Of the Father's love begotten,

ere the worlds began to be,

he is Alpha and Omega,

he the source, the ending he,

of the things that are, that have been,

and that future years shall see,

evermore and evermore!

O that birth forever blessèd,

when the Virgin, full of grace,

by the Holy Ghost conceiving,

bore the Savior of our race;

and the Babe, the world's Redeemer,

first revealed his sacred face,

evermore and evermore!

In the name of God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Merry Christmas!

Welcome to all on this glorious evening, the night when Christians across the world join for the yearly celebration of the birth of Jesus, the coming of the savior, the advent of the Word who put on flesh to deliver humanity from sin.

Yesterday, when the parish was abuzz with so many faithful volunteers lovingly preparing the church for this magnificent day, my memory flashed back to the early days of December of last year when I first walked into this very room. I remembered being overcome with emotion upon entering this space, as both my beloved Beka and I realized how truly beautiful this church is. This was just before our final interview with parish leadership, but we were already very much hoping we'd be selected to be your next rector. Our hopes were answered, as evidence by my speaking to you right now, of course and it is a delight to celebrate my first Christmas among you, my friends!

But while that anniversary is meaningful to me, it wasn't what provoked my memory yesterday. Rather, as we finished up and took stock of the church decked out and arrayed for the Christ-mass, it was the beauty of this space, and the beauty of the hearts that make it this way that brought me back to last winter. I suspect I'm not the only one whose heart is stirred by beauty, whether that's because of a striking visual or perhaps just the right ring of a chord. Certainly, it lightens our moods and opens our hearts to goodness, enjoyment, and thoughtfulness; beauty adorns our lives, lives which can be such a grind, full of trial and challenge, at times. Thankfully, beauty transforms that which conducts it, transforms those that receive it.

Today, we delight and marvel in the fact that God's most beloved creation, the human being, was adorned with full divinity in the Word made flesh. At Jesus Christ's nativity, we are steeped in the notion that in his incarnation, the fullness of the most beautiful being we can possibly imagine, God Almighty, came to dwell among us in the birth of a baby boy in a manger. And though the dwelling wherein Mary and Joseph greeted the newborn Christ remained outwardly humble, Jesus' own presence made it the most lovely of all places in the world. Even as the impressive temples in the world invited many to enjoy its great stones, none could truly boast what could be said of the smelly hovel in which Jesus was born. No temple in any part of the world could claim to house the Savior of the nations in the flesh. In fact, no palace in any kingdom could claim to enthrone the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the Prince of Peace. It was only the Bethlehem stable that could claim the beauty of his presence; only the crib of his birth where the star gave notice. The angels would announce their fanfare to those blessed shepherds, and the star would draw the wise from the east. Therefore, the birth of Jesus in the overflow of the inn was the most beautiful place we can imagine.

But Jesus didn't come to us in order to improve the places he went like some first century HGTV show. Jesus came to be among so that the beauty of God's goodness, forbearance, mercy, peace, faithfulness, righteousness, and love could be truly present for those that would seek after him. Jesus came to be among us so that each one of our hearts, each place where he is worshiped and obeyed, would become a place more marvelous than any temple or throne room by the presence of God among his faithful people. Beloved, your own heart is meant as a manger of sorts, a place prepared for Jesus Christ so that he can take our humanity and adorn it with his divinity. And filled with God's love, we bring the hope of the nations out with us, heralding afresh the glory of the newborn King.

This Christmastide, with all that afflicts us, all that divides us, all that fills us with fear, and makes us anxious, this is just the time to invite the Savior into our hearts, to beautify them, fill them with hope, to encourage the discouraged, help those in need, help lift up the burdened, and bring the glory and light of Christ to the darkened and desperate places of the world. I pray that the beauty of *this* place stirs something in you as it has me, remembering that every candlestick, every flower and green, every note of the organ and choir, every cool looking robe, all of it points to the beauty of the Incarnation of the Son of God, points to how he would transform our hearts in his likeness, points to how he would draw us into union with God and with one another.

So, Merry Christmas, again. I pray that Jesus, who came to be among us as the perfect sign of God's beauty, perfection, and love, would find a place prepared in and among us. May he watch over us as 2022 begins and increase our sense of mutual charity and responsibility to one another. May he defend us from evil and increase among us good. May he shine his light of joy on a world in sore need of a lamp. May we adore him this night on bended knee,

O Christ, to thee with God the Father,

and, O Holy Ghost, to thee,

hymn and chant and high thanksgiving,

and unwearied praises be;

honor, glory and dominion,

and eternal victory,

evermore and evermore!

Hodie Christus Natus Est! Today Christ is Born! Come let us adore him. Amen.