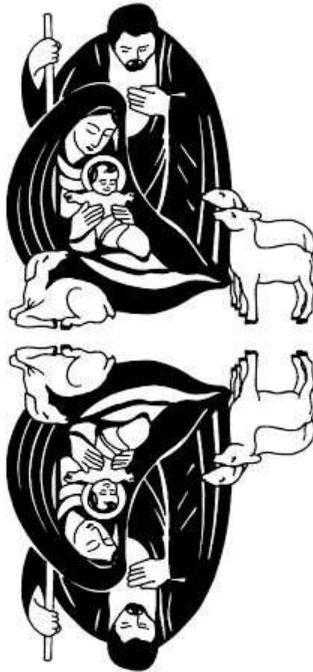


The Festival of the Nativity of Our Lord

+ Christmas Eve +



Calvary Lutheran Church
9807 Church Road + Dallas, TX + 75238
214-348-5567

December 24, 2017 5:00 p.m.

Reflections of Salvation

REFLECTIONS OF SALVATION

PRE-SERVICE MUSIC

A GREAT AND MIGHTY WONDER

Christian Worship, 36:1,2,4

Text: Germanus, c. 634–734; tr. John M. Neale, 1818–66, alt.

- 1 A great and mighty wonder, A glorious mystery:
A virgin bears an infant Who veils his deity.**

Refrain:

Repeat the hymn again:

“To God on high be glory And peace on earth to men.”

- 2 The Word becomes incarnate And yet remains on high,
And cherubim sing anthems To shepherds from the sky.**

Refrain

- 4 Since all he comes to ransom, By all be he adored,
The infant born in Bethl’em, The Savior and the Lord.**

Refrain

INTRODUCTION

In the words of this hymn we sing, “A great and mighty wonder, a glorious mystery.” Tonight we will take a few moments to reflect on some of the truly wonderful and mysterious ways in which God has provided our salvation through the birth of this Christ-child.

If you look at the two pictures on your service folder cover you will notice that while both pictures look almost exactly the same, they are actually opposite of each other as though you were looking at the original and its mirror image.

As one reads Scripture it becomes clear that God takes a certain fancy and delight in solving the problems of sin through what we call “mirror-imaged solutions.” He solves sin by doing exactly the opposite of what we done to cause sin in the first place. And so, tonight, we will consider several of these mirror-imaged solutions to sins and we will call them “reflections of salvation.”

OH, COME, ALL YE FAITHFUL

Christian Worship, 55:1,2

Text: John F. Wade, c. 1711–86; tr. Frederick Oakeley, 1802–80, alt.

- 1 Oh, come, all ye faithful, Joyful and triumphant,
Oh, come ye, oh, come ye to Bethlehem;
Come and behold him, Born the King of angels.**

Refrain:

**Oh, come, let us adore him, Oh, come, let us adore him,
Oh, come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.**

- 2 God from true God, and Light from Light eternal,
Born of a virgin, to earth he comes,
Only begotten Son of God the Father.**

Refrain

STAND

EXHORTATION AND PRAYER

M Dear people of God, in this Christmas season, it is our duty and delight to hear again the message of the angels and, in heart and mind, to go to Bethlehem and see this thing which has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us—the Christ Child lying in a manger.

Let us read and learn in Holy Scripture the story of the loving purposes of God from the first days after our fall into sin to the glorious redemption brought to us by this holy child.

But first, let us pray for people all over the world who would delight with us to know the good news of Jesus Christ and who would join with us in singing his praises. Let us pray for the people of this city and for all those in our own congregation.

And, because this would please our Lord, let us remember in his name the poor and helpless, the cold, the hungry and the oppressed, the sick and those who are sad, the lonely and the unloved, and the elderly and the little children. We especially remember all those who do not know the Lord Jesus, those who do not love him, and those who by sin have grieved his heart of love.

Finally, let us remember before God all those who rejoice with us in heaven, who live in greater light than we, that multitude which no one can number, whose hope was in the Word made flesh, who died in faith, and who live before the throne of God and praise him each day in his temple. We confess that we are united with them as we are united with one another.

To sum up all these petitions, let us pray as Christ himself taught us.

