

Dear Friends,

It seems to me that there was something a little bit different about Christmas this year. Was it the new Christmas Pageant the children of our parish performed on Christmas Eve? It was new, and beautiful. Was it the fact that we had bigger crowds at each of the Masses on Christmas Eve and Christmas day? It is always such a joy to welcome people who have traveled, college students returning home, and folks who come back to visit for the holidays. Could it be the way the Church was decorated? I heard comments like "Our church has never looked so beautiful." Comments like that make my heart sing with pride, but I didn't have very much to do with how the Church looks. It was the parishioners who took time out on a Sunday evening to decorate the church, who made it look so wonderful.

Maybe everything mentioned above contributed to the wonderful celebration of Christmas this year. However, I think there is also something more going on here. For many reasons we have been hungry to celebrate something simple and yet miraculous. In the darkness of this world the light of God's love has come to fill our lives with love and peace.

How do we celebrate God's love? I have watched people over the years and I am beginning to understand more clearly now, that we celebrate the loving presence of God in simple, almost understated ways. All the work that went into preparing to celebrate Christmas included lots of stress, but it was also a lot of fun. All the Christmas parties with family and friends, all the presents that were purchased and wrapped, all the decorating and cooking and hard work that went into celebrating Christmas made us all kind of happy it was all over. I believe it was worth it. In fact, some of us are already looking forward to next year. All this hard work, though, does not have that much to do with what Christmas is all about. All the hard work and stress included in what we call the Christmas holiday is more about a season of having fun than it is about celebrating the incarnation.

We celebrate the incarnation much more simply. We celebrate the birth of the Lord in quieter, more personal ways. In fact, I think what I saw that looked different this year from past Christmas celebrations is an awareness that God really does come to save us in a time in which we are really struggling as a culture. We take comfort in knowing that God is not far away from us. We experience a sense of quiet security in knowing that in all the confusion and doubt our God truly does come to save us.

What a beautiful Christmas it has been. Maybe it wasn't perfect. Maybe the weather was rougher than we had hoped. Perhaps we are all in need of a little break after trying so hard to celebrate the holidays. My hope is that the quiet joy of knowing how deeply we are loved by God will remain throughout the rest of this brand new year. We need it now more than ever.

In joyful hope,
Fr. Tim Seigel