

## Christmas Vigil Mass

December 24, 2012, 5:30 pm

In the spirit of Caesar Augustus I would like to take up a census this evening. How many of you have ever taken part in a Christmas pageant? How many of you were Jesus? (Started at the top, right)? How many were Mary? Joseph? The Wise Men? Now, how about the shepherds? And the angels?

These last two roles have always struck me as great “catch-all” categories. There’s only room for one Jesus, one Mary, one Joseph, three wise men, but you can have dozens of shepherds and angels. There’s no mention of how many shepherds were out in that field. And while one of the angels gets a nice little speech, a multitude of the heavenly host leaves room for... well, a multitude.

In the past I must confess to not giving too much thought to the shepherds and the angels except as a backdrop for the main action – necessary but not all that interesting. But recently I have begun to reassess their importance. As a matter of fact, I would propose that, if God were putting out an ad in Craigslist, it might very well be for shepherds and angels.

Consider the angels. God continues to need angels – those who proclaim this Good News to people needing to hear it, and those who celebrate the Good News in a liturgy of praise. Sometimes it is a lone voice that proclaims the Good News about Jesus. It can take great courage and commitment to do this. At other times, it is the work of the community to sing God’s praises in a way that will draw others into it. Both messenger angels and a multitude of the heavenly host were needed that first Christmas – and still are. These can be discouraging times – a lot of sadness in our world this Christmas. There are people who are losing their jobs, people who find it hard to get a decent job, more people than ever living below the poverty line in our country and in our parish, and growing numbers throughout downtown Seattle who do not have basic needs met. We need angels who will speak this message of hope again and again. We need angels who remind us that God loves this world and all who are in it. And that God’s will is for “peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

The Christmas story is meant to challenge and change us, not just make us feel good. It does more than direct our attention to the lovely manger scene in our church. The Christmas story contains a call to action and a challenge to change. The Christmas message is a story that can change the world if we let it in. It is about the God who continues to make new our world, who continues to love the world into new life. That infant born and laid in an animal feeder continues to nourish the world with his Body and Blood.

Paul A. Magnano

Pastor