**C Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.**

BE SEATED

CHOIR ANTHEM

Before the Marvel of this Night

*Text: Jaroslav J. Vajda, Tune: Carl Schalk
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*Before the marvel of this night Adoring, fold your wings and bow,
Then tear the sky apart with light And with your news the world endow.
Proclaim the birth of Christ and peace, That fear and death and sorrow cease:
Sing peace, sing peace, sing gift of peace, Sing peace, sing gift of peace!*

*Awake the sleeping world with song, This is the day the Lord has made.
Assemble here, celestial throng, In royal splendor come arrayed.
Give earth a glimpse of heavenly bliss, A teasing taste of what they miss:
Sing bliss, sing bliss, sing endless bliss, Sing bliss, sing endless bliss!*

*The love that we have always known, Our constant joy and endless light,
Now to the loveless world be shown, Now break upon its deathly night.
Into one song compress the love, That rules our universe above:
Sing love, sing love, sing God is love, Sing love, sing God is love!*

THE READING OF THE ACCOUNT OF CHRISTMAS

L ^{LUKE 2:1} In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to his own town to register.

⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to men on
whom his favor rests.”

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

The First Reflection

THE FIRST REFLECTION

Flesh and Blood to God – God to Flesh and Blood

IMAGE

Adam and Eve, our first parents, were made of flesh and blood. But in their arrogance, they desired to leave behind their humanity and attain God's divinity. They wanted to become like God. But in trying to attain divinity by their own means they fell into sin and lost the perfect relationship with God that he had blessed them with from the beginning. Rather than knowing God's love for them and finding comfort and peace with him, their sin caused them to hide from God and to lose his perfect love. Listen again to Satan's lying temptation:

“You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

(Genesis 3:4-5)

NOW SING WE, NOW REJOICE

Christian Worship, 34:2,3

Text: Latin hymn, 14th century; tr. Arthur T. Russell, 1806–74, alt.

As you reflect on Satan's words, hear the words of this hymn which remind us that we cannot attain divinity, but that God must come to us and bring us salvation. He saves us from sin and vanity!

- 2 **Come from on high to me; I cannot rise to thee.
Cheer my wearied spirit, O pure and holy Child;
Through thy grace and merit, Blest Jesus, Lord most mild,
Draw me unto thee! Draw me unto thee!**

- 3 **Now through his Son doth shine The Father's grace divine.
Death o'er us had reigned Through sin and vanity;
He for us obtained Eternal joy on high.
May we praise him there! May we praise him there!**

REFLECTION

Thousands of years after that fateful day, God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to solve what had gone wrong in the Garden of Eden. Scripture tells us that Jesus is the eternal Son of God. But his plan

was to be born as a human child, to take on human flesh and blood in order to redeem mankind from sin. Paul tells us about the humility of Jesus who deigned to leave his heavenly home to make his home with us on earth in order to free us from our sin. And so we have the first Reflection of Salvation: Where flesh and blood wanted so desperately to be God, God chose to become flesh and blood to redeem us from our sins. Hear the words of St. Paul in Philippians 2.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. (Philippians 2:5-7 NIV)

OF THE FATHER'S LOVE BEGOTTEN

Christian Worship, 35:1,2

Text: Aurelius Clemens Prudentius, 348–c. 413, abr.; tr. John M. Neale, 1818–66, st. 1-4, alt.

With this hymn we sing about the Son of God becoming flesh and blood for our salvation.

- 1 Of the Father's love begotten Ere the worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega, He the source, the ending he,
Of the things that are, that have been, And that future years shall see
Evermore and evermore.**

- 2 Oh, that birth forever blessed When the virgin, full of grace,
By the Holy Ghost conceiving, Bore the Savior of our race,
And the babe, the world's Redeemer, First revealed his sacred face
Evermore and evermore.**

The Second Reflection



Servant for the Master – Master for the Servant

IMAGE

While we marvel at God taking on human flesh and blood to save us, we must also wonder at our second reflection this evening. If we stop for a minute to examine Satan's real plan in the Garden, we come to realize that he wanted a substitution made. We know from Peter, John and Jude that Satan and his fellow demons were thrown out of heaven because of their arrogance. They despised their places of authority and tried to make themselves God.

