

# Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God – New Year's, 2017

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The Holy Scriptures send out the old and ring in the new with a quaint image of yore that is largely unfamiliar to our modern suburban experience. We're used to seeing dogs being walked by folk all over our town. Some of us even hear the call of the rooster waking us at 4 in the morning. Drive a little bit, and you can still see the occasional cow in the field or horse cantering by. Some might even have run-ins with squirrels scurrying out of trash cans or skunks digging up grubs. But very few of us know a great deal about sheep, let alone what goes into shepherding them!

Still, the Word of God opens our year - and, hopefully, our hearts - with the picture of the shepherd. We read of Moses who carried the shepherd's staff as he herded God's Chosen People through the waters of the Red Sea and the sands of the desert of wandering, out of slavery into the Promised Land. In the Good News of the Birth of the Savior, we are drawn to the manger where we see shepherds keeping their watch by night come to see the One whom the angels announced. He would grow up to be the Good Shepherd who would lead those who would know Him and follow Him into green pastures where He would give them rest and safety.

Christmas is said, in song, to be the most wonderful time of the year. If you were out shopping at all during the past few weeks, if you stood on line at the checkout in just about any store, did the people look like they felt wonderful? Were they the "happ- happiest" folk you'd ever

seen? No!! They were tense, frazzled, tired, stressed ... like they just wanted it to all be over so they could settle in for a long winter's nap!!

Maybe that's why the Church opens the New Year with a shepherd as if to lead us out of our self-absorption, out of our running around like chickens with our heads cut off, out of the brambles of lost joy and purpose, into a new, fresh field of hope and purpose. Jesus, our Good Shepherd, sweetly speaks to us in the midst of our stress and exhaustion and invites us to come know His voice, come follow Him, come and rest in Him.

Most of us, as we blew our diets over the holidays, treated ourselves to all sorts of wonderful sweets: cakes and pies, cookies and candies. Maybe you even had one or two of these ... candy canes. As you were sucking on its sweetness, did you ever wonder why they're shaped like a cane? It's really supposed to be a shepherd's staff, meant to recall those shepherds who first saw the Christ Child, born to save the world. Each of us should carry a cane, candy or otherwise, to remind ourselves that as Jesus came to be our Good Shepherd, we're also called to be good shepherds by God to take care of each other, have one another's backs, nurture each other, and find the ones who have wandered off.

In the end, all of us need somebody to lean on, somebody to care about us, somebody to watch over me, somebody to find me when I get lost. Another Cain - not the candy one - asked, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The Good Shepherd says, you bet your life you are! He did ... and so must we!