In the Shelter of His Presence

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[0:01] And I think if the children want to come forward, that would be good at this moment. Anyone who want to come, we can have the little ones could kneel up here on this thing here. And the bigger ones who want to come up and some of their big parents too, come so you can see better.

The little guys, if you want to kneel, you can even kneel up on here or sit on that little platform. Don't anyone fall down. I was warned by a nurse from Children's this morning that she will not tolerate any head injuries of people falling off this stage.
Well, is everyone getting excited about Christmas?
Parents and children. Who's excited? Who's ready? Just another day to go. Everyone ready at home? Now, who thinks that when it comes time to Christmas morning, and this is for everyone, you're going to get everything you ever wanted.
Who's going to get what you really wanted for Christmas? Do you think it's going to be really cool? What is it you really want for Christmas? What's the thing you want more than anything else? A Game Boy.
[1:12] Anybody else want a Game Boy? Oh, that's very good. Anybody want Lego? Lego Creator? And I know someone, do you guys want to come up? Come up. No, my son doesn't want to come up.

No, he's being shy. And what else? All sorts of things. Maybe for some of the adults, you know, it's wonderful. We get smaller presents, but so much more expensive.
Well, yeah, Christmas is a lot about that, isn't it? It's about getting what we really need. Oh, I found out. No, I'm on again. Getting, you know, all our desires. We're going to have a great dinner. It's going to be a great festival.
Well, and it's Jesus' birthday. Oh, yeah. You took my punchline, kid. I'm not going to have a wedding present. Just get my dad's daughter in a Christmas tree.
Oh. Yeah. That's great. Well, you know, I want to just, as we get ready for Christmas, just show you a few, four representations that are around this building.
[2:16] They're kind of, they're symbols. They're more than symbols. They represent very important realities and truths, which we can grab onto at Christmas. And they're all around. Anyone see some very important things around this building?

What's here? Can anyone see here? Jesus in the manger. And what, can you see something peeking around behind there? What's peeking around behind there? It's got lights on it. And you probably have one in your house too, everyone.
Christmas tree. And what's behind me here? You can see it towering over us, behind that black shroud. What is that? The cross. And what do we have here? The chair.
Well, it's really, yeah, it's a chair. It's a throne. This represents a throne. And I put this lamb on there. I wanted a very serious looking lamb. This is a serious point. And this represents Jesus, the lamb who was slain.
Yeah, so we've got a Christmas tree, a manger, a cross, and a throne with a lamb on it. I want to think about the Christmas tree. That's kind of the least Christian symbol around here, it has to be said.
[3:17] Christmas trees are thought to come from kind of a long time ago. And they were kind of pagan in origin. But they were turned into a Christian symbol by St. Boniface.

Hey, guys, better leave the Jesus there. And they were turned into a Christian symbol by St. Boniface. And he made them into a symbol of the Trinity because they are in a triangle shape.

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So when you see your Christmas tree, think of it as a symbol of the Trinity. Oh, and Martin Luther is credited with adding lights to it. But some Christians think that the Christmas tree did make it into the Bible.
Hear Jeremiah 10. Hear this, brothers and sisters. Hear the word of the Lord. Learn not the ways of the heathen. For one cutteth a tree out of the forest with the axe.
They deck it with silver and gold. They fasten it with nails and hammers that it move not. Now, is anyone getting worried here? Maybe we're barking up the wrong tree.
[4:13] But then it goes on. Be not afraid of them, for they do not do evil. Neither is it in them to do good. So, that probably isn't really talking about Christmas trees. But there you go, just in case.

You have the Christmas tree. Now, over here we have a manger. Now, look at the manger. What do we see in the manger? Is he moving? Wow. Who's in the manger?
Jesus is in the manger. What's so amazing about the manger? Of course, it's amazing, isn't it? We get caught up with the manger every year. Because it's so amazing that this is Jesus.
That this is the Son of God. And, you know, we look and think that this is God. Who created everything. Who is everything. And yet, somehow, this is Jesus.
This is Him. He's contained in the form of a baby. And it's amazing to us, isn't it? That God, who created everything and who is all-powerful and almighty.
[5:14] Should do such a thing. We're going to leave the hay. And become human. And that's the amazing thing about Christmas. It's not that Jesus became a baby.

But that He who is everlasting and eternal and big and created everything became human. Just like you and me. Look, He became like one of us.
He became one of us. He took upon Himself what it means to be human. So the manger is really important. It tells us that Jesus became human.
It's funny, isn't it? At Christmas time that, you know, it's okay now in the public square to have reindeer and Christmas trees and Santa Claus. But not to have a manger. And that's because that really is the meaning of it all at Christmas, isn't it?
That Jesus, who is Himself the Son of God, who is God, who is eternal, took human flesh. Poured Himself into human flesh. And that God is in that child reconciling Himself to the human race.
[6:18] Yeah. Jesus in the manger. Hey, but what's behind me, everyone? Let's go back to the end here. And what do you see behind me? Big, big, big symbol.