In the Garden of Eden, we find Satan still up to his old tricks. He seeks to substitute the creature for the Creator, the servant for the master, the human for the God. He leads Adam to believe that he deserves more and better, that he can be the God and Master of his own life. Again, mankind fell into sin as he sought to substitute himself for God. Here is the Apostle John's account of the battle in heaven according to one of his Revelations:

And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down--that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. (Revelation 12:7-9)

FROM HEAVEN ABOVE TO EARTH I COME

Christian Worship, 38:1-3

Text: Martin Luther, 1483–1546; tr. Catherine Winkworth, 1827–78, alt.

With this hymn we ponder how heaven came to earth to set us free from all our sins.

- 1 **“From heav’n above to earth I come To bear good news to ev’ry home;
Glad tidings of great joy I bring, Whereof I now will say and sing:**
- 2 **“To you this night is born a child Of Mary, chosen virgin mild;
This little child of lowly birth Shall be the joy of all the earth.**
- 3 **“This is the Christ, our God most high, Who hears your sad and bitter cry;
He will himself your Savior be From all your sins to set you free.**

REFLECTION

On the day that Christ was born, we find God's mirror-imaged solution in full spectacle. Since the servant tried to substitute himself for the master, the creature for the Creator, God's reflection of salvation is to turn it around and substitute the Master for the servant, the Creator for the creature. Thus Jesus our Savior becomes the suffering servant who substitutes himself for us in life and in death and in this way provides for us eternal salvation.

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:4-6)

LET ALL TOGETHER PRAISE OUR GOD

Christian Worship, 41:4,5

Text: Nikolaus Herman, c. 1480–1561, abr.; tr. August Crull, 1845–1923, alt.

In this next hymn we are reminded how God exchanged himself for us, taking on flesh and blood for our salvation.

- 4 A wondrous change which he does make: He takes our flesh and blood,
And he conceals for sinners' sake His majesty as God,
His majesty as God.**
- 5 He serves that I a lord may be—A great exchange indeed!
Could Jesus' love do more for me To help me in my need,
To help me in my need?**

ONCE IN ROYAL DAVID'S CITY

Christian Worship, 50:1-3

Text: Cecil Frances Alexander, 1818–95, abr., alt.

This hymn reminds us that the humble child born in Bethlehem is indeed our Lord and King.

- 1 Once in royal David's city Stood a lowly cattle shed,
Where a mother laid her baby In a manger for his bed;
Mary was that mother mild, Jesus Christ her little child.**
- 2 He came down to earth from heaven Who is God and Lord of all,
And his shelter was a stable, And his cradle was a stall;
With the poor and mean and lowly Lived on earth our Savior holy.**
- 3 But our eyes at last shall see him Through his own redeeming love,
For that child, so dear and gentle, Is our Lord in heav'n above,
As he leads his children on To the place where he is gone.**

The Third Reflection

THE THIRD REFLECTION

Firstborn lives and dies – Firstborn dies and lives

IMAGE

Adam and Eve were God's first created people. In a sense they were his firstborn children. God had breathed into Adam the breath of life and he became a living soul. God blessed him with all the blessings of a perfect world... and he and his perfect wife enjoyed its abundance. But although Adam and Eve began their lives in a world of life and peace, their lives quickly turned to death. Because of their offense, sin entered God's perfect world and through that sin death entered as well. What was created to live would now waste away in sin and, ultimately, die. Hear Paul's words to the Romans:

Sin entered the world through on man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men... (Romans 5:12)

BEHOLD, A BRANCH IS GROWING

Christian Worship, 47:1,5

Text: Alte Catholische Geistliche Kirchengeseng, Köln, 1599, abr.; tr. composite.

This hymn reminds us how Christ sprouted and grew out of a stump devastated by the ravages of sin.

- 1 Behold, a Branch is growing Of loveliest form and grace,
As prophets sang, foreknowing; It springs from Jesse's race
And bears one little flow'r In midst of coldest winter,
At deepest midnight hour.**

- 5 O Savior, Child of Mary, Who felt our human woes,
O Savior, King of glory, Who conquered all our foes,
Bring us at last, we pray, To the bright courts of heaven
And to the endless day.**

REFLECTION

On the day of Christ's birth, the reflection of God's salvation reversed the process of condemnation that lived within the veins of humankind. That's because the major reason for the Christ to be born at all was so that he could die. In a sense God's firstborn, the one and only Son of God, began his life in this world *in death*. Simeon, who held Jesus only eight days after his birth, promised Mary that a sword would pierce her own soul. That would be no more evident than at the time of Jesus' crucifixion – that moment at which the Christ accomplished what he came to do, to bear the sins of the world and suffer their deadly, hellish curse. But his death would not be permanent. He would rise from the dead and provide eternal life to all who believe in him. Hear what the writer to the Hebrews said about this reflection of salvation.

