoke this Good News to the man possessed by a demon. He spoke this Good News to the thief on the cross. He spoke this Good News to the disciples after His resurrection as He commissioned them to go into all the world making disciples.

We can sing "Silent Night" and "Joy to the World" celebrating this holiday. But more importantly we can realize that Jesus' Good News extends even to those who have given up on God, who have given up on themselves and just can't bring themselves to worship even at Christmas and yet pretend that everything is all right. These are often the people on the fringe of life. You may be just the person to let them know, or help them see, that God has a word for them: Good News of great joy. As God entrusted Jesus to Mary to bring Jesus into the world, so God now entrusts Jesus to us to bring Him into the world; to bring His love and message to others by all we say and do, by the values we live by, and by our example as men and women of faith.