"NEVER THE SAME AGAIN"

A Sermon By

Rev. Philip A. C. Clarke
"NEVER THE SAME AGAIN"

TEXT: "And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way".

Matthew 2: 12

INTRODUCTION "They" - of course - are the Wise Men who are very much a part of the Story of Christmas. Those mysterious travellers from the East bearing gifts for the infant child. Tradition suggests there were three of them - Melchior, Caspar, and Balthazar. Henry Van Dyke gave us the beautiful story of The Other Wise Man. His name was Artaban. Van Dyke was the pastor about a hundred years ago at the Brick Presbyterian Church, up the street. That story is one of my favorites. I bring it "out" for you every two or three years. Maybe next year.

The birth of Jesus had rattled Herod's cage and roiled his blood. Storm warnings had reached the Magi in a dream. They had seen and worshipped. Now they must go back to their world, but they must do this by another way, another route. We read, "And they departed to their own country by another way".

THE ROAD BACK The road back was not all that was different. I suspect those three travellers were different, too. The scenery without was not the same, but neither was the scenery within and this gives us the launching pad for today's meditation.

My hunch is that they didn't talk much on that homeward trek. Once safely beyond Herod's cruel reach, they would have need and time to reflect quietly on all that they had "seen and heard"...and felt! One does not go where they had gone only to resume "business as usual". For them life was never the same again.

Some of what each believed had been dramatically reinforced. Some of what each believed now had to be revised and perhaps dropped. Comforting axioms and longheld assumptions in the subconscious were now surfacing and demanding criticism in light of what they had passed through in Bethlehem. In more ways than one they were departing to their own country.

On a much smaller scale we may have had a similar experience. An avowed racist hears Martin Luther King's eloquent Washington speech, "I Have a Dream" and is never quite the same again. A wellfed American tourist visits the city of Calcutta, sees the swollen stomachs of starving children, looks into their eyes and is never the same again. A teenager from the affluent suburbs walks the streets of this city and sees the homeless and hungry and is never quite the same again. A Nazi guard lingers near the cell of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, hears him in his final hours praying for his enemies and is never the same again.

From all such experiences we go back another way. For having been there, we are forever different.

AND WHAT OF BETHLEHEM And what shall we say of Bethlehem and all that it represents? To a degree never before matched in any other happening, the life of people in all times and all places has been
forever changed by the coming of Jesus. Even those who are hostile or just indifferent are affected. The world has been to Bethlehem and can never be quite the same again and how true this is with respect to at least two fundamental facts of life: first, the worth of people and second, the power of love. Let's think about both for a few moments.

WORTH OF PEOPLE

The inherent worth of people has once again been affirmed in these joyous events we have celebrated in recent days. Man may be, as he has been on many sad occasions, animalized, brutalized, computerized, de-humanized, institutionalized, militarized, terrorized, tyrannized, vulgarized - BUT, because Jesus has come, none of these "perversions" can long go unchallenged. None can claim to be the final word.

We all have our moments of doubt when we can hardly believe in our own worth, much less the worth of others. So much seems to conspire against us and our belief in the goodness of others. Cynicism tempts us.

Remember that best seller of a few years back, Report From Engine Company No. 82? Dennis Smith wrote about a remarkable breed of men...those men who form Company 82 up there in the South Bronx. They averaged something like 700 calls a month, making it by far the busiest fire house in this city. Those men go out time after time...risking bodily harm from thrown bricks...putting up with false alarms...braving their way into burning buildings. Why? Because at heart they believe in the worth of every human being!

Yes, of course, at times they all have their doubts. We all do. Listen to Fireman Smith,

"Nine lengths of hose for a rotten couch fire that could have been extinguished with a glassful of water five minutes earlier. The guy who lived in the apartment was sitting on the stairs in the hall, smoking a cigarette, and saying that he didn't know how the fire started. He looked around, sounded drunk, but who knows? And when you think about it, who cares?"

God has drawn nigh. Piercing through and transcending all of our moods about ourselves and others, let that word be heard - God has drawn nigh. He cares. His name is "Emmanuel" - God with us. Leslie Dewart, the Catholic theologian, is so right when he writes:

"To take the Incarnation seriously implies not that God once dipped His finger into human history, but that he totally immersed Himself in it, made it His home, His personal residence, His everlasting abode".

However low down and discouraged we may feel about ourselves at times, however shrunk our personal self-regard, remember this: we are a "God-loved" people, living in a "God-loved" world. Bethlehem each year helps to remind us of the tremendous worth of every human being.