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. (Hebrews 2:15)

WHAT CHILD IS THIS

Christian Worship, 67:1,2

Text: William C. Dix, 1837–98, alt.

This hymn reflects on the real work of Jesus who comes to set sinners free from the sentence of death.

- 1 **What child is this who, laid to rest,
On Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet With anthems sweet
While shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing.
Haste, haste to bring him laud,
The babe, the Son of Mary!**

- 2 **Why lies he in such mean estate
Where oxen now are feeding?
Good Christians, fear; For sinners here
The silent Word is pleading.
Nails, spear shall pierce him through;
The cross he'll bear for me, for you.
Hail, hail the Word made flesh,
The babe, the Son of Mary!**

The Fourth Reflection

THE FOURTH REFLECTION

Sight instead of Trust – Trust instead of Sight

IMAGE

In the Garden of Eden, God had provided everything in perfect arrangement. The truth of his presence, protection and provision were tangible and visible. Adam and Eve “walked with God” in a mysterious and unique relationship that we can only imagine. There they could live by sight, feel and experience. Nevertheless, sight was not good enough... they rebelled anyway. But oddly enough they rebelled by trusting in something that was unseen. The devil didn’t come as he is, but hidden behind the form of a serpent and clothed in half-truths and innuendo. His promise that Adam and Eve would become like God, knowing good and evil, was true enough – but it was presented as gain instead of the loss it truly was. And his preface to that promise was outright lie insinuating God was untrustworthy. They ate and their eyes were opened... and like God they had now experienced both good and evil. And though they did not physically fall dead on the spot, Satan’s lie was revealed when, centuries later, both Adam and Eve did die. Listen again to the devil’s cunning message:

“You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”
(Genesis 3:5)

COME, YOUR HEARTS AND VOICES RAISING

Christian Worship, 42:3,4

Text: Paul Gerhardt, 1607–76, abr.; tr. The Lutheran Hymnal, St. Louis, 1941.

In this next hymn we hear how God saved us from Satan and broke the powers of hell.

- 3 Christ, from heav’n to us descending
And in love our race befriending,
In our need his help extending,
Saved us from the wily foe.**
- 4 Jacob’s Star in all its splendor
Beams with comfort sweet and tender,
Forcing Satan to surrender,
Breaking all the pow’rs of hell.**

REFLECTION

Since Adam and Eve's sin concerned a matter of trust, God decided to redeem them from their sin through that very same matter of trust. This time, however, instead of giving humanity the ability to walk with him by sight, God reversed things and called upon his people to live by faith, not by sight. He gave promises that could not be experimentally confirmed... they could only be trusted. And while in some ways God's promises can be tested, for the most part they adhere to this principle, "**being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.**" (Hebrews 11:1). Hear God's promise regarding faith in the unseen:

For God so love the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

Christian Worship, 65 (1,3,4)

Text: Phillips Brooks, 1835-93, abr., alt.

With this hymn we are again reminded how Christ's humble entrance into our world disguises his unseen work of battling for our salvation. This Christ can only be taken on faith.

- 1 **O little town of Bethlehem, How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep And dreamless sleep The silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth The everlasting light.
The hopes and fears Of all the years Are met in thee tonight.**

- 3 **How silently, how silently The wondrous gift is giv'n!
So God imparts To human hearts The blessings of his heav'n.
No ear may hear his coming, But in this world of sin
Where meek souls will Receive him still, The dear Christ enters in.**

- 4 **O holy Child of Bethlehem, Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin And enter in; Be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels The great glad tidings tell;
Oh, come to us, Abide with us, Our Lord Immanuel!**

FRIENDSHIP REGISTER and GATHERING OF OFFERINGS

CHOIR ANTHEM

German Carol Tr. Meg Peacocke, arranged by Philip Ledger (b. 1937)
© Oxford University Press 1982

