

A Sermon by the Rev. Jeffrey A. Packard	Prepared for the congregation of Christ Episcopal Church, Spotsylvania, VA
To be delivered on December 24, 2014	On the occasion of Christmas Eve

The Gift from Heaven

On Christmas Eve we gather in Christ's name, we followers of the holy little babe. It's time to once again remember he came to save us from our sin and give us life. He came to show us of the Father's love. He came to live the life we know we can't. He came to take humanity to him, to open heaven's gate to all of us. This infant lying in a manger wrapped in swaddling clothes will one day be a man. His life, his death, his words witness to us the depth of divine longing for our love. We know our God and understand his grace because of what this baby will become. One day he'll hang upon a cursed tree; and then he'll rise again in victory. His victory did not himself make great. It was for us he conquered death and sin. It was for us he suffered pain and shame. It was our fate he took upon himself, and gladly suffered quietly in our stead.

This babe will one day save and bless the world, but now he sleeps upon his mother's breast. The Word of God in flesh cannot yet speak. He cannot walk; he cannot feed himself. He needs his mother and his father's help. This is how the shepherds found Our Lord, weak and poor, and in a manger laid. It is how we find him on Christmas day. His life, if he is to live, is in our hands. We bear responsibility for him, to nurture him, to make his body grow. For him to speak, he needs our lips, our tongues; for him to walk upon the earth, our legs. To reach out to his children whom he loves, he needs our arms, our hands, our fingers too. We are his body in this century. He is in us, and we subsumed in him. His body nurtures us, renews our spirit; our bodies knit together in him complete, make up the Church, his spirit's fleshly home.

So as we now recall his birth tonight, that little babe born so long ago, we welcome him to be in us new born. We worship him as babe, and man, and God. And like the shepherds who

first heard the news, we glory in the promise of his birth. And like those shepherds, carry forth the news, of peace on earth, good will to men, and hope. The peace within us each must reign supreme, or hollow will our proclamation sound. Good will must flow from all we say and do, or deaf will be the ears to which we speak. Our lives must be in him forever wrapped, with Christ the rock on which our hope is found. The Lamb of God, who takes away our sin, has called us to love and feed his sheep. So to this world for which he came to die, we give our hearts and witness to his love.

May Christ be born anew in each of us, for us, for you and me, and for the world. May we in him forever rest in hope, as he in us forever lives and reigns. May he through us continuously give his life, as we through him our meager lives lay down. May all the world pause to hear the song so sweetly sung by angels on that night, as we take up the chorus joyfully, with prophets, saints, and martyrs sounding forth; and as the earth continues on its path around the sun, and turning, day and night, may every soul receive the gift that's given: the babe from heaven, God's eternal light.

Amen.