

Holy Family December 26, 2004

By Father Charles Bowes

Sirach 3:2-7, 12-14

Psalms 128:1-2, 3, 4-5

Colossians 3:12-21

Matthew 2:13-15

*We are now the family of the dying and rising Lord,
touching and comforting one another in the Spirit of Jesus.*

Many years ago, a pastor stopped by the home of a young woman whose husband had been buried the day before. They had only been married three months when death stalked her husband with pneumonia and brought him down at last.

In one corner of the couple's living room, an old, white-haired woman sat in a low chair, her face half hidden by her hand. Her other hand softly rubbed the shoulder of the young widow, little more than a girl, sitting at her feet. Suddenly the widow turned, almost ferociously, on the pastor. "Where is God?" she demanded. "I've prayed to Him. Where is He? You preached once on the 'Everlasting Arms.' Where are they...where are they now for me?" The minister drew his fingertips lightly down the older woman's arm. "They are here," he said. "They are round you even now. These are the arms of God."

Christmas celebrates more than a single event, more than just the birth of a child in a Bethlehem cave long ago. Christmas celebrates a presence that continues to this day and for all time: "Emmanuel," God is with us. In Christ's birth, God touches human history. Hope reigns; justice takes root; peace is possible. The Spirit of

the dying and rising Lord is unleashed and available to all for the asking.

The challenge to each one of us is to continue the work of "Emmanuel" in which we are already engaged - a work known often only to God and the person so living - to continue to make God's presence tangible by being his "arms" for the hurting, his "hands" for the needy, his "heart" for the grieving. May God so gift us this Christmas that we may be strengthened to continue to bring God's presence into every Bethlehem and Nazareth around us.

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