Still, Still, Still

*Still, still, still, Let all the world be still,
For Mary lays her son to rest, Sings to him softly at her breast,
Still, still, still, Let all the world be still.*

*Sleep, sleep, sleep, My dearest baby, sleep,
The angels all rejoice and sing, Heaven for your delight shall ring,
Sleep, sleep, sleep, My dearest baby, sleep.*

*Joy, joy, joy, My heart is filled with joy!
The God of love has left his throne, Made this humble world his own,
Joy, joy, joy, My heart is filled with joy!*

The Fifth Reflection

Mother of Sin – Mother of Salvation

IMAGE

In the third chapter of Genesis we find the terrible account of the Fall into Sin. Because God has designated the man as the one who bears the responsibility of leadership in the home, Scripture often speaks of Adam as the cause of sin, and indeed his lack of leadership at the time of the temptation was a direct cause of sin entering the world. But we also know from God's Word that Eve was the one who first fell for Satan's temptation to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree. Of all the trees in the Garden God had only said one was off limits – the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God's promise was clear, "**when you eat of it you will surely die.**" (Genesis 2:17). Eve chose to disregard God's Word and do, instead, what her heart wanted to do. And in so doing, she became the mother of sin. The Holy Spirit, through the pen of the Apostle Paul, gives us his evaluation of that fateful moment in the Garden:

For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. (1 Timothy 2:13,14)

AWAY IN A MANGER

Text: Little Children's Book, Philadelphia, 1885, st. 1-2; Vineyard Songs, Louisville, 1892, st. 3.

Christian Worship, 68

Notice how unaffected by sin our precious Christ-child is. Though he was born into a world of sin, he remains sinless and holy.

- 1 Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.
The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay,
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.**

- 2 The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
But little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.
I love you, Lord Jesus; look down from the sky,
And stay by my side until morning is nigh.**

- 3 Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask you to stay
Close by me forever and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in your tender care,
And take us to heaven to live with you there.**

REFLECTION

God's compassion knows no bounds – though sin entered through the hand of Eve, it would be through Eve that the Savior from sin would be born. God specifically identified the enmity that he would create between Satan and “the woman”... and that one of *her seed* would eventually crush Satan's power. Therefore, Jesus did not suddenly appear on earth out of nowhere, but he was “born of a woman.” On the Day Jesus was born, God's remedy for sin had finally arrived. But, whereas Eve had once disregarded God's Word and promises, Mary trusted God's Word concerning all that had been said about her child. When the angel brought Mary the news that she would bear the Son of God as her child, her response was Spirit-worked faith, humility, and submission to the will of God's Word. Hear Mary's words as the angel brought her God's promises:

“I am the Lord's servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said.” (Luke 1:38)

GENTLE MARY LAID HER CHILD

Text: Joseph S. Cook, 1859–1933.

Christian Worship, 56 (1,3)

The words, “Gentle Mary” remind us of Mary’s gentle faith in her God and her willingness to submit to his will for her life.

- 1 Gentle Mary laid her child Lowly in a manger;
There he lay, the undefiled, To the world a stranger.
Such a babe in such a place—Can he be the Savior?
Ask the saved of all the race Who have found his favor.**

- 3 Gentle Mary laid her child Lowly in a manger;
He is still the undefiled, But no more a stranger.
Son of God, of humble birth, Beautiful the story;
Praise his name in all the earth, Hail the King of glory!**

The Sixth Reflection

THE SIXTH REFLECTION

Sinner becomes Saint – Saint becomes Sinner

IMAGE

Our final reflection this evening is found in the substitutionary work of the Christ-child. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, the whole world became sinful and every human being, save Jesus, has entered this world having inherited a sinful nature. Every person in the world is destined for an eternity under God’s wrath and, therefore, every person in the world is need of a Savior from sin. Hear Paul’s words to the Romans as he confessed his dire need:

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:24,25)

SILENT NIGHT! HOLY NIGHT!

Christian Worship, 60

Text: Franz Joseph Mohr, 1792–1848, abr.; tr. John F. Young, 1820–85.

This quiet hymn stands in contrast to the restless and fearful soul of the sinner who must stand before the Judgment Seat of God.

- 1 Silent night! Holy night!**
All is calm, all is bright,
Round yon virgin mother and child.
Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.

