

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

For Mary it had been a long journey.

The road from Nazareth to Bethlehem was rough and rocky.

The rainy season made the road even more treacherous.

Every time the donkey stumbled or slipped

she had to hang on for dear life.

Her wet cloak hung in sodden folds about her shoulders,

and her swollen belly only made her more ungainly...

and more uncomfortable.

The journey from Nazareth seemed to go on forever.

To finally arrive at Bethlehem in the pouring rain

and find no lodging available was more than she could take.

As she broke down and her own tears joined the rain that ran down her face,

the words of the Angel from her dream taunted her like a bad joke.

“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.”

Why had she ever agreed to this.

Surely God could have picked someone else.

If this is how God treats his favorites....



The life of faith is not always easy.

Confessing belief in God doesn't make your problems go away.

Indeed, in so many ways it complicates things.

So if this is the case, why go to all the trouble.

Or to put it another way,

Why are we here tonight (today)?



A sharp pain lanced her belly and she caught her breath.

She leaned forward and rested her hands on the donkey's neck for strength  
and tried to breath normally.

It was a contraction. A big one.

No! Not now, please not now!

Joseph appeared out of the rain

with a sheepish looking landlord in tow.

“He says we can stay in the cave for the animals out back.

It isn't much but it's dry.

Hopefully it will only be one night.

The registration is tomorrow and then we can be on our way back home.

I'm sorry for –

What's the matter?”

“I think it's time.”

As she watched the conflicting emotions pass over Joseph's face  
another contraction took hold and her eyes began to swim.



Anyone who has ever been present at a birth  
will tell you that it is a magical and holy event.

Every time.

The tension and expectation and incredible effort  
that go into bringing a baby into the world  
explode in a tidal wave of love and release and exhaustion  
at the moment of birth.

The mystery of the incarnation for me,  
is that God would freely choose to enter into our reality  
merely for the love of us.

And that by Gods divine action of becoming flesh,  
our own bodies have become intermingled with the divine.

The simple statement, Emmanuel, God with us,

just doesn't do it justice.

In that birth,

God and humanity are so intertwined  
that they can never be separated again.



They had made it to the stable.

Mary was panting like a dog

with her head down and her eyes closed,

trying to catch her breath and regain a little strength.

Joseph was there with a damp rag mopping her neck and face.

She grabbed a corner of the rag

and sucked the cool and slightly salty liquid into her parched mouth.

The cattle and sheep had been moved away from the manger,  
tied in the back of the cave to make room.

Restless at first they had settled down at last.

The light of the small oil lamp cast more shadows than light.

Out of the dark, the animals gazed silently at the holy family.

All were waiting now.

Joseph wanted to help Mary, but he wasn't sure how.

He kept looking nervously out into the night,

waiting for the landlord to return with the midwife.

They were alone, except for the animals.

They felt so alone.

As another contraction began

they grasped hands and looked into each others eyes for strength.



One of the mysteries that the incarnation reminds us of

is that God resides behind and within all of creation; is bound up with it.

And so too, it reminds us of the universal nature of the Good News.

Jesus Christ came into the world to save all sinners,  
not just Christian sinners,  
and so the joy and hope of Christmas  
is a story of joy and hope for all of humanity.  
At the heart of all of us resides the light of the world.  
No matter how covered up with the mud of darkness and sin,  
that light will never,  
can never go out.

As Christians it is our job to seek that light in all persons  
and to nurture that light in all places.



Mary leaned back against the cold wood of the manger.  
With her arms spread wide for balance  
she grasped the corner posts,  
put her chin to her chest  
and pushed with all her might.  
Starlight sparkled on the inside of her eyelids  
and blood roared in her ears.  
Her legs started to quiver like they were out of her control.  
In a series of surges first the head  
and then the shoulder  
and then the whole baby came out  
helped and supported along the way by Joseph's strong hands.  
As Mary lay back in the straw exhausted,  
Joseph wrapped the baby in a blanket against the nights chill,  
and the little boy howled out his discomfort.  
As Joseph lifted the little baby up to his mothers breast  
and Mary caught her first glimpse of his tiny face,  
the words of the Angel came again to her mind.

“therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.”

And her heart broke open.

She noticed that the rain had stopped

and starlight began to show through the tattered clouds.

The three huddled together in the dimness of their little lamp for warmth

and just because they wanted to be together.

And the light of heaven shown in their eyes

and the light of the stars reflected off the tears of joy

that rolled down their cheeks.



Every year at Christmas we celebrate birth of Christ,

the coming of God into the world as a little helpless baby.

And we also celebrate the special child that lies within us all

– the child of God.

It is a time when we are made young again

by the abundant loving-kindness of God.

Hearts hardened by pain, or suffering, or disappointment

are broken open in the brilliant light of this most holy night (day).

Sadly, it does not last.

Soon enough we will be back to our old ways.

We are only human after all and not God.

But for an all too brief moment

we do get a glimpse of the kingdom of God.

And joy and hope are born again.

“For unto us a child is born. Unto us a Son is given.”

In the wonder of a child at Christmas

we see with fresh eyes the gifts we have all been given in Baptism.

An enquiring and discerning heart.

Courage to will and to persevere.

A spirit to know and love God.

The gift of joy and wonder in all God's works.

In the wonder of a child at Christmas,

we are made young again

and we begin to see the divine potential that resides in us;

in all of us.

Now I'll be the first to admit that it has been a rough year.

We are at the start of an election year,

and that always makes it rough

as the negative rhetoric from both sides

on a wide array of topics pummels us.

Here in Jefferson City, and personally in Grace Church,

we are struggling to find a solution

for the growing number of unhoused people

appearing here in the downtown area.

Our continued struggles with the racism in our society,

and the hard work of balancing

personal safety and community responsibility

as it relates to the use of force,

bring us face to face with the hard truth

that we are not as good as we think we are,

or think we should be.

Fear and hopelessness lurk at the margins of our consciousness,

threatening to overwhelm us.

Perhaps that is the reason

why the simple gift of the incarnation, and the wild hope it brings,

seems so precious this year.

How easy it is to forget

that the light of Christ twinkles all the brighter when it is dark,

like the stars that shine so brilliantly on a clear winters night.  
Remember that those same stars shine on you night and day,  
even when they cannot be seen.  
And remember also, that the light of Christ shines in your heart always,  
even when you feel alone.  
You may not feel worthy,  
but you don't need to be.  
Christ comes to you where you are,  
shattering all your excuses.  
This is the present that God gives each of us  
over and over again every year at Christmas.  
This is the present we are told to share with everyone we meet.  
Truth be known, God gives us this gift every day,  
it's just easier to see the gift on Christmas.  
Look around you. Tonight (today) the stars are out.  
"For unto us is born this day in the city of David a Savior,  
which is Christ the Lord...  
And suddenly there was with the Angel  
a multitude of the heavenly host  
praising God, and saying,  
Glory to God in the highest,  
and peace to his people on earth."  
Amen.