

Christmas Eve, Year C 2021
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC
December 24, 2021

Isaiah 9:2-7 Psalm 96 Titus 2:11-14 Luke 2:1-20

4pm:

What a wonderful telling of the gospel story. Thank you for sharing it with us in such a special way.

Tonight is a mystery with the most wonderful of surprises. Our Lord is here. Jesus is with us. And do you know? Coming to church today is a brave thing to do. Maybe you left cooking or wrapping or something else undone, or escaped boredom, or were dragged here by some voice – Mom’s and Dad’s, or a whisper from God. However you came to this place, Jesus called you here. We each answered a call, like the shepherds in the field responded to the angels, to seek the Christ child, to meet Him on this holy night. Welcome to a life in which we meet Jesus everywhere, but most especially tonight, in an unlikely place, sleeping in a feed trough meant for animals.

We very often say – and it is true – that Jesus meets us exactly where we are. We must also seek Jesus, and look for him in the most unlikely of places. When we feel unworthy to meet Him, baby Jesus is there, in a place more humble than we could imagine, in a place where our dirty feet and our dirty clothes and our worst fears are not as bad as the conditions in the stable. We fear going to a birthing suite; Jesus is out back in the barn. Thank God. When we feel as if our life is one big battle, baby Jesus is there to interrupt the war, to show us a crude stable that enfolds even our weary hearts. Thank God. When the darkest of night encroaches upon our very soul, the prince of peace and light is with us in that place. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for Jesus is not just a baby, but our Lord, the one who saves us. Tonight I hope that you see him in this place, hear him in a song, find him in the beauty of right now, in the stillness and mystery of worship.

Jesus comes to us this night as light –
In the light of the Christ candle, lit for the first time tonight,
Yet also lit each year.
Jesus is here, still and again.

The prophet Isaiah wrote that “Those who dwell in darkness will see a great light.” The light is here; it is the light of Jesus the Christ, shining into the world. It is the light of love. The hymn title, “Love came down at Christmas” is true. Jesus’ love is brighter and more vast than all of the stars in the sky. Look up tonight or on a cloudless night and see the magnitude of Jesus. Count the stars, and know how vast Jesus’ love is.

We will have a new bishop in March, and he sends us this greeting: (From our bishop-elect, Daniel Richards)

Merry Christmas! What I have to say to you is that you belong. You were created to bear God’s image, name, and likeness. You were made to love as God loves, and to live as Christ would live your life. You were made to be a vessel of the Holy Spirit. No one is going to force you to do that - as if that were possible! But I will love you until you know that you are loved. I will live in a way that models that Reign of God in me as best I can, with God’s help and the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

As the Father waited for the son in the parable of Jesus, I will wait for you to come home. As the Father went out into the night to persuade his older son to come in, I will do everything I can to persuade you to join the party.

And if I could ask you; how will you live into God's Reign this Christmas? How will you adore Christ who is incarnate in these people who bear his Spirit? How will you love those who are moving through life asleep? How will you make real and present the life of God in this Feast of the Incarnation?

Let us lay aside the lies that we have half-believed about what matters and like shepherds called from sleepy fields go running for the light of Christ wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

Pray that I may ... be worthy of the trust placed in me. And I will pray that you are able to know your worth and the infinite riches of God's Kingdom revealed in this Child.

[Catherine:] I am so glad that you are here. You belong. Merry, holy Christmas!