

Merry Christmas everyone! It brings me great joy to gather with all of you this night to celebrate the day on which our loving God came to us in such a beautiful way, in such a perfect way, in such an incredibly humble way, in the person of Jesus - our Savior, our brother, our friend and our God. Who could have imagined that the One who would change absolutely everything would start his journey this way, with these parents, in this small town, in a shelter of little or no comfort, lying in a container used to feed animals? Yet, this is how it happened - how our God chose to step into our world in a physical way, a tangible way, a profound way.

What a God we have!

Of course, what I've described is just about - a "what". But that's not the biggest question, not the most important one. The essential question is Why? Why did God choose this way? Why enter our world as a baby, born of a woman? Why not miraculously appear and do whatever he needed to do? Put simply - why would God want to be like us?

Of course, most of us probably look at other people all the time and wish we could trade our lives for theirs. We see someone who has way more friends than we do and think, "I wish I could be like him / her." Or we see someone who is smarter and has an easier time in school and we think, "I wish I could be like him." We see a couple who never has to worry about money and we think, "I wish I could be like them." Or we see someone who is way more attractive, or better at sports, or more musical, or more creative, or who has a great family, and we think, "I really wish I could be like them."

And so it makes a certain kind of sense that we would want to be more like a whole bunch of different people, people whose lives look a lot better than ours. We'd like to trade places with them, step into their worlds, their lives, so that we could enjoy the things they enjoy. But why would God want to be like us? What is in it for him?

Nothing. After all, that's what God needs - nothing.

Then, why?

I guess one could argue that for God to save us in the manner he chose to save us, it was necessary that he become one of us. That's certainly a big part of it. I can't dispute that. But is that the whole picture? Is that all that first Christmas was for? My dear friends in Christ, in faith we believe it was in reality much more than that. The incredible truth seems to be that God wanted to be like us - wanted to enter our world, walk our journey, assume our nature, so that we could be more like him! Think about that. He embraced what we are so that we could embrace what and who he is.

And so, while there is really nothing in it for God (so-to-speak), there is certainly something in it for you and me, something of incomparable value, something more meaningful than we can ever imagine, something tremendously hopeful. The truth is that the created world was forever changed once our loving God chose to enter into it in such a profound way. Because of Jesus, we now are creatures who have the possibility of becoming more and more like our Creator. Can you imagine that?

And that all become possible through the Incarnation, through the gift the baby Jesus IS and the gift he came to BRING - a new kind of life for each of us - lives transformed into something more beautiful and more God-like than we could ever imagine.

And so, we believe

That God drew close to us so that we could draw closer to him.

That God broke into our world so that we could break into his.

That God walked our journey so that we would have a path to follow.

That God experienced our pain so that we could experience his love.

And in addition to all of that, this loving God of ours came not for a visit, but to live with us forever; the living God who wants each of us to be his dwelling place.

And so, that means that the manger is no longer in some cold, dark, lonely place as it was two thousand years ago. It is now within you and within me - waiting to cradle Jesus, if we have the courage to invite him in.

Do we believe it? Truly? Do we believe it?

My dear friends, let's not let this Christmas come and go and wake up on the 25th the same as we were before. Rather, let's pray for that precious gift and open it when he comes, for in the end, it's the only present we truly need, our God who wants to come to us, dwell within us, and change absolutely everything.

Let's let him.

I take this opportunity to wish Merry Christmas and Joys of New Year 2023 to each and every one of you. May the Peace of our Lord come to us.

Jesus Christ Our Lord and Savior is born!