

The title for tonight's message is: **Moments At The Nativity Scene.**

The angel of God said: *"Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."*

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Perhaps the most well-known Christian symbol of Christmas is the Nativity scene. A symbol you'll find in many stores, and front yards.

Churches too have Nativity scenes, including ours. So I ask you, what thoughts do you have, as you look at the Nativity scene?

The first thing I notice, is all the characters in the scene. The angel of God, baby Jesus, Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the animals and yes, even the Magi.

Then we notice that everyone of them are looking in the same direction. That's right, they're all looking at the manger, where the baby Jesus lies.

As you look, what do you think Joseph is thinking, as he looks down at the infant? Maybe he's recalling what the angel had told him earlier, in a dream.

That this child Mary was carrying, was not conceived from any man, but rather, from the Holy Spirit. That God is the father of the baby, not he.

And that the angel told him to give this child the name Jesus, and more importantly, that this child will save all people of the world from their sins.

And I'm sure, Joseph is thinking about his new responsibility of taking care of this child, who is God Himself.

As Joseph looks into the manger, I'm sure he wondered: "How in the world am I supposed to be the Son of God's stepfather?"

And just how is this little baby going to take away the sins of the world? How about Mary, what do you think she was thinking, as she looked at her son?

She's probably remembering what the angel Gabriel had said to her, that this baby would be called the Son of the Most High.

That God would someday give this child the throne of David. And that, He was going to reign forever and ever.

Surely Mary is thinking about what her cousin, Elizabeth, had said to her, that she, Mary, was blessed to be the mother of the Lord.

So, as Mary looks down at the manger, she too has questions: similar to Joseph. "How am I to raise the Son of the Most High, God.

And when will He become a king? Early in life? or later in life? And how will He reign forever, since no one lives forever?

And then, there are the shepherds, who had just arrived from tending their flocks in the fields nearby.

What do you suppose was on their minds, as they looked at the infant Jesus in the manger?

They too were probably thinking of what the angel of God had said to them that very night, that this little infant is the Christ.

The one God promised would come, the long awaited Messiah, who will bring peace on earth, and good will to all people who believe in Him.

And there He is, all wrapped up, laying in a animal trough the manger, just as the angel said He would be.

And as for the shepherds, they too had questions. Questions like, “How can this little baby, be the Messiah?

Wasn't the Messiah supposed to be greater than this? Shouldn't the Messiah be born in a palace, and not in a cold dark stable?

And, how would He bring peace to this earth? What will He do? And when will He do it?”

I don't know if you noticed, but there is someone missing from the Nativity scene. Someone we haven't talked about yet.

At the same time, there's three people too many in the Nativity scene, even though most Nativity scenes, including ours, show the three Magi.

They weren't there, no, they didn't show up until much later, when Joseph, Mary and the baby Jesus had moved into a house in Bethlehem.

But, the person missing from the Nativity scene is, “you.” That's right, you see, through the Word of God, and through our eyes of faith.

Were all transported into the Nativity scene some two thousand years ago. I wonder what it would be like, if you and me could literally go back in time.

And actually stand with Mary, Joseph, the shepherds and all the others that night in the stable in Bethlehem?

Where would we stand? How close to the manger will we dare to get, what might we say?

And as we looked around, we would be shocked to see how ordinary everything looks. How poor, and humble Mary, and Joseph actually are.

The shepherds, they're much rougher around the edges than we had ever imagined them to be.

The stable, why, you cannot help but notice the smell of the animals. And the manger, which is nothing more than an old animal feeding trough.

Nor is the place as clean as we show it to be, and the people aren't as neat, as the Nativity scenes we've seen over the years.

So there we stand, and we draw closer to the manger, do we dare to look right into the baby's face, right into the eyes of the Son of the Most High.

There He is, the Great Messiah, the Savior of the World, looking at us, with that same look that all babies seem to have. What would you think?

Surly, you wouldn't have the same questions that Mary, Joseph and the shepherds might have had.

No! Unlike them, we know the whole story of Jesus' life. We know, that this child will grow up in the home of Mary and Joseph.

And that He will perfectly obey His Father in heaven. We know, how He will preach to the crowds, yet, hardly anyone would believe Him.

We know, that He will someday perform hundreds, and hundreds of miracles, but hardly anyone will follow Him.

We know, that someday, His closest friends will desert Him, and that He will eventually be hung on a cross to die.

And, we also know, three days later, the Son of God, will rise from the dead, and ascend into heaven, and rule as our King forever and ever.

We know the whole story, and perhaps that's what fills us with awe. Here, in this feeding trough, is the one, who has forgiven us from all our sins.

And here, lying in a stable with animals, is the one, who has given us hope, and peace in our hearts.

Here is the Christ, who promises us that He is preparing a place in heaven for you, and me to live in, forever.

And here, He is only an infant, and yet, He is the one we pray to, and the one we worship. Yes, this little child is our God, our Lord and our Savior.

What would you do, if you could go back in time and stand in the stable? Would you want to talk to Mary and Joseph, and the shepherds.

If so, would you want to tell them the whole story; "Here's what's going to happen, and this is how He's going to save us all from our sins.

But the night is silent, and you see how quiet, and peaceful all those in the stable are that night.

You see how relieved, and peaceful Joseph looks, now that he knows Mary and the baby Jesus are OK.

And so we stand quietly. We look down into the manger one last time, and we ponder all these things in our hearts.

And although it is quiet, there is the sound of hope in the air. Yes, even though they don't understand yet, there is the glow of peace in their faces.

We can see that Joseph is full of hope, believing that this little child will in fact save the world from sin.

Mary too, is full of hope, that her son is the long awaited Messiah, the Christ whose kingdom will have no end.

And the shepherds are full of hope, that through this little child, God will bring peace to the world. Yes, this is a quiet. and humble place.

A place of hope, you can feel in the air. Here in the manger is visible proof that God does keep His promises.

And that God does love us, and the world. That God is faithful, and loving, so much that He became an infant on this night.

Here we have God, looking up at you, and me, just as real as the babies we see today.

Truly, it is a silent night, but a holy night. In the midst of this dark, chaotic world.

There in the stable, all is calm, and all is bright, around the virgin mother, and child.

Here we see God as a holy infant, tender and mild, sleeping in heavenly peace. Here we have hope, a reason to rejoice, a place of peace.

May the Nativity scene be for you more than just a nice seasonal decoration. May it be for you a reminder that the Son of God has been born.

Here, God begins the work of saving our souls.

Let us pray: O holy Child of Bethlehem, Descend to us we pray! Cast out our sin and enter in;

Be born in us today. We hear the Christmas angels, and great glad tidings tell; Oh, come to us, Abide with us, Our Lord, Immanuel!

Amen.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all. Amen.