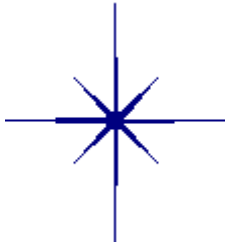


## THE JOY AND EXCITEMENT OF CHRISTMAS

Dear Friends of the Council on Christian Unity:



Two weeks ago my wife and I attended Mass with my daughter and grandsons here in Indianapolis where we heard the priest preach a wonderful sermon on the theme of the joy and excitement of Christmas. He began by sharing his personal experience when he had been in Washington D.C., at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, at the time of the visit of Pope John Paul II. He recounted how the huge crowd that had gathered in the Basilica were awaiting the moment when the Holy Father would arrive to celebrate Mass.

He recalled that every movement of the Pope – from his arrival at Reagan Airport, to the motorcade through the city, and finally to his arrival at the Basilica -- had been shown on a television screen set up in the sanctuary for those who had arrived hours earlier to be a part of that historic service of worship. And, as a priest, he had been able to secure a seat “up-close and on-the-aisle.” He remembered how the congregation cheered and applauded every step along the Pope’s journey: expectant, excited, and receptive to his arrival.

At that point in the sermon the priest paused and asked a penetrating question, “I wonder if we here today are as excited, and watchful, and expectant as we approach Christmas this year and the coming of the Christ-child anew into our lives and our world? Do we still have the joy and excitement of Christmas?”

As I have reflected on that question these past weeks, I realize that part of the loss of our excitement is that the Christmas story has become all too familiar -- just like the loss of our expectations around Christian unity. We don’t expect new things to happen – either to us, to our churches, or in our world. Our faith journey is focused more on God’s incarnation in the past, rather than on God’s breaking into our present and our future.

For me, this is expressed beautifully by Ann Weems in her book of poems, “Kneeling in Bethlehem”:

*It's not over, this birthing:  
There are always newer skies  
Into which God can throw stars.  
When we begin to think  
That we can predict the Advent of God,  
That we can box the Christ  
In a stable in Bethlehem,  
That's just the time that God will be born  
In a place that we can't imagine and won't believe.*

My wish for each of you is that Christ be born anew in your life, and into the lives of all persons and all churches, in this holy season of Christmas,

In the joy and expectancy of Christmas,

Robert Welsh

P.S. If you have not done so and would like to make a year-end gift to the CCU, please send a check made out to “Council on Christian Unity,” at P.O. Box 1986, Indianapolis, IN 46250. Thank you!