

Evil visited America this year, evil on an unimaginable scale. Thousands of innocent citizens lost their lives in harrowing acts of terrorism. As a nation, we have turned to war, and we have also turned to God.

We have turned to war because those who perpetrated these crimes must be put in a position where they cannot harm again. No one likes being at war, especially on Christmas Day. War pulls out the worst in us. It stokes our hatred. It makes us violent. It threatens the lives of our military. It fosters a false belief that safety comes from weapons.

We don't like war. The collateral damage from this one is severe. One estimate holds that American bombs have now killed more innocent lives in Afghanistan than we lost on September 11. That does not count the thousands of Afghani children dying of malnutrition. Those kids are not dying because the present war is a success. They are dying because past philanthropy was a failure. The rich of the world have not erased poverty and hunger.

We are at war to do what we must, but what we must do is more than wage war. We must perform charity. Thanks be to God, we have already seen breathtaking examples of charity on an unimaginable scale. Airline passengers have shown uncommon bravery in overpowering terrorists. Firefighters have demonstrated that underneath those way-cool uniforms beat the hearts of true heroes. Postal workers continued delivering the mail even when their lives were at risk. People accustomed to stashing money in savings, or spending money on themselves, suddenly opened their hearts and their checkbooks and absolutely choked the charities aiding the victims of terrorism. Prospective American parents want to empty all the orphanages in Afghanistan. The American flag has become a symbol of unity, freedom and grief. Muslims, once fearful of new prejudices, have found people wanting to understand the goodness of their beliefs. Churches, synagogues and mosques have had the honor of welcoming back people who had put their faith on hold. We have turned to war, but we have also turned to God.

The dust has not yet settled from September 11, but this much is clear. A light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Two thousand years ago, on the first Christmas Day, God entered a world where the rich did not care for the poor. If you were God, how would you enter a world like that? How would you get the attention of the rich? Would you send a board of directors? Would you hire an army? Would you pay celebrities to speak for you? After all, those are the techniques we use in the United States.

God did something else. God appeared among the poor and came as a baby. God riveted the attention of the strong upon the plight of the weak. And it worked.

Our country is learning the lesson that you don't win at war unless you can win at peace. We don't need enduring freedom. We need enduring relationships.

Evil visited America this year. But something else visited America this year. Goodness visited America. God has visited America, as surely as God visited Bethlehem long ago. There's a newborn baby in our midst, wrapped in swaddling clothes. It's the baby of charity, the baby of love, the baby of generosity, the baby of true heroism, the baby of unity, of pluralism, and of understanding. That baby has been born in the manger of our country. We have an opportunity to make things different for our families, for our churches, for our country, and for the needy in Afghanistan and around the world. We can make things different this Christmas, and by the grace of God, we will.