POWER OF LOVE

And the other fact of life that Bethlehem certifies is the power of love.

Admittedly, we have our problems here. I do and I'm sure that many of you
do, too. The power of love versus the power of force: Are people drawn by the power of love or driven by the power of force? Stockpiles of weapons command respect. And might has rolled up some impressive victories over the years since the angels sang over Bethlehem's skies. But in our calm and reflective moments I should like to think that deep in our hearts we know that the ancient Word from the Bible is still true:

"It is not by might nor by power, but My Spirit, saith the Lord".

And God's spirit is the spirit of love at work in our world.

Love is not just one of many attributes of God's nature. Love is of the very essence of God. There are no other attributes of the Divine Being which can be likened unto it or made parallel with it. "Not by might nor by power, but by My spirit, saith the Lord!"

The American Indians were wise in their rendition of Psalm 23. Instead of saying, "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, He leadeth me beside the still waters", they said:

"He throws me a rope, and the name of the rope is love, and He draws me to where the grass is green and the waters are not dangerous and I eat and lie down satisfied."

For the time being, we may be driven to concede the need for armies, standing or marching; the need for police - federal, state and local. Yes, and even the need for locks on our doors. Nevertheless, we who have walked the Road to Bethlehem and knelt there in adoration before the Christ Child know that the abiding, invincible power of life is found in the power of love - greater than the power of force. Powerless love versus loveless power. And where there is love, there is no will to power.

And well might Henry Drummond have called love "The Greatest Thing in the World" - for it is. And well might Gandhi have observed that love is the strongest force...the world possesses and yet the humblest imaginable. Gandhi who once said that it was the Sermon on the Mount by Jesus and Thoreau's "Essay on Civil Disobedience" that got him started on the path he walked. And it was to this point that Bernard Meland was speaking when he said:

"This is the operation - this tender, patient, gracious working...too silent to be audible...too subtle to be obtrusive...too vast and extensive to be observed - of which religious sensitivity must make us aware."

JESUS CAME Jesus came and walked among us and affirmed the power of love.

In His Holy Birth he was edged out of the inn into a drafty and dirty stable. In His death, He was edged out of the Holy City to die on Golgatha - Jerusalem, RD. And throughout His life, it was not His miracle power that drew people to Him, but rather His incredible non-stop, boundless love which was there for all people - black, white, rich, poor, the well, the sick.

And friends in Christ where we have tried it, we have known its power. What love does is to absorb from the atmosphere the poisons that threaten to
destroy. Damaging hatred and hostility are replaced by forgiveness and peace for those who have walked to Bethlehem. The great need of our time is for love to become so embodied in us that we can draw to ourselves—in the power of God's spirit—some of the poisons that threaten to choke us to death!

CLOSING ILLUSTRATION Mike Warnke's book, The Satan Seller, told us of the depths of depravity to which people who are caught up in satan worship will sometimes go. He tells the reader of a member who had a finger chopped off that was then passed around among the group in a crude imitation of the Sacrament of the body and blood of Christ. He tells us in this mind-blowing book that his own life signature for a time was "Evil, Be Thou My God". He gave himself with reckless abandon to satan worship.

There was one incident he described, however, that had a surprise ending for the reader. New members were being prepared for induction into a satanic covin on the west coast. The leaders, including the author himself, felt that something spectacular should take place in connection with the induction ceremony—something different, something new. As they were riding around in the surrounding community thinking about what to do they spied an attractive coed and made a decision to abduct her. They brought her to the ceremony, stripped her down, forced her to lie on an improvised altar in front of the group. And when she struggled and fell off to the floor they stomped her hands with booted feet until the pain became so great that she weakly submitted to multiple rape by the members.

Some weeks later, Warnke tells us that he was walking on a nearby campus when he happened to see the girl. She came over to him and said, "I think I recognize you". He responded off handily, "Yeah...so what." He kept walking. She walked beside him. He asked, "What precisely do you want?" She smiled and said to him, "I don't want anything...I just came over to tell you something. I forgive you. I forgive you for what you did. I care for you." "You what" he replied. He felt he wanted to run and hide. But the girl continued, "I said that I forgive you for what you and the others did...I have become a Christian. I have come to know Christ and...I have accepted Him into my life as my Lord and my Savior. I forgive you. I love you".

IF YOU HAVE BEEN THERE "And being warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way".

