All over the world tonight and into our tomorrow, people are gathering to hear the story of Jesus’ birth. Because we have seen so many images of this holy night over our lifetimes and heard the scriptures read each Christmas, we are able to envision the scene in our mind’s eye, almost as clearly as if we were watching a movie. There is young Mary, seated on a donkey that is being led by Joseph. Mary and Joseph's faces reflect their concern and anxiety, for they do not understand why they have been singled out by God, both for Mary’s pregnancy and for the bewildering identity of the child she is carrying. Mary shifts on the donkey, trying to get comfortable, for it isn’t easy to ride a donkey when you are nine months pregnant. Joseph looks back to make sure Mary is OK, a look of concern for her clouding his face.

The couple arrive in Bethlehem and they come across an inn; they are weary and dusty from their journey and Mary’s increasing discomfort tells them she must be close to delivering her baby. Joseph hopes there is a room for rent, or preferably two rooms, for he and Mary are not yet married. He is disappointed, for the inn turns out to be full of guests. There is no time to look for another, for Mary is now in labor. The couple are offered a place to stay in a barn and Mary gives birth to her baby, then wraps him in strips of cloth and lays him in a bed of straw. The baby’s cry pierces the silent night.

This cry is not like that of any baby before or after. In this baby is everything everyone has ever longed for. For hundreds upon hundreds of years, prophets have had visions of him. People who have walked in deep darkness have watched for his light. And now, at last, he is here, and, in the words of Bruce Cockburn, “Redemption rips through the surface of time in the cry of a tiny babe.” In this tiny babe’s cry is God’s response to a world’s yearnings. This babe cries “Enough!” and the powers of the world are toppled while the poor finally get what they need to thrive. With this babe's cry, the wicked reap what they sow and the hungry are fed. In the cry of this tiny babe is an end to all war, and a promise to take the weapons of war and pound and forge and reshape them until they become implements for farming.

This tiny babe is the long hoped-for Messiah; in him is all the power of earth and heaven. He wields his power with compassion, his judgment with wisdom and his discipline with healing. This world will be reshaped by his love. God has brought heaven to earth in the flesh and blood of the tiny babe.

Tonight, this babe is in Syria and Pakistan, in North Korea and in South. He is in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in India, in Venezuela, in China and in Floyd, Virginia. Wherever there is war, oppression, corruption or unrest, wherever there is disease or poverty this babe comes to be born in human hearts.

Tonight, around the world people are worshiping, people are doubting, people are laughing and people are crying, people are healing and people are hurting, people celebrating with loved ones, people are lonely and alone. The tiny babe is born for all of them, for all of us. Tonight, we are witnesses to the truth: that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not, cannot, overcome it. The one we have waited for, our Immanuel, is with us. He brings hope and promise and peace to a despairing world. Hear him in the words of scripture and song tonight. Know that the One sent to save us – you and me and this whole broken world, is here, and that tonight, redemption rips through the surface of time in the cry of a tiny babe.

*Christmas Eve 2015*

*Floyd-Willis Lutheran Church*