

Tonight, we come together to celebrate and reflect upon the God who pours God's very self into a human person, the God who stands outside of time, yet entered time and became human, the God who took on flesh and bone to dwell among us. Tonight, we celebrate the mystery of the God who is infinite but becomes finite; the God who is all powerful but becomes all-vulnerable. We reflect upon the God whose very womb gave birth to all of creation, to the entire cosmos, but now is born of a woman's womb to bear the good news of God's grace and love for this world. We reflect upon the living, creative Word that spoke the universe into being, but now cries from a baby's lungs. We reflect upon the breath of God that swept across the dark waters of the deep separating the day from the night, but now quietly exhales, breathing softly on a teenage mother's cheek. Tonight, we reflect upon and celebrate the gift of incarnation – the ultimate gift of **love**. We celebrate God coming among us and to us with skin on. We celebrate God's unconditional love for this world made manifest for all to see in the person of Jesus. And, as we ponder this mystery, will we recognize him, **will we know him when he comes among us?**

Yes, as we come and stand in awe of this great mystery, we must ask ourselves, "Will we recognize him?" **because** this One who takes on our

flesh is willing to dwell in what we might consider the most despicable of places, the most vulnerable of people, and the most wretched of circumstances. God gave God's own true Son to us to show us how deeply God loves this world and how each one of us is immeasurably loved, but will we know him when he comes?

I share with you a story that may be helpful as we ponder this question. The story is about an old shoe cobbler who had spent his life making new shoes and repairing old shoes. One Christmas Eve night, he dreamed that Jesus would come to visit him the next day. The dream was so very real that he was convinced it would come true. So, the next morning he got up, went out and cut green boughs, used them to decorate his little shop, and got all ready for Jesus to come and visit. He was so sure that Jesus was going to come he just sat down and waited for Him.

Well, the hours passed, and Jesus didn't come. But an old man came. The man was a refugee who had walked for miles after fleeing danger in his home country. He was seeking a safe place to live. This old refugee came inside the cobbler's shop for a moment to get out of the winter cold and get warm. As the cobbler talked with him, he noticed the holes in the old man's shoes, so he reached up on the shelf and got him a

new pair of shoes. He made sure they fit, made sure the man's socks were dry, and then sent him on his way.

Still, the cobbler waited. But Jesus didn't come. However, an old woman came. A woman who was hungry because she hadn't had a decent meal in days. They sat and visited for a while, and then he prepared some food for her to eat. He gave her a nourishing meal and sent her on her way.

Again, he sat down to wait for Jesus. But Jesus still didn't come. Then he heard a little boy crying out in front of his shop. He went out and talked with the boy and discovered that the boy had been separated from his parents. The little boy was afraid and very lonely, and didn't know how to get home. So, the cobbler put on his coat, took the boy by the hand and led him home.

When he came back to his little shoe shop it was almost dark and the streets were emptied of people. Then, in a moment of despair, he lifted his voice to heaven and said, "Oh Lord Jesus, why didn't you come?" And, in that moment of silence, he seemed to hear a voice saying, "Oh shoe cobbler, lift up your heart. I kept my word. Three times I knocked at your friendly door. Three times my shadow fell across your floor. I was the man with the bruised feet. I was the woman you gave food to eat. I was the homeless boy on the street."

Yes, Jesus **had** come, and the cobbler had truly experienced Christmas. Jesus had come and the cobbler just didn't realize it. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said:

Christ comes in the form of the beggar, of the dissolute human child in ragged clothes, asking for help. Christ confronts you in **every** person that you meet. As long as there are people, Christ will walk the earth as your neighbor...

Yes, the God of the cosmos, the cosmic Christ, who left God's place in glory to take on human flesh in the person of Jesus and visit us in this dark dreary place, **has come** to give us God's very self, all because of God's unconditional love for **all** people and **all** of creation, and God's love for you. Christmas is about God pouring God's very self into all creation, and Christ's presence is **continually** and **forever** being born among us. To be Christian is to see Christ in **everyone** and everything. That is the reality that shapes and informs **everything** we do, the way we **live**. So, celebrate Christ's coming tonight, tomorrow, and throughout all twelve days of Christmas. And then, celebrate and continue to live the meaning and work of Christmas every day throughout the year. As Howard Thurman said:

When the song of the angel is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flocks –
The work of Christmas **begins**:
To find the lost, to heal the broken,
To feed the hungry, to release the prisoner,

To rebuild the nations, to bring peace among people,
to make music in the heart.