

She came to look at the manger. Elsie pulled her coat in tighter as she locked her front door. The fear of burglary kept her from going out at night, but this was Christmas. The cold air pierced her weary body to the bone. Walking alone, she remembered how close her husband used to hold her. Twenty years without him now, each Christmas she wanted to stay home and cry, but she had to come for a look. She had to see the manger.

Charlie's family piled uncomfortably into the car. Checking the rear-view mirror he couldn't recall when he last saw faces in the back seat. "Yes, dear," he said, "I remember the way to church." The silence in the car unsettled the thoughts which disturbed him. How long could he continue this way? The girl at work and the woman next to him were so different. Why was he going to church? Oh yeah. To look at the manger.

Tina was pleased her date wanted to go to Mass together. She needed refuge tonight. Her best friend was in trouble and she was sure to call again. Tina didn't know what to say to her anymore. She wanted to get away. She wanted to hear Christmas carols. She wanted to look at the manger.

They're all here tonight. They're in good company.

For four weeks of Advent we have prayed, "Come, Lord Jesus." It's cold and dark outside; come, Lord Jesus. I'm worn out trying to manage job and family; come, Lord Jesus. Our neighbors get better toys than we get; come, Lord Jesus. My cholesterol is up and so is my craving for chocolate; come, Lord Jesus. I love someone I shouldn't and I can't get them out of my mind; come, Lord Jesus.

For four weeks we have prayed for Christ to come, and tonight we have come to look at the manger and see if he's really there.

I imagine that's how it was for the shepherds. I mean, what would you think if your job was the midnight shift tending sheep and one night you saw in the sky a multitude of angels singing and telling you a baby-Messiah was just born and you can see him over the next hill lying in a feeding trough? I'd say, "Right!" But I'd go, and see if he was really there.

Angels have spoken to us. Parents, preachers, teachers, and friends have told us time and again that Christ is born. So tonight we come to see for ourselves. Tonight we come like shepherds. Perhaps we're a little dirty, a little smelly, a little sinful, a little doubtful, but we come because some angel told us to.

We come to church to look at the manger, and what we see is Christ. Hold the hand of the person next to you. Go ahead and hold it, everybody. Feel a living human being; feel the miracle of life. It was flesh like this that Christ put on that first Christmas Day, and it's flesh like this that Christ does wear in this church today. Did you come to church to see Jesus? Even now you touch him.

"Today is born our Savior," said the angel. Today is born Christ. Today the one who saves is here. He saves the lonely; he saves the frightened; he saves the wounded. He saves us from the cold; he saves us from sin; he saves us from ourselves. Today, Jesus is born. Today, Jesus is here.