

Come to Bethlehem and See
Luke 2:8-20

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T'was the night before Christmas and all through the earth
Every creature was stirring, and needing new birth.
Some faces were guilty, others were worn,
Some filled with sorrow, some sin torn.
When God up above, without much clatter,
Sent a Savior to earth to remedy the matter.
He came without splendor, saying life's not a waste,
Will you rise up and follow and see Him with haste?
When it's the night before Christmas from the ground to the sky
God's glory is near and Jesus comes by.

It is Christmas Eve. Christmas Eve is not so much another day on the calendar as it is another mood of the heart. All is calm. All is bright. Tonight I invite you to come with the shepherds over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.

Come to Bethlehem and see, Him whose birth the angels sing
Come adore on bended knee, Christ the Lord the newborn King.

Come and See

The Roper organization asked Americans how they would spend Christmas. Here is what people said:

68% would open presents	61% would visit family
39% would attend church	31% would watch a football game
15% would have a fire in the fireplace	10% would leave food for Santa
4 % would stay in bed sick or alone	2% would go caroling

You are among the 39% of the American people who on this Christmas will attend church. For some this is familiar territory. You habit these halls, fill these pews. You sing these songs every Sunday. You know your way around here. Don't let the routine of the place dim your vision. Come and see. Open your hearts and minds. With eyes wide open, encounter Christ the newborn King. Behold him and follow him.

Others surely feel more like the shepherds on this holy and scared night. Shepherds were more acquainted with earth than heaven, more accustomed to sheep bleating than angels singing. Worship was no familiar place for them. They were too busy keeping sheep to observe Jewish ritual. They hadn't planned to come. They had no time to go shopping and buy a present or even change their clothes. They came as they were and had always been. Yet kneeling down next to the manger, they felt closer to God than they had ever felt before.

Come to Bethlehem and see Him whose birth the angels sing. Come and see. Now that you are here, stop, look and listen. Let not the thoughts of other things dull your vision to this thing of which Christmas is all about. Open your spiritual eyes and see Jesus. Experience his love, know his forgiveness and accept his grace, honor his glory. He is here in plain view. Don't miss him.

In Truman Capote's work "A Christmas Memory," Annie, an old spinster lady, is out flying kites on Christmas morning. She says to her youthful companion, "I'll wager at the very end a body realizes the Lord has already shown himself." Indeed He has. He has made himself known to his people. That is what Christmas is all about. So just drop everything for a moment and listen to the angels sing and be in the presence of Christ.

When our boys were little we had a Christmas morning rule that no one could get up before sunrise. Having been up all night on Christmas Eve leading worship services, I was never anxious to rise early on Christmas morning. Regardless of our instructions, about 5 a.m. we would hear the pitter patter of little feet running up and down the stairs. By 6 a.m. there was this long discussion outside our door on whether or not they dared to awaken us to Christmas. When they could wait no longer, they burst into our room screaming "Mommy, Daddy, Santa's come! It's Christmas! Wake up or you're going to miss it!"

I want to see as a child sees with innocent eyes, eyes rinsed clear. I want to see to the heart of the thing, to know what is happening. Jimmy, Sally, Henry and Helen, wake up, wake up, Christ the Savior is born. Don't miss it! Attentiveness is the first step toward belief.

Come and See – Bow and Worship

I am experiencing the oddest Christmas in my 58 years of life. Due to my compromised immune system, I have not been to a single Christmas party, eaten a single Christmas meal, or attended a single Christmas open house. My son and daughter-in-law did my Christmas shopping for me. I have not been inside a shopping mall. I have spent this Christmas season sitting in my lounge chair praying for a chance to live and pondering the meaning of life.

There is one word that describes my feelings this Christmas. That word is gratitude. Gratitude for the life I have been privileged to live. Gratitude for the love that has been expressed. Gratitude to God who is faithful to the end.

Henri Nouwen says, “To be grateful is to be grateful for all of life – the good as well as the bad, the moments of joy as well as the moments of sorrow, the successes as well as the failures, the rewards as well as the rejections.” We are only truly grateful people when we learn to say thank you to all that has brought us to the present moment.

I need to worship tonight. I need to praise God from whom all blessings flow. He has been a rock in a weary land, a shelter in the time of storm. Yea though I have walked through the valley of the shadow of death, God has been with me. His rod and staff they comforted me. Lord, you are worthy of our praise. You deserve to be worshiped. Let us pause and worship and praise God.

Former NFL star, John Borrough, said, “I thought the highlight of my life would be to play in a Super Bowl. Then in 1998 I got my chance with the Atlanta Falcons. In the middle of all the explosions and hoopla and happening, all I could think was, is this it? Is this all there is? Why this doesn’t even compare to worshipping my God.”

Worship has the capacity to transform us. Worship is seeing God worthy and giving him the glory. Worship is the full commitment of one’s life to God. “Come adore on bended knee, Christ the Lord the newborn King.”

Let the Bread of Heaven Satisfy the Deepest Hungers of your Heart

Come to Bethlehem, the “place of bread” and taste the bread of life. Christ is food for your soul. Jesus said, *“I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never be hungry. He who drinks from my cup will never be thirsty.”*

When I was in the hospital I went for two weeks without a bite to eat and only an occasional sip of water to keep my mouth moist. Then one day my entourage of caretakers announced that I could go home if I could eat and drink enough to ward off dehydration. I asked my dietician for a piece of toast from the hospital cafeteria. It was delivered, a piece of white, dry, luke-warm toast. I broke it into pieces sacramentally as I break bread at communion. I said this prayer: “Lord, this is a lifeline for me. Help me eat this bread that I may be set free.” Piece by piece I was able to keep it down.

Lying in a feeding trough, we behold the bread of life. He is a life-line for our freedom; the forgiveness of our sins; the redemption of our souls. He is common food for even outcasts, such as shepherds who come to worship half scared, half believing, hoping He might be an answer to their prayers. Let us feed on Him till the hungers of our souls are satisfied. O taste and see that the Lord is good. He satisfies the hungry heart with gift of finest wheat. Come, give to us, O saving Lord, the bread of life to eat.
Amen.