It's more than a symbol, isn't it? It's a cross. Yeah, it's more than a symbol, the cross, isn't it? That's the reality. And isn't it amazing? In this church, we have this cross that is so big, it towers over the building.
It towers over us. And you can't get away from it anywhere in this building, this great, big cross. And isn't that right? That we have a big cross in the building. Because, you see, you can't think about Jesus without thinking about His cross.
You can't... Hey, guys, let's leave. Let's sit down for a second. You can't think about Jesus without the cross. You can't think about Christmas without the cross. We can't understand the manger without thinking about the cross.
Because the baby who was born in the manger came to offer His life on the cross. He came to die. He came to die on the cross.
[7:23] His life is overshadowed by the cross. That was His purpose. And that's His meaning. And, of course, for us as Christians, even at Christmas time, our lives are always shadowed by the cross.

The cross is so much more than a symbol. The cross is Jesus' purpose. The cross is His meaning. The cross is His reality. It's what He came to do. And, of course, the cross is our only hope.
We, as Christians, live under the shadow of the cross. But now I've got a throne. Okay, let's gather around the throne, everyone. Look at this throne. Come over here. And let's sit around this throne. Because... Let's sit down maybe on the floor. And we've got a throne. Let's leave the Lamb, because He's a very special Lamb. Did you make a picture of this? This is a different one, isn't it? Now we've got a manger. Well, we've had a Christmas tree. A manger. Let's sit back. Let's sit back. A manger. We have the cross. And we have a throne. And you may have heard in that reading from Revelation that we had reading.
[8:24] The reading from the Bible talks about a throne. And it says, on that throne is a Lamb. And this Lamb is Jesus. Because Jesus, who was born in the manger, and who died on the cross, He rose again from the dead.

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But He won a victory over sin so that we can live forever. Let's leave the Lamb. Let's sit down. And so in the Bible, it talks about Jesus as the Lamb who was slain.
And guess what? In that reading from Revelation, there were people gathered around this throne. See, it's a picture of heaven. It's a picture of what's going on right now in heaven. And just like we're gathered around this throne, in heaven, there are lots of people, a countless multitude of people gathered around this throne, worshiping Jesus.
What do you think about that? It's amazing, isn't it? And it says that they are worshiping Him because they are those who have made themselves white by His blood.
The people who love Him have been made safe from their sin, and they gather around His throne and they worship Him. Isn't that amazing? They get to be forever with Him in His presence, always worshiping Him, always serving Him, always singing His praises.
[9:45] And we get to do that in a small way when we're in church and in our lives, but we're going to get to do that when we're in heaven forever. We're going to get to gather around the throne and we're going to worship Him.

So we've had a manger, a cross, and a throne. Yeah? I want a Christmas tree.
And a Christmas tree. And a Christmas tree. We can't forget the Christmas tree. Yeah. Why don't you guys sit down for a second? And I'll just say one thing to the parents as well. So the manger, the cross, and the throne.
See, those people that are there gathering around that throne because of what Jesus did. Because they took what Jesus offered. Because Jesus took human flesh.
Because Jesus sacrificed His life on the cross. Because Jesus won the victory. They were there because of what Jesus did. And they are there in His presence forever serving Him.
[11:02] And it is an awesome picture of what it will mean for us to be in heaven. Living under the shelter of His protection. All hunger and thirst will be ended. We are going to be led by the Lamb to streams of living water.

Water that will never fade away. That will give us eternal life. And all sadness and sorrow will be ended. And what I want all of us to see as we prepare for this celebration of Christmas is that it is all about Jesus getting the attention.
The manger, the cross, and the throne. It's about Jesus getting all the attention. Because on that throne, He is the center of all praise.
And that great congregation are gathered around Him. Celebrating Him. Singing His praises for what He has done. And when Jesus is the center of it all, then the deepest longings of human hearts are met.
When Jesus is the center of it all, then all human needs are met. And when Jesus is the center of it all, then all human meaning is fulfilled.
[12:15] You know, it's the amazing paradoxical thing about being a Christian is that when we turn aside from ourselves and leave ourselves behind and stop focusing upon ourselves and focus on Jesus, the Lamb who was slain, and sing His praises and gather around His throne, then we know true meaning.

And this is what we will enjoy when we're in heaven. But even now, in our lives, in our gathering together, we focus on Him.
We sing His praises. We make Him the center. The manger, the cross, and the throne. They're much more than symbols.
They are a reality more glorious than anything we can imagine. Let's pray. Almighty God, thank you that you sent your Son, Jesus Christ, to take human flesh and become one of us.
To sacrifice Himself on the cross that we might live. And that He reigns, even now, the Lamb who was slain on the throne. And as we prepare to celebrate the Feast of Christmas, grant that you would turn all our hearts to Him.
[13:39] That He might be the center of our worship and the center of our praise. And we might truly celebrate Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

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