



You see, then, that Luke's mentioning of swaddling clothes are not merely a mother's act of love for her first-born son. They have greater fulfillment in the Savior's act of love for you, His people. You are wrapped in His swaddling righteousness.

What about the location of His birth? Perhaps nothing more clearly confesses the humility of God becoming man for us than the King of Creation being born in a most unholy place. For where there is a manger, there are also piles of dung. Wherever animals eat, they also defecate soon thereafter.

St. Jerome, preaching on this text over 1500 years ago said, "He is born on a dunghill in order to lift up those who come from it" for as the Psalmist writes, "**From the dunghill he lifts up the poor**" (Ps 113:7). If you were to look up that verse in Psalm 113:7, most translations today use the words "ash heap" instead of dunghill. The King James Version in this case, however, more accurately preserves the meaning of the Psalm and shows how Christ fulfills this for us in his lowly birth. Jesus exalted the poor in spirit precisely by being born in such a lowly place. As Christians, we know what we are supposed to do. God has given us His clear will to follow in the 10 Commandments, and yet we return to our sinful habits day after day. We make excuses like, "I'll be regularly in Church starting next week" and then "next week" turns into "next year", and soon we are like those whom Peter spoke of in his **second letter, 2:22, "What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire."** Vomit, mire, or a dunghill, because of our transgressions in thought, word, and deed, that's where we find ourselves – poor in everything spiritual. We deserve nothing good from God. Apart from repentance and faith, we would rot and decay like vomit, mire, and dung in the grave vault of hell.

Yet it is precisely here in a world of dung and filth that Jesus comes to us, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laying in a manger. He was born that man may never die. You probably didn't think you'd hear a sermon about poop on Christmas Eve, but what do you think Mary and Joseph – and our Savior (!) smelled on that holy night? Certainly for the holy family, they were in a "home that's not home." It was a home for animals, not a place for the Prince of Peace and the mother of God. Yet as Jesus would teach throughout His earthly ministry, **Matthew 8:20, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."**

Most of us have Christmas Eve and Day traditions that involve gathering together at someone's house. Whether it's Mom and Dad's or Grandma and Grandpa's, etc., one of the sweet comfort of Christmas is being gathered together with the ones we love. Some of our shut-ins and the infirmed aren't going to have that this year. Don't forget about them. They are still a part of our church family here. Several of our shut-ins have had to move out of their homes into new living facilities in recent months. I'm thinking specifically of the Scheiderers and the Bettins. That's quite a burden to bear, having to adjust to such a big change. One of our shut-ins painfully said on a visit a couple weeks ago, "It's really hard being home that's not our home." (In fact, that's what gave me the idea for this sermon.) Some of you have family members that are having long hospital stays during this holiday season. It can be really hard being anywhere that's not home.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, which means "house of bread." Here in the Lord's house is where God's sheep gather to receive our daily bread. Jesus comes to us in His Word for the forgiveness of sins. And where there is forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation. It is here in Church that the Christian finds his or her home before Christ returns. [*Looking at camera*] I know some of you really want to be here tonight, but can't be because you have COVID or are still recovering from it. Hang in there. Hang onto Christ's Word. He will be here tomorrow, Sunday, and next Sunday, too, in His Word and Sacrament as He has promised.

Our church family gathers together around Jesus at the foot of the manger and at the foot of the cross. Little did Mary know that when she set baby Jesus down to sleep in a feeding trough that she was putting He who would later say, "**I am the bread of life**" (Jn 6:48) right where He came to earth to be. The shepherds who went to see Jesus that night were satisfied in full by His presence like those whom Jesus would later say, "**I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst**" (Jn 6:35).

There are many Christians, some of whom are members of this congregation who are living in a "home that's not home" regularly on Sunday mornings. You're cutting yourself off from the Bread of Life. May God grant you faith like those shepherds on that first Christmas night to come home and receive Jesus. He is no longer

in a manger, but He'll be on the altar tomorrow morning. Your Savior misses you and wants to feed you in both body and soul.

There are few things that gives a pastor more joy than when a prodigal son or daughter returns home to Christ Jesus to receive the forgiveness of sins. As Jesus teaches, **“There is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Lk 15:10)**. When Jesus ascended into heaven, He promised He was going to prepare a place for every single person that repented of their sins and believed in Him for the forgiveness of sins. That promise was made to all of you. Come home, as it were, and receive it. For when we repent and believe in Jesus, He brings us from our “homes of spiritual darkness that are not homes” to His marvelous heavenly home of light. Now, because of Jesus’ birth, life, death, and resurrection we have that home by faith, but on the Last Day, we will have that home in its fullness for all eternity where we will celebrate Christmas Joy Forever. In Jesus’ name, Amen.