

Christmas Eve, Dec. 24, 2022 4pm

Prayer: Deliver us from evil by the blessing which Christ brings, and teach us to be merry with clear hearts. May the Christmas morning make us happy to be thy children, and Christmas evening bring us to our beds with grateful thoughts, forgiving and forgiven, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

“The Manger of Christ Never Disappoints”

“To you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.” (Luke 2:1-14)

That says it all. That's the Christmas truth. It's the only thing that needs to be said or really even can be said. And it's the only thing I have to tell you tonight. Nothing more, nothing less.

They are the angel's words to the shepherds. “To you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.” They are words of “good news of great joy for all people.”

Tonight, Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 9:2-7) is fulfilled. “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined.” Tonight, Gabriel's words to Mary (Luke 1:26-38) come alive. They are flesh and blood real. Tonight “a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger” is our sign that “nothing will be impossible with God.”

Every year I come to this night wanting only one thing. I want to be reminded of the angel's words. I want to be cradled in the truth of those words. I want to hold them in the mangers of my heart. I want to be told that the story is true and can be trusted. I want to know the reality of this birth in my life and in our world.

I suspect that's what you want as well. I think that's what we all want. We want to hear the angel's words again for the very first time. I think that's why we've come to this place on this night.

Why do I say that? Why do I come here every year wanting to hear those words one more time and be reminded of their truth? Why do I think that's why you're here and what you want?

Because I have walked in darkness. Because I have lived in a land of deep darkness. Because I have known times when my life was draped by curtains of impossibility. Because I look at our world and ache to hear some good news of great joy, not just for me but for all people. And I think you know what I am talking about. I don't think your life and world are all that different from mine.

Let me give you a few examples.

I have friends and loved ones who are walking in the darkness of cancer – waiting, wondering, weeping. I have lived in the dark land of grief, loss, and sorrow. The names and faces of family and friends run through my mind like tears down my cheeks.

The darkness of confusion, self-doubt, and not knowing have caused me to stumble and fall. Sometimes my words and actions, my choices and priorities, things I have done and left undone, have darkened my soul and mind, leaving me blind to new possibilities and imprisoned by impossibility.

I desperately want to hear good news of great joy for all people, for blacks and whites, liberals and conservatives, Muslims and Christians, Jews and Palestinians, citizens and immigrants, gay and straight; and I want to see that good news overcome our divisions.

I could go on and on but I suspect you get it. You know what I am talking about, right? Maybe now you understand why I am here tonight, what I want, and why I want what I do. Those are not, however, my stories only. Change a few names and particulars and they are your stories too. They are the stories of all of us. They are as real for you as for me.

Every one of us has experienced some darkness over the last year; no especially over the past three years. Every one of us has stood before a curtain of impossibility. Every one of us has longed to be told good news of great joy. And for some of us that wasn't just about the past year. It describes our life today; here, now, in this moment.

That's why I come here tonight wanting to be reminded this story is real and true. That's why I said I think you come here wanting the same thing. And you know what? We've come to the right place. I never leave here disappointed. You will not leave here disappointed. The manger of Christ never disappoints.

Thanks be to a loving God, we can leave this place of worship once again having seen the "child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger" and once again, as if for the first time, we know this story is true. I always leave here knowing the reality of its truth for my life, how about you? Tonight, you and I will leave with a renewed awareness.

We will leave here knowing –
that the manger of darkness is filled with the Light of Life;
that the manger of confusion and self-doubt is filled with the Wonderful Counselor;
that the manger of weakness and impossibility cradles the Mighty God;
that the manger of loneliness and orphanhood holds the Eternal Father;
that the manger of chaos and conflict holds the Prince of Peace;
that the manger of cruelty and violence is filled with the Most Gentle One;
that the manger of guilt and regret is filled with the Merciful One;
that the manger of fear and lostness is filled with the Good Shepherd;
that the manger of hunger and poverty holds the Bread of Life;
that the manger of thirst and desire holds the Cup of Salvation; and
that the manger of our humanity now cradles God.

Somehow that little manger in Bethlehem holds the creator of us all and by his manger you and I, every aspect of our lives, and all of creation are cradled in him. Tonight, the Creator is born and by his birth we, the created, are made anew, reborn, and recreated.

I can't tell you how this happens. I don't know. I only know that it does happen. Year after year it happens. I've experienced it in my life and I've seen it happen in the lives of others. The only thing I can tell you is this: "To you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord." And that is good news of great joy for all people.