

*“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.””*

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

As we get started this morning, I want to wish you a very blessed Christmas Day once again, because I am sure that there are a few people here who recognize that the words of our text today are not actually part of the Christmas story, but are from the Gospel lesson for Epiphany, which is the last day of Christmas. Oh, I know we often put the wise men at the manger scene, kneeling with the shepherds in adoration of the newborn King. But it may have been several months after Jesus was born that the magi come to Jerusalem. The biblical text suggests that Mary and Joseph have moved out of the manger and into a house. The Holy Family may have been staying close to Jerusalem so that they could carry out the purification rites at the temple. They may have been waiting until Jesus was a bit older before they travelled. Maybe they weren't finished with the census yet. But they have been in Bethlehem for a little while before the wise men arrive.

It is not the visit of the Magi that concerns us on this Christmas morning. Rather, it is the question they ask of Herod that draws our attention today. *“Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?”* Or, as we want to ask today, *“Where is your God?”*

On Christmas morning, of all days, we know the answer to that question. We listen to the angel who says: *“And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”* (Luke 2:12, ESV) Our God has come to earth from heaven. Our God lies in human flesh in a manger. Our God is Immanuel, which means *“God with us”* We know where our God is, and we rejoice in that knowledge. We rejoice to think of the love so great that the very God who created the world and everything in it should deign to stand with His creation, in the midst of the mess that they have made of His world. We rejoice that the Eternal Son lives among us to give His life for us on the cross. We rejoice that the Saviour born in Bethlehem will not only die for us, but will destroy death as He rises for us.

Christmas assures us of where God is. Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, who knew that the Christ would soon be born, said: *““Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David,”* (Luke 1:68-69, ESV) God is with His people! What a wonderful blessing that is! Yet we are often like the wise men—still not sure and asking, *“where is God?”* We may wonder why we don't feel His presence in our lives. We may wonder why we are struggling with problems, cares and sorrows if God is with us. It sure doesn't help when the unbelieving world throws this in our face, mocking us because we use religion as a crutch. Several times the psalmist says: *“As with a deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me all the day long, “Where is your God?””* (Psalm 42:10, ESV)

That question is asked so often, by so many different people. In the aftermath of 9/11, it was a common complaint: where was God? Why didn't He stop this terrible disaster. On the other hand, the terrorists used this as an opportunity to mock the Christians and the true God. Where was your God? He couldn't help you, could He? Pick any disaster, any terrible event we hear in the news and people will ask, *“Where was God?”* Where was God when that fire destroyed Fort McMurray? Where was God when that gunman went berserk; when that train derailed; when that hurricane hit; when that drunk driver killed those people? Where is God in all those things we used to refer to as ‘acts of God’? Why doesn't He change things? Why doesn't He stop those car crashes, those fires, those disasters. Why doesn't He heal my dying body? Why doesn't He do something about all the bad things happening in the economy? Where are you, God?

The first man in space, Yuri Gagarin, was said to have commented that once he left earth's atmosphere and ascended into the heavens that he didn't see God. For a man who was trained to believe that religion was *“the opiate of the people”*, not seeing God was proof that there was no God. But the best answer to this came from a young Russian girl, who said, *“then he must not be pure in heart, for the bible says: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”* (Matthew 5:8, ESV)

Where is your God? The psalmist reminds us: *“Why should the nations say, “Where is their God?” Our God is in the*

*heavens; he does all that he pleases.*” (Psalm 115:2-3, ESV) There is something wonderful in knowing that God is in heaven, watching over all things from His throne of power. But that also can be a bit intimidating, can't it? God does whatever pleases Him. But what about us? Where do we fit in to all that pleases God?

This blessed Christmas Day assures us that we do fit into God's plans. It assures us of the God who came to be with us, and who is *“with [us] always, to the end of the age.”*” (Matthew 28:20, ESV) The Living Word becomes flesh and dwells among us. He is Emmanuel—God come to be with us. We have all the wonderful promises that God has given us: *“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.”* (Hebrews 2:14-15, ESV) Or, as St. Paul writes: *“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”* (Galatians 4:4-5, ESV) This day marks the beginning of the fulfilment of God's plan, a plan which He purposed since the very creation of the world: the plan to bring to sinners like you and me the forgiveness and redemption that only He can work for us. And so our God lies in a manger. Christ is born for us. God comes to abide with us, to be one with us, to save us! He lived and died and lives to be with His people, with the children He loves, in all things. He came to make a difference in the midst of this world's cares. He came to bring blessings that will last forever. What wondrous love this is, that we, who by our sinful actions and attitudes continue to turn from His goodness and grace day after day should be so blessed that the Lord of Glory should come to us; that He should take His stand with us that He might save us.

We can also be sure that the Saviour who came to bring us into His glory is not only well aware of our needs, but is with us to help in those needs. I am always drawn to the words of Paul: *“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”* (Romans 8:32, ESV) Remember that the baby doesn't stay in the manger. He doesn't always hide His glory and majesty. He does grow in wisdom and stature. He does keep God's law for us. He does offer Himself for us on the cross. He does die, but also rises from the dead. He does ascend into the glory of heaven, to speak to the Father on our behalf, but also to plan and purpose all things for the good of His beloved children. If we look, it isn't all that hard to see where our God is: He is with us in the midst of all of life.

One Saturday night a pastor was working late, and decided to call his wife before he left for home. It was about 10:00 pm., but his wife didn't answer the phone. The pastor let it ring many times. He thought it was odd that she didn't answer, but decided to wrap up a few things and try again in a few minutes. When he tried again she answered right away. He asked her why she hadn't answered before, and she said that it hadn't rung at their house. They brushed it off as a fluke and went on their merry ways.

The following Monday, the pastor received a call at the church office. The man that he spoke with wanted to know why he'd called on Saturday night. The pastor couldn't figure out what the man was talking about. Then the man said, “It rang and rang, but I didn't answer.” The pastor remembered the mishap and apologized for disturbing him, explaining that he'd intended to call his wife. The man said, “That's OK. Let me tell you my story. You see, I was planning to commit suicide on Saturday night, but before I did, I prayed, ‘God if you're there, and you don't want me to do this, give me a sign now.’ At that point my phone started to ring. I looked at the caller ID, and it said, ‘Almighty God’. I was afraid to answer!” The reason why it showed on the man's caller ID that the call came from “Almighty God” is because the church is called Almighty God Tabernacle!”

I'm not suggesting that every time we ask for a sign, or even when we wonder where God is that He is going to answer us in such dramatic fashion. But then again, God did give us a sign. That is exactly what Isaiah had prophesied: *“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”* (Isaiah 7:14, ESV) Jesus Christ, the ever-living God says to us: “Here I am! I have come to help you. I have come to save you.” We don't need drama. We don't need such miraculous signs. We know where our God is—at least, we should know. Faith trusts in the wonderful miracle of this day. On this day, we rejoice that God became a child, and that in Jesus Christ He came to be with us to save us. We know that the Saviour, who died and rose for us still walks with us as He has promised.

*“Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?”* He is with us this morning, as God, the Holy Spirit opens our hearts and ears to the wonderful Gospel message. He is with us as we come to the altar to partake of His body and blood, the very body and blood given and shed for us on the cross. He is with us in the waters of our Baptism, dwelling in us through the Holy Spirit, that we may have life as His children forever. No longer a baby, no longer a child, He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, filling heaven and earth with His presence, and shining in glory in heaven. And He is in all these places for you, the child He loves so very much. Amen.