Yes, dear friend...if you’ve been to Bethlehem...to the manger of the Child, you can never be the same again. For now you have felt the secret of God about the worth of every person and the redeeming power of His love. And that secret will burn in your soul from then on—whether like a flashing beacon or flaming judgement...until you "fall on your knees"...Bless God for it and build and shape your life around it as did the Wise Men of old and as the wise of every generation since then have. "Home by another way...never the same again".

PRAYER

Grateful we are, O God, for this story of the Wise Men of old, filled with meaning for us even today. It serves to remind us that You so often speak to us through people and events out of the past who have remained faithful to the highest and best they have known and who have travelled great distances to worship the Christ Child.

We pray that in these quiet moments you will visit our sick with the quiet assurance of your care. Encircle the bereaved with thy warming, healing presence. Point out markers on the trail for those who have lost their way here in the city. And douse with the cold water of common sense any who might this very day be on the verge of following some destructive action or hurtful decision.

The race is short, O God, even at its longest and we would try to run it well, and to Thy glory. In the name and spirit of Christ, our Lord, we now pray.
ANNOUNCEMENTS: Sunday, January 3, 1988

HOLY COMMUNION

It is the custom of this Church to celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion on the first Sunday of the month. We like to announce—especially for the benefit of visitors in the congregation—that the Table of our Lord in this Church is open to all...that one does not have to be a member of this parish, nor of this denomination in order to receive the Sacrament. His Table is open to all and we invite all of you to receive the Sacrament on this the First Sunday of a New Year, trusting that the time for you may be an occasion of spiritual renewal, a time of reconsecration of your life to the will of God as it comes to us in the life and love of Jesus Christ—God’s Son and our Lord and Saviour.

The elements will be served to you in the pews by the ushers. We add this word: that upon receiving the elements please hold them until all have been served, and then together as one family of faith we shall commune.

GREETING / VISITORS

We greet the visitors in the congregation this morning...delighted to have you with us and we hope that the opportunity will be ours to greet you in a more personal way following this service—either at the door as you depart, or...time permitting...downstairs in the Russell Room where tea and coffee will be served.

Be free in the sharing of your name with us. Take a moment to fill out a visitor card, or to sign one of the Guest Books in the narthex. Join us on other Sundays in our worship. Come and work with us in our programs of outreach and service to others in this community.

We’re primarily a neighborhood Church...most of our people are within walking distance. This is the fourth building out of which this congregation has served. We date back to 1837 as a Church and recently celebrated 150 years. We minister in the name of Christ and it is in His name and in His spirit that we bid you welcome on this first Sunday of a New Year.

EPHYPANY / THANK YOU

January 6th—Wednesday—is the date of Epiphany. Epiphany marks the visit of the Wise Men to the manger of Bethlehem.

As we move into the Season of Epiphany, we’ll be taking down our red banners of Advent and the wreaths and the trees will be removed. I always love the Christmas Season in our Church—the music, the touches of red and green, the presence of the children in our services and the Advent wreath and candle-lighting, the greeting of friends from other days back for a visit...our students home for the holidays. It was a good Christmas and I thank all of you who took on extra responsibilities to make it so for us, and who responded with such generous Christmas gifts for the Christmas appeal.

A special word of thanks to the Church choir for their lifting and joyous music...always so moving and inspiring. Also, special thanks to those who "pitched in" to make our Christmas Eve service so beautiful and meaningful to those who filled the sanctuary and the Russell Room that night!
LOOKING AHEAD  The last four months have been very busy ones for us here in the Church. Building the budget. Conducting the canvass. The Church Fair. The Charge Conference. The reception of twenty plus new members. The Sunday School party and pageant. A rummage sale along the way.

We now turn a corner into a New Year and begin to make plans for the weeks ahead. Our Administrative Council will be meeting a week from today Tuesday evening and several committee meetings are already "in the works" for January.

Saturday, January 30th, is the date of our mid-Winter rummage sale and workers are being enlisted for that sale.

FINANCIAL  The 1988 boxes of offering envelopes are available downstairs on a table in the rear of the Russell Room. Be sure to pick up the box that has your name on it.

ALSO  Be sure to pick up the January issue of our monthly news sheet. Copies are on the table by the door as well as downstairs. Also, take along with you your copy of "A Year With the Bible" pamphlet...which provides you with a Bible reading suggestion for the next 363 days.

