

How many of you having already seen the Star Wars movie this week. Amazing! A church in New Jersey is taking advantage of the hysteria surrounding the movie *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* by hosting three weeks worth of Star Wars-themed sermons and activities called "Cosmic Christmas." On Christmas Eve, there will be a living Star Wars nativity scene. Princess Leia will stand in as Mary, Han Solo will represent Joseph, Chewbacca will be *all* the animals in the manger and R2D2 will rep the wise men. What about baby Jesus, you ask? Sadly, it's not Yoda. "They said that no Star Wars character will be in the crèche,"

That is because the concept of God as presented in the Star Wars Movie or The Force is quite different from the Babe of Bethlehem. Our younger generation has grown up with this concept. George Lucas invented this concept of The Force and described it as the energy of all the people who have lived before us. The concept of God as the Force is impersonal. Our God is not a force, but a person the loves and cares for us- He is Emmanuel, God with us. He pitched his tent among us.

This is how Luke describes Jesus' birth. Mary gave birth to a son, her firstborn. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn.

**At Christmas, we tend to romanticize the manger.** We turn it into something beautiful and heavenly – a First Century birthing suite. But a real manger just isn't like that. The manger is cold.. Manger is dark... Manger is dirty.  
**The truth is that Jesus is always born in the manger.**

**No matter** how cold your heart is, Jesus is willing to be born there. **No matter** how dark your heart is, Jesus is willing to be born there. **No matter** dirty your heart is, or how sinful your life has been, Jesus is willing to come in, enter and clean your heart.

Pope Francis has declared this Year as the Year of Mercy. Pope Francis has powerfully called on the entire Catholic Church to refashion itself as a place not of judgment or condemnation but of pardon and merciful love. "And that is indeed the Christmas story. God sent his only Begotten son into the world, not to condemn the world, but to show his mercy and pardon and love. Perhaps we have long since forgotten how to show and live the way of mercy," writes Francis in the document, released Saturday evening with the Latin title *Misericordiae Vultus* ("The Face of Mercy"). This Christmas, this Jubilee year of Mercy, we are invited to become the compassionate Face of God in our troubled world.

The spirit of Christmas – spirit of Mercy and Grace should live in our hearts.

You may know this story. A Jewish lady named Mrs. Rosenberg many years ago was stranded late one night at a fashionable resort – one that did not admit Jews. The desk clerk looked down at his book and said, "Sorry, no room. The hotel is full." The Jewish lady said, "But your sign says that you have vacancies." The desk clerk stammered and then said curtly, "You know that we do not admit Jews. Now if you

will try the other side of town..." Mrs. Rosenberg stiffened noticeably and said, "I'll have you know I converted to your religion." The desk clerk said, "Oh, yeah, let me give you a little test. How was Jesus born?" Mrs. Rosenberg replied, "He was born to a virgin named Mary in a little town called Bethlehem." "Very good," replied the hotel clerk. "Tell me more." Mrs. Rosenberg replied, "He was born in a manger." "That's right," said the hotel clerk. "And why was he born in a manger?" Mrs. Rosenberg said loudly, "Because a jerk like you in the hotel wouldn't give a Jewish lady a room for the night!"

Christmas teaches us many lessons. In the spirit of Christmas, we don't discriminate; we don't despise or put down. Like our compassionate and loving God we open our hearts and lives and our communities to people. Wouldn't our world be so much better, if we were the Face of our God – loving, inclusive, hospitable, generous and forgiving? I would like to conclude with the words I started.

**No matter** how cold your heart is, Jesus is willing to be born there. **No matter** how dark your heart is, Jesus is willing to be born there. **No matter** dirty your heart is, or how sinful your life has been, Jesus is willing to come in, enter and clean your heart. Merry Christmas.