- 2 Silent night! Holy night!**
Shepherds quake at the sight.
Glories stream from heaven afar;
Heav'nly hosts sing, Alleluia;
Christ, the Savior, is born!
Christ, the Savior, is born!

- 3 Silent night! Holy night!**
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

REFLECTION

With the coming of Jesus, the Christ, God began the great reversal of our condition under God's condemnation. Jesus reversed our destiny by sacrificing himself in death as payment for the price of sin while at the same time offering his righteousness (something all sinner lack, but need) as his gift to us. Paul speaks of this Great Exchange in his letter to the Corinthians:

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

PRAYER

STAND

M When all was still and it was midnight, your eternal Word, O Lord, descended from the almighty throne to dwell among us. May we receive him in the peace of forgiven hearts and proclaim your gracious goodwill to all people on earth, for he is God with us, Emmanuel, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C Amen.

BLESSING

M May he who by his incarnation gathered things earthly and heavenly into one, fill us with such joy that comes with the knowledge of the forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life. And the blessing of God Almighty—the Father, the Son, † and the Holy Spirit—be upon you and remain with you always.

C Amen.

WHERE SHEPHERDS LATELY KNELT

Christian Worship, 54

Text: Jaroslav J. Vajda, 1919–2008. © 1987 Concordia Publishing House. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

This hymn reminds us, individually, how Christ was born for me and for my salvation. But it also reminds each of us that he was not born for me alone, but for all sinners.

- 1** Where shepherds lately knelt and kept the angel's word,
I come in half-belief, a pilgrim strangely stirred;
But there is room and welcome there for me,
But there is room and welcome there for me.
- 2** In that unlikely place I find him as they said:
Sweet newborn Babe, how frail! and in a manger bed,
A still, small voice to cry one day for me,
A still, small voice to cry one day for me.
- 3** How should I not have known Isaiah would be there,
His prophecies fulfilled? With pounding heart I stare:
A child, a son, the Prince of Peace for me,
A child, a son, the Prince of Peace for me.
- 4** Can I, will I forget how Love was born, and burned
Its way into my heart unasked, unforced, unearned,
To die, to live, and not alone for me,
To die, to live, and not alone for me?



It has been our joy to have you here this evening to celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. As we go our separate ways, traveling toward our traditions, may we remember that the greatest gift came wrapped in swaddling clothes with a tag saying "From: God the Father – To: The World – With Love!" Have a blessed Christmas Eve. The poem below is meant to focus our hearts in the proper direction as we exchange gifts this Christmas season.

We also invite you to join us for Christmas Eve Compline this evening at 11:00 p.m. or Christmas Day Worship tomorrow at 9:30 a.m.

Die Bescherung

(German: "the sharing," or the distribution of Christmas gifts)

A poem to read before the opening of gifts

So now it's Christmas once again, the time of Jesus' birth,
When angels scurry round about to every home on earth
To watch the goings on this eve around each Christmas tree
And with rejoicing celebrate when in a place they see
Hearts aglow with faith and love because of God's great gift,
Homes that sparkle in the snow, not aimlessly adrift
With loud and boisterous unconcern for the great mystery
That on this eve in Bethlehem's barn occurred for you and me:
The Son of God exchanged His robes -- that's what the angels saw --
For swadd'ling bands and mother's care, while shepherds stood in awe;
He came, the Lord, to share our lives and save from misery;
He came, our Lord, to make us lords with Him eternally!
Now angels, as God's messengers, again rejoice to see
Families gathered in His name around the Christmas tree.
God's gift is not forgotten as they give gifts to share,
In fact, His gift gives to each gift that very special flair
Of love that flows from God's own love; it binds all hearts in one.
That family shares, which truly shares the gift of God's own Son!
So come now family, each in turn, your special tribute bring,
To the delight of each of us, in honor of your King.
Say your fine piece, or sing a tune, or speak but just a word;
We listen, cheered and cheering, to things we just now heard.
Then snug up in a settled spot and wait your turn to get
The gifts marked with your name; they'll be just right, I'll bet --
"Just what you need," for each of us has taken special care
To see to it that each of us get gifts that are as rare
As mother's love and apple pie, and in their own say
"I love you much!" And so let's get The Sharing underway.

AJK

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