

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Christmas Eve begins the Church's celebration of Christmas. I'm sure your preparations began long ago. You had to put up trees and do your decorating at home. We did also at church. You may have participated in office parties and attended school Christmas programs — or "holiday programs" in public schools these days. You've surely listened to Christmas music and, perhaps, watched Christmas movies. But the real Christmas celebration began tonight for us all as we remembered, "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" (LSB376:1).

Of course, the dour scoffers come out at this time, too, trying to dampen our joy, trying to cover up the "reason for the season," like the city mayor in South Carolina did who "ordered the removal of a Nativity scene from public property" citing "America's tradition of separation of church and state" (Becket Fund email, December 22, 2025) ... like the man who reported on TikTok: "After much conviction and revelation, my family and I have decided that we will no longer be celebrating Christmas, [because] Christmas is demonic and a pagan tradition." And all this he found out on TikTok and other social media, known for their high standards of truthfulness (Andrew Klavan podcast, December 18, 2025).

Actually, I feel sorry for such people, who are missing out on the joy of the season. But I'm not going to give a legal apology for displaying a nativity on public property. I'll leave that to the lawyers. I'm not going to defend December 25th as the date of Jesus' birth or other attacks on celebrating Christmas. I've got news for the TikToker—we don't even know exactly what year Jesus was born. Luke says it happened when Augustus ordered a "taxing," a "registration," and it was the first one that happened when "*Cyrenius was governor of Syria*," but historians aren't sure about when that was.

But who cares? We celebrate the fact of Jesus' birth at Christmas, not necessarily the when. I've done *apologias* in the past, but I'm done with it. I'm bored with it. These scoffers are not going to divert my eyes off of Jesus, for He is the point. Tonight ... this season ... is about Jesus, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.

Tonight, we revel in Him as we hear of the circumstances of His birth. Joseph and Mary had to make the arduous journey from Nazareth in the north to Bethlehem, a few miles south of Jerusalem. It would have been arduous for anyone, but it was especially so for Mary, who was well along in her pregnancy. When they got to this "royal David's city," there were no special accommodations

for the pregnant mother — no place for them in the καταλύματι. They had to carve out a space near the ox and ass for the holy family, that she might give birth.

Tonight we feel the tender embrace of our loving God, who sent His Son to be born of this virgin mother, the King of kings born as a servant in lowliness, wrapped up in swaddling cloths and laid in a manger.

And if this weren't lowly enough, a humiliating cross lay before Him. For that is what it would take for this infant holy, infant lowly to be our Savior, as the Christmas angel proclaimed Him to the shepherds. "Behold, the life-giving cross on which was hung the salvation of the whole world," we will sing four months from now. This little babe in the manger is He who will be hung from the cross, His blood spilt to cleanse us from our sins, His life spent unto death, that He might give us life.

But how could this be? How could this little baby's blood do all that? How could His life offered up, be offered for the sins of the world? It's because tonight is not just about tenderness and sentiment. Tonight we marvel at the great mystery of the faith — this little baby Jesus is God Himself, the Word of God, the only Son of the Father. There, meek and mild in a manger, lay the creator of the world. *"All things were made through him."* More than that, *"In him was life"*; our life is from Him. All the fullness of God was contained in this helpless infant. That makes His blood of infinite worth—*"the blood of Jesus [God's] Son cleanses us from all sin"* (1 John 1:7). For all this the angels sing forth in thunderous song: *"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"*

In fact, perhaps it is only through music that we grasp the wonder of this great mystery, in the hymns we have sung tonight, in the choral pieces penned by masters like Bach and Handel and sung by choir and soloists, in the music played by musicians with us tonight. I've mentioned it in the past, but one piece the brass played in pre-service was "O Magnum Mysterium." The music itself is haunting, but the music is set to words that remind us of the significance of this day cloaked in humility. The words are in Latin, but here they are in English: "O great mystery and admirable sacrament, that animals should see the new-born Lord, lying in a manger! Blessed is the Virgin whose womb was worthy to bear Christ the Lord. Alleluia!"

Yes, "Christ, the Savior, is born" ... for you! To which, we say with joy: "Alleluia, Amen!"

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.