

Finding the Child

“And this will be a sign for you. You will find a child wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger.” (Lk. 2:13)

These mysterious instructions are given by an Angel of the Lord to the shepherds.

The profound implication is: it is a revelation about Jesus, but it is also revelation they share in. If the shepherds find the child, they will find themselves. It is a sign “for you.”

What could this mean and why is it important?

We have many ways of identifying ourselves. If we are asked who we are, most likely we will bring forward one or more of the available selves that we embrace in our daily life. We identify with our gender, or our sexual orientations, or our age, or with a physical or mental suffering or characteristic, or with a social role or work position, or with membership in a race, a nationality, or a family, or with some traits or collection of traits of our personality, etc.

Our work may describe us as facility and administrative staff, nurses, physicians, chaplains, managers, directors, leaders, Board members, sponsors – and all other ways we make Catholic Health Care work.

But there is more going on than these usual ways we describe ourselves. In the symbolic language of Advent/Christmas, we are a “child wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger.”

As a “child,” we realize we are always indebted to a larger reality that continuously is creating us. We may be physically, psychologically, and socially adults, but on the spiritual level we remain in a position of receiving our existence from the ultimate Mystery of God. “Child” is the image for acknowledging our dependency on this greater Source.

As “wrapped in swaddling clothes,” we realize we are loved by the Source who created and sustains our existence. This image comes from an ancient way of caring for newborns. When a child was born, it was cared for and comforted by being wrapped in swaddling clothes. In the center of ourselves, we are receiving love from the reality that brought us into being.

As “laid in manger,” we give the love we have received to others. The manger is a

feeding trough. It is where food is made available. We feed others with what we have received.

The feast of Christmas is a mirror to our deeper selves. We all share in the spiritual reality revealed in Jesus; and if we take a moment and look inside, we will see the dynamics of this spiritual reality energizing our lives. The sign is for us.

We are a “child wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger.”