NEXT SUNDAY  Next Sunday John Simms - who has done such a terrific job for us in leading the canvass - will begin a Sunday morning class on Methodism. Note the insert in the bulletin. Let's have a good turn out for it. 9:15 Sunday mornings. Third floor fellowship hall area.

OFFERING  Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive". In this spirit, let us worship God with our morning offering.
CHRISTMAS EVE MUSIC: December 24, 1987

"Lo, How A Rose E'er Blooming"

"Lo, how a rose e'er blooming from tender stem hath sprung! Of Jesse's lineage coming as men of old have sung. It came, a flow'ret bright, amid the cold of winter, when half-spent was the night.

Isaiah 'twas foretold it, the rose I have in mind, with Mary we behold it, the Virgin Mother kind. To shew God's love aright, she bore to men a Saviour, when half-spent was the night."

"The Shepherd's Carol"

"Me thinks I see an Heav'nly Host of angels on the wing; me thinks I hear their cheerful notes, so merrily they sing.

Let all your fears be banished hence, glad tidings I proclaim; for glad tidings I proclaim; there is a Saviour born today, and Jesus is his name.

The master of the Inn refused a more commodious place; Ungen'rous soul of savage mould and destitute of grace.

The Royal Guest you entertain is not of common birth, but second in the Great I am, The God of Heaven and Earth, The God of Heaven and Earth.

Then suddenly a Heav'nly Host around the shepherds throng, exulting in the Three-fold God, and thus addresssed their song."

"Masters In This Hall"

"Masters in this hall, hear ye news today brought from over sea, and ever I you pray: Noel, noel sing we clear! Holpen are all folk on earth, born is God's Son so dear: noel, noel! Noel sing we loud! God today hath poor folk raised and cast adown the proud.

Going o'er the hill, through the milkwhite snow, heard I ewes bleat while the wind did blow: shepherds many and one sat among the sheep, no man spake more word than they had been asleep.

Quoth I, 'Fellows mine, why this guise sit ye? Making but dull cheer, shepherds though ye be?' Shepherds should of right leap and dance and sing, thus to see ye sit, is a right strange thing. Quoth these fellows then, 'To Bethlehem town we go, to see a mighty Lord lie in manger low'. 'How name ye this Lord, shepherds?' Then said I 'very God'. They said, 'come from heaven high': this is Christ, the Lord, Masters be ye glad! Christmas is come in and no folks should be sad.'

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Mrs. Judith Keisman

CUSTODIAN
Mr. Roberto Meriles

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CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE
December 24, 198

ORDER OF WORSHIP
8 P. M.

ORGAN "Noel Basque" Benger

CALL TO WORSHIP

HYMN NO. 386 "O Come, All Ye Faithful"

INVOCATION (seated)

O God, our Father, You have brought us again
to this glad season when we commemorate the birth
of Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord: grant that
we may joyfully welcome Him to reign over us. Open
our ears that we may hear again the angelic chorus
of old; open our lips that we too may sing with
uplifted hearts, "Glory to God in the highest, and
on earth, peace and good will toward men." Amen.

SILENT MEDITATION AND WORDS OF ASSURANCE

THE LORD'S PRAYER

***

HYMN NO. 396 "Infant Holy, Infant Lowly"


ANTHEM "Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming" Brahms

***

SCRIPTURE Matthew 2: 1 - 12 Page 835

ANTHEM "The Shepherds Carol" Billings

CHRISTMAS GREETING

CHRISTMAS OFFERING

ANTHEM "Masters In This Hall" Wilcocks

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HYMN NO. 388 "Hark The Herald Angels Sing"

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 1: 1 - 3; Isaiah 9: 2;
John 1: 4 - 5; 8: 12; Matthew 5: 14 - 16

PRAYER

HYMN NO. 381 "O Little Town of Bethlehem" (seated)

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CHRISTMAS PRAYER.

HYMN NO. 374 "Angels We Have Heard on High"

CHRISTMAS BENEDICTION (seated)

ORGAN "From Heaven on High" Pachelbel

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289-6997

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SCRIPTURE  
Luke 2: 1 - 20  
Page 889

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Matthew 2: 1 - 12  
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"NEVER THE SAME AGAIN"

TEXT: "And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way". (Matthew 2: 12)

INTRODUCTION "They" - of course - are the Wise Men who are a part of the story of Christmas. Those mysterious travellers from the East. Tradition suggests there were three of them. Tradition also suggests their names: Melchior, Caspar, Balthazar.

