

THE HOPE THAT IS IN YOU!
Dakotas Conference Christmas Message
2012

I am Bishop Bruce Ough, and I am delighted to greet you in this season of anticipating the birth of the Christ Child – the Hope of the World.

One of the primary themes of the Christmas message is “do not be afraid.” Mounting fear often causes the Church to lose focus and forget purpose. We all know it is difficult to nurture faith and generate an impactful witness in the face of pervasive fear.

Perhaps, that is precisely why the Christmas message is so important. When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, he said:

“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.” (Luke 1:30)



When the herald of Christ came to the shepherds in the fields, he said:

“Do not be afraid; for see, I bring you good news of great joy for all people.” (Luke 2:10)

This theme of “do not be afraid” is repeated throughout the gospels. “Do not be afraid” *does not* mean we avoid the very real economic, demographic and political realities we face. It *does not* mean we become callous or casual about our concerns. It *does not* mean we shut ourselves in a room or in our churches and let the world pass us by.

It *does* mean we don’t let worry win. It *does* mean we don’t close the door to the Holy Spirit’s presence and promptings. It *does* mean we remain vigilant to not let Christ’s mission get hijacked, derailed, ignored or delayed. “Do not be afraid!”

I Peter 3:15 reminds us to “always be ready to make...an accounting of the hope that is in you.” What is the “hope that is in you” that

drives away fear?

elicits abundant joy?

holds in the midst of of the tempest?

compels extravagant generosity in the face of challenging times?

Char and I are so pleased to be back “home” in the Dakotas. You have extended radical hospitality to us. We thank God for your accounting of the hope that is in you. Your continuing witness to the Hope of the World is a source of inspiration and encouragement to us and an invaluable foundation for the life and mission of the Dakotas Annual Conference.

Christmas is the season to make an accounting of the hope that is in us. Our hope is in

the angel’s promise,

shepherds going with haste to Bethlehem,

a Savior-gift of Christ Jesus, and

the “Good News of great joy for all people.”

As you celebrate this Season of Hope, be assured of our prayers for you and your congregation. We pray that the hope born in Bethlehem will renew you this Christmas season and prepare you to make an accounting of the hope that is in you in the new year. Merry Christmas!

Merry Christmas!