

## *Christmas in Bethlehem: Part II*

Two years ago, I went on retreat to the *Bethlehem Hermitage* in New Jersey. On November 15<sup>th</sup> I returned. This time I took up residence in the *St. Francis & St. Therese* cabin. It was a small and simple dwelling, nestled on a hill behind the Main Chapel and Monastery grounds. Like before, I had my own chapel with a Tabernacle (I was not alone; Jesus was with me), and a bible on the altar already opened to Psalm 46. One verse stood out: **“Be still and know that I am God.”**

This was the reason for my revisiting this sacred place! I desired to be still and attune my heart to hear the voice of God. Like Elijah, it would be in the *quiet of the silence* that God could whisper His words of love to me. A hermit's life is one of solitude, prayer and work. This week gave me the opportunity to be a hermit for a few days and commune with the Triune God, dwelling within me. I was like *Moses standing on Holy Ground*. God's Presence calling me to prostrate before the *Burning Bush* of His all-consuming light, warming my soul with HIS LOVE!

Jesus, the Incarnate Word, brought the Kingdom of His Father to earth within His Heart. At His Conception, Mary gave Jesus a human heart, beating out a melody of love for us. At His Birth, Jesus gave His Heart to us. Throughout His Life, Jesus gave His Heart to us. On the Cross, Jesus gave His Heart to us. In His POVERTY, SIMPLICITY, HUMILITY and OBEDIENCE to His Father's Will, Jesus had ONLY one thing and one thing ONLY to give us: HIS HEART (GOD'S HEART) OF LOVE!

When entering the door of the chapel at the hermitage, you see a stable scene with Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus in a manger. It is kept up year round. On the wall opposite the scene, there is a plaque that says:

*From His first cry in Bethlehem*

*To His last cry on Calvary...*

*He has give us the gift of His undying love*

Then you climb the stairs to access the chapel where **His undying Love** becomes **Living Bread** that **we** might become *living bread* and *undying love* for others!

*"O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by;  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light;  
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee to-night.*

*O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;  
Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us to-day.  
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us, abide with us, Our Lord Emmanuel!"*

Emmanuel is the Living Bread, Who nourishes us with His undying Love. From the wood of the manger to the wood of the altar, we are loved! On anyone's birthday we give a gift, don't we? As we celebrate the birth of Jesus, let us give Him a gift; let us give Him the gift of our hearts that we might give birth to a greater love for one another!

Merry Christmas,  
Father David