

*"I Found You!"*

*Christmas Day, December 25, 2008 – Grace Church, Haddonfield*

*Rev. Dr. Patrick R. Close*

*Merry Christmas! I have always liked Christmas Day's service. It's smaller, and quieter. Last night was glorious, all the singing, the decorations, the people and atmosphere. The Christmas pageant was its usual chaos ... shepherds fighting with their crooks like swords ... the Christmas stars wrestling on the floor in the choir chancel. But there is something special about this day.*

*I remember the first Church I served in northern New Jersey. They didn't have a Christmas Day service. I said we would have one! I know it's hard to get up and have another service after all the work last night, but this day is special! Did you encounter many people or cars coming out this morning? No! There is a peace and quiet that is truly special this morning.*

*Christmas morning talks to us about what we find under our Christmas tree ... the baby Jesus. God in the divine wisdom and glory chooses to come into our midst out of love for us! God is looking for us, and decides to look for us as one of us. The Divine Love becomes human in Jesus. He is born this Christmas morning in Bethlehem, and out of love for us, will die on the cross at Cavalry.*

*There is a Hasidic tale that helps us understand what Christmas is all about. It talks about God seeking us, the Incarnation. Have you ever lost a child? If so, you know what terror and fear it can strike in the hearts of parents. My youngest brother was a wanderer. One night we lost him in northern Syracuse, not far from the Thruway, for three hours! We found him, but my dad was determined not to lose him again. Remember those leashes we have for dogs? My brother had one. My dad even built him a pen with chicken wire to keep him home! But let's go back to a lost child.*

*Once upon a time there was a young girl (Polsy & Wozner, "Everyday Miracles; The Healing Wisdom of Hasidic Stories) who lived on the edge of a forest. She loved to wander, and one day became lost. It grew dark and the little girl didn't return home. Her parents became very worried. They called and searched for her, as it grew darker. The parents called on neighbors and town people to help them search.*

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*The little girl continued to wander in the forest. She was worried and anxious, as it grew dark. She couldn't find her way home. She tried one path after another, to no avail. The girl grew tired, and when she came to a clearing, she lie down by a big rock and fell asleep. Her parents and neighbors continued to look in the forest for the girl. They called and searched, to no avail. Many of them became exhausted and left. But the father continued to search throughout the night.*

*Early in the morning, he came upon the clearing where the girl lay sleeping. He saw her, and ran towards her. The noise he made running through the forest and the dry branches awoke the girl. She saw her father and with a shout of joy exclaimed, "Daddy! I found you!"*

*That's how it is for us. We think that on Christmas we find God! It is God who has found us! God is always seeking us, even when we aren't looking for God. It doesn't matter if we embrace the latest spiritual practices, or do all kinds of service, or come to all the worship services we can ... we are fooling ourselves when we think we have found God! It always is, and has always been, that God is looking for us.*

*Christmas is the story of God looking for us in a new way. God comes into our midst as a child, Jesus, to save us ... to bring joy, peace, hope, love and new life. God never stops looking for us. God chooses the most unlikely time and places, but God still comes ... looking to find us ... looking to save us ... looking to transform us and bring new life into our midst.*

*Like the parent that will do anything to find a lost child, God comes looking for us ... and finds us! Christmas is the day to celebrate with joy the fact that out of great love, God finds us ... through Jesus. May we celebrate this day with the joy that it is meant to be! Merry Christmas! We have been found!*