The birth of Jesus had rattled Herod's cage and roiled his blood. Storm warnings reached the Magi in a dream. They had seen and worshipped. Now they must go back, but they must do this by another way, another route. We read, "And they departed to their own country by another way".

THE ROAD BACK The road back was not all that was different. The travellers were different, too. The scenery without was not the same, but neither was the scenery within.

My hunch is that they didn't talk much on that homeward trek. Once safely past Herod's reach, they would have need and time to reflect quietly on all that they had "seen and heard" and felt! One does not go where they had gone only to resume "business as usual". It's quiet reasonably for us to assume that for those Wise Men life was never the same again.

Some of what each believed had been dramatically reinforced. Some of what each believed had now to be revised or dropped altogether. Comforting axioms and assumptions long held in the unconscious were now surfacing and demanding criticism in light of what they had been through. Yes - "they departed to their own country by another way" - in more ways than one.

We have all had similar experiences on a smaller scale. An avowed racist hears Martin Luther King's eloquent Washington speech, "I Have a Dream" - and is never quite the same again. An American tourist - well-fed - visits the city of Calcutta, sees the swollen stomachs of starving children, looks into their eyes - and is never the same again.

A teenager from the affluent suburbs around a city like NY calls on a ghetto family in East Harlem and is never the same again. A Nazi guard lingers near the cell of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, hears him in his final hours praying for his enemies - and is never the same again.

From all such experiences we go back another way. For having been there, we are forever different.

And what shall we say of Bethlehem and all that it represents? To a degree never before matched in any other happening, the life of men and women in all times and places has been forever changed by the coming of Jesus. Even those who are hostile or indifferent are affected. The world has been to Bethlehem and can never be the same again. This is true with respect to at least two fundamental facts of life: the worth of people and the power of love.
WORTH OF PEOPLE

The inherent worth of people has been affirmed again in these joyous events we have celebrated in recent days. Man may be - as he has been on many sad occasions - animalized, brutalized, computerized, dehumanized, institutionalized, militarized, terrorized, tyrannized, vulgarized - but because Jesus has come, none of these perversions can long go unchallenged. None can claim to be the final word. None ultimately prevail.

We all have our moments of doubt when we can hardly believe in our own worth, much less the worth of others. Recently a man in Miami asked on his hospital bed, "Why does God hate me?" At the age of 10 he was playing with some children. Gasoline was sprayed in the air. A match was struck. The result was sever burns. After years of skin grafting and plastic surgery, he started to come around and look like a normal human being. At the age of 23 in the Everglades of Florida, he was again out with friends. He sought to save money by fashioning his own bullets over the smoldering embers of a campfire. The result - another explosion and more burns. Eventually the cry, "Why does God hate me?" The wife added her despair, "Alan was really looking good after all those years and now this. It just isn't fair!" For reasons equally foolish and perverse, we find it hard on occasion to believe in our own worth.

Remember that best seller of a few years ago, Report From Engine Company No. 82, by Dennis Smith? What a remarkable breed - those men who form Company 82? There in the South Bronx, they average something like 700 calls a month, making it by far the busiest fire house in the city. Those men go out time after time ••• risking bodily harm from thrown bricks ••• putting up with false alarms ••• braving their way into burning buildings. Why? Because at heart they believe in the worth of every human being!

Yes, at time, even they have their doubts. Listen to Fireman Smith:

"Nine lengths of hose for a rotten couch fire that could have been extinguished with a glassful of water five minutes earlier. The guy who lived in the apartment was sitting on the stairs in the hall, smoking a cigarette, and saying that he didn't know how the fire started. He looked around, sounded drunk, but who knows? And when you think about it, who cares?"

God has drawn nigh. Piercing through and transcending all of our moods about ourselves and others...let that Word be heard...God has drawn nigh. He cares. His name is "Emmanuel" - God with us! Leslie Dewart, the distinguished Catholic theologian, is so right when he says:

"To take the Incarnation seriously implies not that God once dipped his finger into human history, but that He totally immersed Himself in it, made it His home, His personal residence, His everlasting abode."

However low-down and discouraged we may feel about ourselves, however shrunk our personal self-regard, remember this: we are a "God-loved" people, living in a "God-loved" world. Bethlehem reminds us of the worth of every human being!
The other fact of life that Bethlehem certifies is the power of love.

