

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

It may seem an odd question to ask you, and it's not meant as a discouragement. I've been thinking about this question for some time. Why are you here tonight? The answers are not so obvious. The reasons may be several.

Why are YOU here tonight? For some of us, we have work to do, myself with the servants in the chancel, Mike and the musicians, the ushers, etc. It's not laborious, but it is work, important and joyful. For others, you probably have some connection with Zion: you are members or former members. For some of you, it may be a personal or family tradition — a bit of nostalgia.

Why are you HERE tonight? There are other places you can go on a Christmas Eve. Many in our country today wouldn't think of coming to church on a Christmas Eve. I was reminded the other day that for some, even Christians, the holiday is holy for the sake of family and children, and the church should gracefully yield to them and not do anything to conflict with their sacred time. But Christmas is not ABOUT family or children; it is FOR them like it is for you; and you are here at church because you know something of what Christmas is really about, and why it's really holy.

Therefore, you have come here to church as sinners on this Christmas Eve to hear once again the wonderful promises of God to send a Savior, born of woman, who by His cross would bruise the head of your ancient enemy.

You have come here to church to be reminded of your loving God, who would not withhold His Son, His only Son, from the sacrifice that would atone for the sins of the world.

You have come here to church to hear proclaimed the Light of the World who broke into our dark night of sin as a little child, God's Son in human flesh, come as Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace — a King who would reign with righteousness and justice over an everlasting kingdom.

You have come here tonight to worship this Messiah anointed not with oil, but with the Spirit of the Lord, our King who would come to judge with righteousness and equity, who when He comes again in glory will establish a kingdom of peace even among mortal enemies.

You have come here tonight to marvel at His coming announced to the maid who would offer her virgin womb willingly to God, so that by His Spirit, He might bring this Savior King into the world and establish His reign forever ... to marvel as His majesty coming in poverty and humility and obscurity ... to tremble at the announcement made by an angel to terrified shepherds: *"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord"* ... to worship with those

shepherds at the feet of the infant king, to sing His praises with angels and shepherds: “*Glory to God in the highest,*” and to ready yourselves to go, tell this Good News on the mountains, over the hills, and everywhere: “Jesus Christ is born!”

That’s all wonderful! Still, why are you here TONIGHT? This actually is the question that I have pondered for some time and think that perhaps I have stumbled upon the answer. That is, why tonight and, for many if not most of you, not tomorrow? After all, tonight is Christmas Eve; tomorrow is Christmas Day. More will be read tomorrow; there is much more to be said about Christ’s marvelous birth. More will be sung tomorrow on the Feast of Christ’s Nativity, more great carols and hymns . . . and we will serve up the Sacrament and partake together of Christ’s body and blood.

So why tonight? I suggest: it’s not just sentimentality or nostalgia, but it’s the context that draws you: the darkness and stillness of the night — silent night, holy night; all is calm. Tonight, there is heavenly peace, for the darkness is invaded by the light. The stillness is broken by the sound of our voices united with our choir and the heavenly choir of angels. God in His Son has brought heaven down to earth.

We know it truly for God’s word says it, but we feel it on Christmas Eve, I think. Tonight, the transcendent has mingled with the immanent. Tonight the supernatural is manifest among us. Immanuel has come! We can feel it; God is with us! We are calm! “Christ, the Savior is born!” We are at peace.

We’re glad you’re here tonight and would love to see you tomorrow at the feast. But even if we don’t, God grant not only that you may hold onto the Christmas Eve message, but also the feeling of Christmas Eve throughout the New Year! “Christ, the Savior is born!” In Him, God has brought His heaven down to earth. In Him, God begins the hard work of effecting our salvation.

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