

Pastor Troy E. Medlin  
Christmas Eve 2025  
Grace, River Forest  
12/24/2025

*Today*

The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news for all the people: to *you* is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” A scene and words many of us know well. Like it they are indelibly marked on our hearts.

At the Marian Library in Dayton there are over 3,600 nativity sets. From the very beginning of nativity scenes folks in a myriad of cultures and places have been putting themselves and their people into the story. Something fitting their experience.

It could be nativity scenes that include members of a local community coming to gather around the baby Jesus like in Italy. Bakers, farmers, fishermen, musicians and even the sleeping shepherd Bonino who misses the angel's announcement while fast asleep.

In southeast Asia you find elephants, and in Africa- zebras and lions alongside the Holy Family.

In Mexico, you find the devil lurking around the nativity carrying items of temptation. His presence reminds us that this baby will one day bring us victory over sin and death.

Maybe you have heard about nativity scenes this year in Chicagoland. Placing the birth of Jesus into this world as fraught, fearful, and in need of good news as it always has been. A Nativity scene in River Forest has an empty manger. Mary, Joseph and Jesus are gone, while cutouts of Magi, shepherds and animals stand there. A sign reads, “Due to ICE activity in our community, the Holy Family is in hiding.”

We insist on placing ourselves and this time, and our hopes and dreams, losses and grief, in this story. We would have it no other way. That’s the only way. This story, so familiar, is made new in every time and place. It must. Especially those so familiar with the brokenness of this world that God so desperately loves. The God we encounter tonight would not have it any other way either. The good news that the angel proclaims is for us too. It has to be.

What might that look like?

There is a translation of a proclamation sometimes chanted on this night that connects the birth of Christ to various ways of marking time and major events in the past. Placing this moment in

actual history. It ends with the phrase “*today* is the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.” It would not be enough if we were only recounting something that happened back in time-- we are here because this Christ Child insists on being born again for you- today and never leaving you any longer.

This miraculous event that happened once in Royal David’s City has found its way to us. That love of God that we see made known in Bethlehem is wide and expansive and strong enough to hold all that you bring into this story and into this night and all the frayed edges and fractured parts of your own story even the parts you keep hidden. It all belongs because you belong here. There is a spaciousness to this night.

When I’m at a wedding or party with assigned seating I am always a little bit worried that somehow the hosts have forgotten to assign me a place to sit. That all the tables are filled and for some reason I’m the one left out. So, I scan nervously to try to find my name.

This baby that was held by the manger, that will go from cross to empty tomb, is God’s unending sign that there is a place for you in the triune God. You know: Christmas Eve, cross, and all. Your name is included by grace alone. Pure gift. No strings attached. Now this little child holds you close. What is it like to be held by the Christ child? How does he encounter you?

Hear this- addressed to you: Do not be afraid; for see- I am bringing good news which is for you. Unto you \_\_\_\_\_ is born this day a wonderful counselor, a Mighty God, an everlasting father, a prince of peace. A friend. A future. A companion. A reconciler. A healer. A shelter. A shepherd. A savior. A resurrection. A love stronger than death.

Indelibly a part of the story we bring its promise into our own time. Like prophets waking up this world to God’s dream dawning. Promise- in perpetual particularity. For you!

Christ has no hands on earth but ours, no hands or feet on earth but ours, ours are the voices through which Christ speaks to this world with kindness, as Theresa of Avila said.

As the body of Christ we enter into each other's midnight without fear, carrying our candle. Holding it as a sign. Compelled by a zealotry for good deeds as Titus put it, may they see in its flickering flame that they too are a part of God's story. That God has not forgotten them and neither will we. And that God calls each of us by name- and remembers us, loves us, into forever and ever.

Today is the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. You will find him- with you at all times. Even, maybe especially unbidden. He’s already found you.