

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Tonight is a glorious night. It's our night. It's a night to join our voices to those of the angels as they sing out in joy. It's a night to praise God and sing with the angels, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*" Tonight we hear again and revel in the "*good news of great joy.*" It's for us: "*unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*"

And yet, hard as it may seem tonight, our joy is muted by the knowledge of how our King came, for Jesus came as a servant amidst poverty and weakness and shame. He was born of a lowly maiden and took upon Himself all that that poverty implies. And yet, by His poverty, He saved the world.

Let the swaddling cloths teach you how poor the Lord was as He entered this world of sin. He was wrapped in them, though He deserved soft kingly attire. Let the manger teach you of the poverty of this infant King. He had no plush crib for a bed, though He deserved it—only a feeding trough for animals. Let the obscure little town of Bethlehem teach you of the humility of the long foretold Ruler of Israel. He really should have been welcomed by emperors and kings in Rome, for He is King of Kings, yet only animals and shepherds attended this babe.

But let Jesus' lowly coming be for you a kind of prophetic foreshadowing of your salvation, for His coming was not self-serving. Jesus came as a servant. Let that coming teach you that Jesus came especially to serve. Let Jesus' coming as an infant show you that Jesus came especially for the helpless and weak. Let Jesus' poverty show you that He came especially to give the poor in spirit the kingdom of heaven. Let Jesus' manger bed teach you about the One who had nowhere to lay His head, and who would later lie in repose in death for you. Let Jesus' swaddling clothes be for you a reminder of His burial cloths and the death whereby He would earn the world's salvation announced by the angel.

Surely, all this shows that Jesus' coming is indeed good news of great joy for all people. For if Jesus had been born to high rank and amidst luxury, what might the world have thought? That salvation could only come to those with wealth and status? If Jesus had chosen Caesar's palace in the great city of Rome as His birthplace, what might the world have thought? That salvation is brought about by civil power? If Jesus had been born the son of a secular king, what would have been said? "*How useful it is to be powerful!*" Or born the son of a Roman senator rather than a Jewish maid? "*Look what can be accomplished by legislation!*"

Let no one misunderstand: Jesus came in low estate so that no one need be afraid to approach this Savior. No one need be overawed by His immense wealth

or the grandeur of His royal estate. The lowly and despised shepherds weren't, and we need not be either.

No, He who offered Himself for the salvation of the world came in ordinary flesh and lowly surroundings that we, who struggle with our sinful flesh and are surrounded by the base ways of the world and the devil, might believe that He came for us, to save us from our sins.

This is the mystery of the babe in the manger: that God Himself came down in human flesh and was laid in a manger, so that all, both the powerful and the weak, the rich and the poor, would be able to share in His salvation. For He whose Divinity made him rich became poor for our sake, so that He might earn for the whole world the riches of salvation, and give them to all who believe in Him.

That's why we rejoice tonight. That's why we sing. Of course, Christians sing all the time, but especially tonight, because this is our festival. It's our "*good news of great joy.*" Therefore, rejoice! Sing, "*Joy to the world, the Lord has come!*"

But more than that, let me give you a special invitation. Come back tomorrow, for He, whose little body was laid in the manger for you, bled and died for you on the cross. And He will be here tomorrow to feed you with His exalted body, risen from the dead. For, as much as we like Christmas Eve, tomorrow is Christmas. Tomorrow is the feast. So, yes, there is church here tomorrow. There will be more rejoicing and singing, and eating and drinking. So, come back tomorrow and feast on Christ for your salvation.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.