

November 28, 2011

Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. Luke 2:9-10 (NRSV)

Dear Members and Friends of the New England Mission Center,

Let me make it very clear: the Good News is NOT that retail sales are up 7% over a year ago. Luke has it exactly right. The Good News is, and always has been, that God is still revealing God's self to God's creation through Jesus Christ. God is still desperately seeking to be in relationship with us and entice us to live in sacred community with each other that exhibits the characteristics of God's kingdom. And the most amazing thing about all this continues to be that God does this with a story about the birth of one, lowly, insignificant baby born in the backwater of the mighty Roman Empire. As always, the task before us is to make sense of this in ways that speak to us in our own time.

Fortunately, we in Community of Christ have been blessed with some remarkable tools for doing just that. I hope you have become familiar with the Enduring Principles of Grace and Generosity, Sacredness of Creation, Continuing Revelation, Worth of All Persons, All Are Called, Responsible Choices, Pursuit of Peace, Unity in Diversity, and Blessings of Community. These teach us what it means to BE sacred community. The Mission Initiatives, unveiled this year, give us the guidelines for DOING mission based on who we are. They are as follows: Invite People to Christ, Abolish Poverty, End Suffering, Pursue Peace on Earth, Develop Disciples to Serve, and Experience Congregations in Mission. As we strive to understand and implement these ideas in our lives and the life of our congregations, we will more fully come to grasp the announcement of the Good News the angels gave to the shepherds so long ago on the hills outside Bethlehem.

I know this is a bit early for my annual Christmas message, but I wanted it to be in your hands by the time Barbara, Katy, and I begin our long-anticipated vacation in Hawaii. They both join me in wishing you a most joyous and meaningful holiday season. May peace and joy be clearly discernible in your lives, the life of your families, and the life we share in those sacred communities, our congregations. May these arenas for the demonstration of God's love be a vital force for the spread of God's peace to many in our world.

In the Sacred name of the One we serve,

Bill Gardner