

St. Columba's Episcopal Church
December 24, 2022 – Christmas Eve
The Rev. Dr. Susan Kraus

We have come in from the world to a sacred space and a holy time to honor the birth of Jesus. His birth was foretold by the prophets of Israel and announced by an angel to Mary, his mother. In our readings from the Bible, our prayers, and our hymns we celebrate and commemorate this holy birth that took place so long ago. But marvelous as it was, we are here to do more than recall ancient history. We are here to prepare for Jesus to be born once more, in us, now.

The baby Jesus was born into a very imperfect world, a world in great need of good news and of salvation, a world where there was light but also great darkness. The Lord was born to be the light that shines everywhere, for all time and forever. The same Lord is waiting to be born again, into our imperfect world, into our imperfect souls and to be that holy light for us.

Scripture tells us that when it was time for Mary to give birth, the Holy Family found no room at the inn with other travelers. They had to go apart from people, to a stable. There were no human voices to distract them there, only the quiet breath of animals, their warmth and companionship.

Shall we travel now within ourselves? To a quiet place in our hearts, a stable where we can prepare the mangers of our souls for the birth of our Lord? The manger is a humble place, a homely place. Can you find it? Now it needs to be filled with straw. Gather that straw from every part of your mind and heart and place it in the manger. Your love and joy, your fears, your illness and pain and emptiness, your sins. In humility and with faith, lay it all in the manger.

We know the man Jesus. He rejoiced at human love. He blessed the wedding at Cana with his first miracle. He had close friends. He enjoyed dinner parties with all sorts of guests. Now bring the straw of all your love and lay it in the manger of your soul. Recall the people you love and the people who love you. Bring them there. Place your joy and your laughter in the manger, to be blessed by the Lord.

Jesus healed the sick. Now lay before the Lord everything in your life that needs healing. In your body. In your mind. In your spirit. Whatever is not whole and well. It's all part of the straw in the manger of your soul, waiting for the birth of the Holy Child.

Jesus reassured his followers when they were afraid. Spread the straw of your fears there in the manger. Prepare them to hear the message of the angels and the words of our Lord, "Do not be afraid."

Jesus fed the hungry. What do you hunger for? Where are you empty and waiting to be filled? Place all that straw in the manger, too.

Jesus forgave sinners. We all have sins hiding in the dark places of our souls. Go and gather them. Reach into the darkness to bring them to the light. Lay down that heavy straw and wait for the Lord to lift up your soul with his words, "Your sins are forgiven."

Jesus raised the dead. There is grief-laden straw in each of our souls, isn't there? There may be places where we have lost the feeling of life, dead places. Remember - no tomb could hold Jesus. His life is stronger than death. So lay out the straw of grief and death in the manger of your soul, too. Make it ready for new birth and new life.

Once you have filled the manger of your soul with the straw of all yourself, pray. Invite the Holy Child born so long ago in Bethlehem to be born once more in you, now. And whenever you feel the birth of Jesus within you and whenever you see the signs of his birth in the people and the world around you, join with the angels and sing, "Glory to God in the highest heaven!" For today the Savior of the world is born, Christ our Lord!

Amen and alleluia!