By Russ Pankonin, The Imperial Republican

This is supposed to be the season that brings glad tidings of joy. But the hearts of all Americans, especially those in Newtown, Conn., bear a burden of sorrow and disbelief not shared in this country since 9/11.

A nation reels in shock from the actions at Newtown's Sandy Hook Elementary School where a deranged gunman shot and killed 20 first-graders, along with four teachers, the school principal and psychologist. He also executed his mother before heading to the school to carry out his carnage.

One of the most nagging questions in all of our minds is "Why?" We may never know the answer.

What we do know is this incident affects each one of us. All you need to do is to look at your own young son or daughter, grandson or granddaughter, nephew or niece and just imagine the emotions if they were suddenly snatched from you.

Our country has experienced mass shootings before, such as those at Columbine, Virginia Tech, Tucson, Ariz., and the Aurora, Colo., movie theater. It's not that we've grown calloused to this as a country but when innocent 6- and 7-year-olds are violently gunned down, it seems more personal to all of us.

In the wake of the shooting, which was carried out with a tactical assault rifle, debate has already begun on banning such weapons. But that's a debate for another day.

As we mourn the death of these 27 people, we must rely on our faith in God to get us through such a gloomy, heart-breaking exper-ience.

As we ask ourselves why, we must fall back on our faith in God for the strength he gives us all in these times of despair and need.

As we get ready to celebrate the birth of Christ, let us remember that he came to our earth to bear our sins and bring comfort in times of need like this.