We have our problems here. I do and I'm sure many of you do, too. The power of love versus the power of the fist which can be so strong. Stockpiles of weapons command respect. And might has rolled up some impressive victories over the years since Bethlehem. But in our calm, reflective moments I should like to think that deep in our hearts we know that the ancient Word from the Bible is still true. "It is not by might nor by power - but My spirit, saith the Lord". And God's spirit is the spirit of love at work in our world.

Love is not just one of many attributes or aspects of God's nature. Love is of the very essence of God. There are no other attributes of the Divine Being which can be likened unto it or made parallel with it. "Not by might nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord".

The American Indians were wise in their rendition of the 23rd Psalm. Instead of saying, "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, he leadeth me beside the still waters", they said:

"He throws me a rope, and the name of the rope is love, and He draws me to where the grass is green and the waters are not dangerous, and I eat and lie down satisfied."

For the time being, we may be driven to concede the need for armies - standing or marching; the need for police - federal, state and local. Yes, even the need for locks on our doors. Nevertheless, we who have walked the road to Bethlehem and worshipped there know that the abiding, invincible power of life is this power of love...greater than the power of force. And where there is love, there is no will to power!

And well might Hengry Drummond have called love "The Greatest Thing In the World" - for it is. And well might Gandhi have observed that love is the strongest force...the world possesses and yet the humblest imaginable. It was to this point that Bernard Meland was speaking when he said:

"This is the operation - this tender, patient, gracious working...too silent to be audible...too subtle to be obtrusive...too vast and extensive to be observed - of which religious sensitivity must make us aware."

Jesus came among us and affirmed the power of love. In His birth, He was edged out of the inn into a drafty, dirty stable. In His death, He was edged out of the Holy City to die on Golgatha - Jerusalem, RD. And throughout His life, it was not His miracle power that drew men and women to Him, but rather His incredible, non-stop, boundless love which was there for all with no respect of persons...black, white, rich, poor, the well, the sick.

And friends, where we have tried it, we have known its power. What love does is to absorb from the atmosphere the poisons that threaten to destroy. Damaging hatred and hostility are replaced by forgiveness and peace for those who have been to Bethlehem.
The great need and hunger of our time is for love to become so embodied in us that we can draw to ourselves, in the power of God's spirit, some of the poisons that threaten to choke us to death!

CLOSING One of the most mind-blowing books of recent years that has come before me is The Satan Seller by Mike Warnke. It's hard to believe the depths of depravity to which people who are engaged in satan worship will succumb. But it's all there in this book, written by a man who gave himself to it with abandon. His life signature for a time was "Evil, Be Thou My God". He speaks in utter frankness of the brutality and debauchery that accompanies satan worship, at one point telling the reader of a member who had a finger chopped off that was subsequently passed around among the group in a crude imitation of the Sacrament of the body and the blood of Christ.

But the part of the book that I share with you has to do with a strange incident that carried a surprise ending. New members were to be inducted into a satanic covin on the West coast. The leaders, the author included, felt that something spectacular should take place in connection with the induction ceremony - something different, something new. As they were riding around in that community thinking about what to do they spied an attractive coed and decided to abduct her. They brought her to the ceremony, stripped her down, forced her to lie on an improvised altar in front of the group. When she struggled and fell off to the floor they stomped her hands with bootied feet until the pain became so great that she weakly submitted to multiple rape.

Not long after, Warnke was walking on a nearby campus when he spied the girl. She came over to him and said, "I recognize you". He said, "Yeah...I know you, too. So what?" He kept walking. She walked beside him. He asked, "What precisely do you want?" She smiled and said to him, "I don't want anything. I just came over to tell you something...I forgive you. I care for you. I love you". "You what?" he replied. He wanted to run and hide. But the girl went on. "I said that I love you and forgive you for what you did." "I have become a Christian...I have come to know Christ and have accepted Him as Lord and Saviour of my life. I love you. I forgive you".

IF YOU'VE BEEN THERE "And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way"

If you've been to Bethlehem...if you've been there, you can never be the same again. For now you know God's great secret about the worth of man and the redeeming power of love. And that secret will burn in your soul from then on - whether like a flashing beacon or a flaming judgement - until you "fall on your knees"...bless God for it and shape your life around it.

PRAYER As this Christmas Season passes once again, 0 God, may the light of it linger in our lives, so that we see the whole world in a new way and from a new point of view. By all the quiet and gentle forces of this Holy time, and especially by the action of Your spirit at work in our hearts, help us in the days of a New Year to follow Jesus as "the way, the truth and the life". Amen.