

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place this way. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:18).

People throughout the world decorate this Advent season – *and even last month* – with Christmas trees, evergreens, and electric lights. Even non-Christians decorate. But there is a decoration that is distinctively Christian. There is a decoration that captures the true story and true message of Christmas. Tonight, we will look at how the creche, a model of the nativity scene, helps us prepare for the coming of Christ.

The creche is an explicitly Christian symbol because it presents the people involved in the birth of Christ, such as Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the Magi, and even the angels and some farm animals. Prince of Peace is blessed to have so many nativity scenes. In fact, we use the creche as a witness to define the real reason for the season.

The word “creche” derives from Latin and means “nursery.” In fact, even today, it is the French word for nursery or childhood center. And in many other European countries, “creche” refers to a nursery school where infants and other young children are cared for during the day while their parents are at work.

This word “creche” has been transferred from this context of baby care to the scene which the greatest Baby in history was attended by His mother and guardian as well as the shepherds and in most cases, the Magi. But, here in America, the creche is most associated with the Biblical nativity scene in which figures are arranged to depict the event of Jesus’ birth.

The creche has been a decoration for Advent and Christmas for centuries. It has been depicted in frescos, paintings and reliefs. It has been reenacted with living people and animals since at least the 1300s.

But it is most common to see plaster statues or wooden figures of the Holy Family and their guests.

By the 1800s, many Christian churches, including Lutherans, began embracing the use of creches in their churches. Eventually, Christians began using them at their homes.

The creche is a visible representation of the people who attended the birth of Jesus as depicted in the accounts of Matthew 2 and Luke 2. The creche provides us with a visible and tangible representation of the setting and event of Christ's birth. It enables us to see with our eyes and touch with our hands the scenario in which Christ's first advent occurred. Since God has created us with multiple senses, the creche engages our abilities to see and touch to support the hearing of His Word, the events of the birth of the Messiah.

You see, the advent of our Lord didn't happen in a spiritual fantasy land but in real time among real people in this very real creation. St. John affirms the reality of the incarnate Christ, writing: ***"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life ... that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ"*** (1 John 1:1, 3).

But I will admit that I have an issue with the creche, or nativity scene. Many of you may know what I am going to say. Take a look at our creche under the Christmas tree. Who is missing? The Magi. But I am kind enough to have the Magi on the outskirts of the sanctuary. Why do you think the Magi are over there and not with the rest of the scene?

Well, it's because the Magi did not arrive in Bethlehem at the birth of the Christ Child. They actually arrived some months later. So, that's why I have them make their arrival on the day of Epiphany. And when they did finally arrive, they didn't see Jesus wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger (Luke 2:12), but saw Jesus being held in Mary's arms inside a house (Matthew 2:11).

However, the creche reveals that the very Son of God was born in a very earthly setting, laid in a manger, with livestock surrounding and hay abounding. He was laid in a feeding trough. God entered this world as a small and helpless infant, dependent upon His mother for food and protection. The creche attests to the reality that ***"the Word became flesh and dwelt among us"*** (John 1:14). This humble setting displays the One ***"who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men"*** (Philippians 2:6-7).

The creche points us to the ongoing humiliation of Jesus for our salvation that He being fully God became man in order to die for us. ***“And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross”*** (Philippians 2:8).

Remember, Jesus did not remain in the manger. He would grow up to be ***“despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. ... But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed”*** (Isaiah 53:3, 5).

Jesus came in humble circumstances to share our humanity and become the Savior for sinners. The creche reminds us of His humble beginnings on earth.

The creche attests to what Christmas is all about. It presents in visible and tangible form the people and events of Jesus’ birth described in Matthew and Luke. This decoration of the nativity scene prepares us to celebrate the advent of the Baby who was born to save His people from their sins.

Amen. Come Lord Jesus.

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +