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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**December 22, 2019**

**Christmas**

**Selected Scriptures**

**Prayer:** *Father, we just again praise you and thank you for the gift of Christmas. Lord, we are just thrilled to be able to tell it on the mountain that you have been born, the ultimate Christmas gift. We just thank you for it. Lord, this morning as again we open your word and we are focused in on Christmas and what that means, we just pray for your grace, we pray for your Holy Spirit's presence. Lord, enable us to plumb your word in a way that brings new depth and understanding to how much you loved us and just what you've given to us and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Reconciliation is really what the heart of Christmas is all about, and reconciliation takes place when two parties who were previously separated find the means to end that separation. Now for God and man, that separation took place really at the very beginning in the Garden of Eden with the first man Adam. When he defied God's one command that he not eat the forbidden fruit, he gave up his perfection and he caused mankind itself to be separated from its creator. Now this reconciliation that took place took place

strictly between God and man but it took place entirely on God's part. Man was no longer perfect and so a perfect God elected to become a man, live out his life perfectly and then offer up that life as a sacrifice and substitute for the sinful lives of his sheep. The God man Jesus Christ came to earth to bring peace by laying down his life to pay the cost of our separation and by faith in Jesus, his righteousness becomes our righteousness. So because of him we can sing: "Hark the herald angels sing, glory to the newborn king. Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled." That reconciliation was the ultimate Christmas gift and here is why. You see, the price of a gift is not in its cost, it's in its costliness. If I gave my wife a ten carat diamond for Christmas, it may well be costly, but if I just happened to own a chain of jewelry stores and at the last minute I pulled that costly diamond off the shelf, then in reality the cost to me was minimal, and so was the real value of the gift. Christmas is a celebration of the greatest gift that was ever given and one of the reasons why is because it was the costliest gift ever given. That gift is the miracle that we celebrate at Christmas. It's actually a miracle that stretches our imaginations and our ability to comprehend to the maximum the more we dwell on it. It's this idea that God became a man. I mean it's been said once you accept the miracle of the incarnation, then all the other miracles become easy to accept. This morning I want to focus in on just what it cost God to become

one of us. I want to describe three different aspects of its costliness with regard to its poverty, to its passion, and to its permanence.

And the first thing I want to focus in on cost wise is the poverty of Christmas. *2 Corinthians 8:9* says: *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich.* I want to take a look at just how much poverty Jesus was willing to embrace for our sakes. And you know, if you've been here for any length of time, you know that I end my messages with this blessing from Jude. This is Jude 1. It should be familiar to you. It says: *Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.* Well, this is a doxology and it lists four things that rightly belong to the only wise God our Savior. They are glory, majesty, dominion, and power. Well Jesus underwent an impoverishment of all four of them, and scripture gives us ample examples of the majesty, dominion, and power that all belonged to the Son of God before he became a baby Jesus. Nahum describes his majesty. It says: *The LORD has His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet. He rebukes the sea and makes it dry, and dries up all*

*the rivers. Bashan and Carmel wither, and the flower of Lebanon wilts. The mountains quake before Him, the hills melt, and the earth heaves at His presence, yes, the world and all who dwell in it. Psalm 104 describes his dominion. It says: He looks on the earth, and it trembles; he touches the hills, and they smoke. And Psalm 114, his power. It says: Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob.*

I think it goes without saying that the baby born in the manger was previously the most powerful force in the universe. And everything in all creation was created by the Son "ex nihilo" which is a fancy Latin phrase which simply means "from nothing." As creator, he had the ultimate authority and power and all of creation recognized it but then, then he did something extraordinary. The greatest power the universe had ever known went to the absolute extreme of human powerlessness. At the end of one scale was God capable of speaking universes into being simply by his power alone, and at the other end of the scale was not just the birth of God as a human baby, but as God beginning his human experience just as we all did, as a human zygote, clinging to the very edge of human existence. I mean all of us started as two cells, then four, then eight, and then sixteen, and so on. God started the exact same way. He went from the most power in the universe to the extreme opposite where he was a mere two cells away from non-existence by becoming a zygote

clinging to his mother's womb until nine months later he was born a creature so powerless that he couldn't even sit up or speak. One of the hardest things for us to grasp about God is his eternality. *Colossians 1:17* says: *And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.* I mean we have a hard time imagining a God who always was and who always will be because that's really not the case for us. I mean all of us have had a beginning, I mean, every one of us knows the day of our birth. Well, God for all time had existed outside of time itself until some 2,000 years ago, then he consented to be born just like we are and thus enter into our world of time. And we can't begin to grasp the poverty of that decision because we've never had the riches of existing unconstrained by time. But he did. And he gave that privilege and power up to join us as finite human beings. I mean there his majesty, his dominion, and his power he gave up for us. His glory though, his glory is really another story. You see his glory was so great that it terrified any human that got near it. It was something that Israel experienced with a mixture of awe and dread.

When Israel was in the desert, having escaped from Egypt, God announced that he would come down to earth and meet with Moses on top of Mount Sinai, and Exodus describes it. It says this: *Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and*

*the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice.*

This is not the God that we think of when we think of the God of Christmas. And when you've spent five decades or so thinking about God as "the man upstairs" or maybe "my co-pilot," well it's very easy to have notions about God that are completely divorced from who he really is. I mean God at one point chose to touch the earth and meet with human beings prior to his incarnation at Christmas, and the effect was absolutely terrifying. Just a few weeks ago there was a volcanic eruption off the coast of New Zealand. And you saw those pictures that were a lot like when Mount Saint Helens erupted. There was a huge pyroclastic cloud that's rocketing forward at hundreds of miles an hour. That was just a thermal reaction. May I suggest to you that that was nothing compared to what the Israelites saw when the living God actually touched earth. I mean this was the creator's glory actually touching the planet. The mountain was quaking. But God was using his extraordinary

power to surround and truncate his glory enough to be able to touch Mount Sinai without melting the entire planet or shattering it into tiny little pieces. I'm not just waxing poetic here. The threat to the planet was very real indeed. As the psalmist says: *He looks on the earth, and it trembles; He touches the hills, and they smoke.* I just want you to picture what the Israelites saw, I mean, the smoke is everywhere, the planet itself is shaking like it's about to come apart and accompanying it all is this trumpet blast that according to scripture sounded long and became louder and louder. Just put yourself at that place at ground level. You hear a sound like you've never ever heard before, it's a trumpet sound coming from literally everywhere and the power and the volume continues to rise as if it's never going to stop.

You know, a few years back I went to the air show at Stewart, and it featured the Blue Angels. If you've ever seen that, their opening act consists of all five jets going screaming by you at treetop level with full afterburners on. I mean they went screaming by and I knew right then and there that I had never, ever in my life heard a sound as loud as that. That was just five F-18 Hornets. My guess is that that trumpet sound made those Jets sound like purring kittens. So not only is the sound going through you like a wave, the ground beneath you is beginning to roll like the waves in the sea and everywhere you look you see this billowing

smoke unlike anything you've ever seen before and perhaps you wonder how could anybody refer to God as "the man upstairs"? This God is absolutely terrifying. And if you don't think so, just picture the reaction that the Israelites had, realizing that they were God's chosen people, basking in his love and care. This is what *Exodus 28:18* says. It says: *Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die."* Now mind you, the Israelites are basking in God's love and benevolence and they're still terrified of his presence.

But he's not just a God of terror. It is incredibly difficult to capture the idea of God's power and glory while at the same time trying to describe his love. Many of you remember C.S. Lewis' attempt to do that in his children's book *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. And if you remember in the book Aslan the lion represents Christ, is this enormously powerful and scary beast and Susan is one of the children who's in this new kingdom and she asks the beaver this question as she's about to meet with Aslan. She says, "Is he quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion." "Safe?" said Mr. Beaver. "Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."



You see Lewis put it perfectly, God is never safe, but he's always good.

So Moses goes up this mountain again and again to meet with God and he learns just what Lewis is saying, that God is good but he is not at all safe. So Moses meets with God and he speaks with God and *Exodus 33* says: *Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.* The God that Moses spoke to was not remotely the full expression of who God actually was. You see, God himself took great pains to veil his actual presence from Moses and at one point he tells Moses why in *Exodus 33:18*. It says: *Moses said, "Please show me your glory." And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'the LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live."* God says to Moses, for me to completely reveal myself to you would kill you instantly. I mean I don't think he's saying that he would kill Moses, I think what he's saying is simply being in my presence unprotected would outright kill you. Later at the end of Moses's life he looks back at that moment and he says this to his people in *Deuteronomy 4:32*. He says: *"For ask now concerning the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether*

*any great thing like this has happened, or anything like it has been heard. Did any people ever hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and live?"*

So when Moses goes up the mountain, who is it that he actually saw? I mean was it God the Father, was it God the Son, was it God the Holy Spirit? Well, the Holy Spirit's only manifested himself in scripture as a flame or as a wind, and both the apostle John and Jesus insist that no one, including Moses, has ever seen God the Father. John says in *John 1:18*: *"No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side. He"* -- that is Jesus -- *"has made him known."* And Jesus says in *John 6:45*: *It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.'* Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me -- not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; -- again, that's Jesus -- *he has seen the Father."* Well, the answer to the question who did Moses actually see when he went up on the mountain to see God was the pre-incarnate Christ, the Son of God, the one who came to visit us at Christmas with no smoke, no earthquakes, no lightning, no resounding trumpets, just the bleating of barn animals. The Son of God gave up his majesty, his dominion, his power, and his glory just to become one of us. Paul can barely contain his amazement when he says to us in *Philippians 2*: *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 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 and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

This second cost that we want to focus on this morning is the cost of Jesus's passion, and I'm not referring to the cross. I'm referring to Jesus's own personal passion. Simply put, Jesus's passion was to do the will of his Father, and it was his Father's will that he empty himself to take on his role as our high priest. And you know, people have for centuries struggled to figure out what that emptying means, and many have come up with explanations that border on the heretical. I mean, the Greek word for "emptying" is "kenosis," and there are all kinds of different kenosis theories as to exactly what Jesus emptied himself of and why. The question is, okay, when God became a man, what exactly happened? Did he strip himself of his deity and then take on humanity? Well, we know that that can't possibly be true because we know that God was fully man and fully God at the same time. Well, so what is it then that God emptied himself of in order to become one of us? Well again, it was his majesty, his glory, his omniscience, his omnipresence, and all the other attributes of deity that belong to him for all time. Well, how did he empty

himself of these attributes? And why? Well, in order to really get to this, in order to understand this properly, you really have to understand the nature of the Godhead which is not an easy task in the first place, talking about Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But if you understand the relationship that they had with one another that you understand for all time that Jesus, the Son stood in relation to the Father in a way that mirrors the way that he took on flesh. And that is to say that the Son was always, always in submission to the Father and the Spirit was always about the business of making the Son and the Father known. So how did Jesus submit to his Father when he emptied himself of his full capacity as God? What poverty did He embrace for us as an infant? Well, just like we do, God started his earthly life completely and totally helpless, dependent on his mother for life itself. Again, just as an aside, this is not the Jesus that many people think of at Christmastime. I mean, there's lots of folks who think of the baby Jesus as some extraordinarily endowed infant, but that's not how the scripture describes him. I mean we've all seen those paintings of Jesus as a baby with a glowing halo around his chubby little face and his chubby little finger lifted up giving a blessing as if he's endowed as an infant with all of the wisdom and knowledge of a king. I don't think anything could be further from the truth than that impression, because when Jesus emptied himself, it also included his self-awareness. Now, the Bible is silent as

to exactly when Jesus knew for certain that he was the Messiah, but we certainly have a scriptural basis for believing that by the age of twelve he understood that God and not Joseph was his Father, and that he was on a sacred mission from his Father. And that's all told in a story in *Luke 2*, starting at verse 41. It says this, it says: *Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"*

Well, we can deduce some things from that. Number one, Jesus at the age of twelve clearly understands that Joseph was his

stepfather and that his actual father was the one whose house he was now teaching in. I mean you have to understand that part of this goes into the poverty aspect of what Jesus endured for us, part of the pain that Jesus had to endure throughout his entire life was the burden of what he knew and when he knew it. I mean at the age of twelve he shares this revelation with his parents and the scripture says -- quote -- *"And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them."* A significant part of the poverty of emptying that Jesus underwent for us was demonstrated by his willing submission to his mother and his stepfather Joseph even after he's come to the realization that his real Father is the one who lived in the temple. Jesus's passion -- again, I'm describing the love that he had for his Father -- proved to be extremely costly. His will was to do the will of his Father and it was his Father's will that he continued to submit to the will of his parents from age twelve to age thirty. So Jesus's passion to do his Father's will had the king of the universe at age twelve understanding who he was, what his mission was, and yet still the very one who sent Mount Sinai ablaze in terror is working as a carpenter under his stepfather in order to fulfill his heavenly Father's will. Verse 51 says: *And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.*

I mean Jesus's infancy as well as his adolescence was marked by a gradual process of coming to realize that he was the one who had left heaven itself in order to pursue the rescue of us. And we know for a fact that Jesus had to grow and to learn because God tells us in Hebrews that he learned -- learned obedience through suffering. Jesus was also clear that there were things that occurred on earth that he was ignorant of, and there are also things that he knew that he could only have known by virtue of his supernatural abilities. I mean sometimes Jesus acted like God and sometimes Jesus acted like man. There were some plain physical facts that Jesus clearly did not know. "Who touched me," Jesus asks in Luke 8 when a woman with an issue of blood comes up behind him and touches his garment. At the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus asks his disciples, *"How many loaves do you have?"* In Mark 13 he clearly admits that he doesn't know the day appointed for his return. Mark 13:32, this is Jesus's own words, he says: *"But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."* It's Jesus as man. But at other times we see Jesus illustrating a supernatural ability to know things that nobody else could know. John's gospel tells us flat out that he knew what was inside people. In John 2:24 says: *But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.* Jesus frequently gave very specific

details to his disciples about things that were clearly still in the future. I mean Peter's insisting to Jesus that he will never betray him, and Jesus says in *Mark 14*: "*Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.*" He knew for a fact that Lazarus was dead. These are all Jesus as God.

So how do we reconcile the fact that there were certain things that Jesus knew and certain things that he clearly did not know? Well, again it all goes back to this idea of Jesus's passion, the love that he had for his Father. You see the incarnation marked this stunning level of poverty that Jesus was willing to embrace for us but it also demonstrated more than any other act that Jesus would ever do, that his passion was to do the will of his Father. Before time itself had even begun, the Son was in submission to the Father even though he was fully coequal with Him. And so the Son's will and desire was always to please the Father. And that desire didn't change when he took on flesh. And we can see Jesus again and again telling us while he's here in the flesh that he's fully and completely in submission with his Father. Just a brief survey: This is *John 5:19*: *So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise."* *John 5:30*: "I can do nothing on my own. As I



hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me." *John 6:38: "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. John 8:28: So Jesus said to them, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me."* Jesus made his submission crystal clear when he said, *"I do nothing on my own authority."* So what Jesus did in emptying himself was a voluntary impoverishment of his attributes that varied moment by moment depending on the will of his Father. If the Father didn't want him to know something, then Jesus willed not to know it. If the Father wanted him to exercise his omniscience, then he would exercise it. His attributes were completely under the power of and in submission to the will of his Father. And therefore even though he was 100 percent God and 100 percent man, depending on the will of his Father, he exercised one or the other of these natures that he possessed both of. And the fact is almost all of the time he forsook all of those attributes and belonged to him and trusted solely in the will of his Father so that he could be high priest for us, experiencing everything that it means to be fully human. Again *Hebrews 4:15* says: *We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.*

And there's also another reason why Jesus fully submitted to the will of his Father in all things, and the reason is critical for us. You understand Jesus was showing us something. He was showing us by example how we are to be fully submitted to him in all things. Peter tells us this, he says: *For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. So just like Jesus did with his Father, so we do with him, we trust our heavenly Father by trusting in his Son.*

Jesus was the perfect example of what it means to be passionate about doing the will of his Father. He said he would do nothing on his own accord and authority but trusted in his Father in everything, and when he was reviled, when he was threatened in the midst of his suffering, he relied on the one who he knew would judge justly. That's really what he wants from us, because he knows that that passion and dependence is the source of all the grace, strength, and power that we need to live our lives for his glory. Jesus wants from us the very same passion towards him that he had toward his Father, and he demonstrated exactly what that means by being utterly dependent. Jesus made himself weak so that

we could be strong.

Jesus' first cost was poverty. He willingly emptied himself of glory, majesty, dominion, and power so that he could live a life just like us. His second cost was his passion, to do the will of his Father, whether it meant exercising his divine attributes or suppressing them in order to perfectly comply with his Father's will. He mirrored the utter dependency that he wants us to have. But now on to the third cost. His third cost is one that really never occurred to me for years. It's the cost of permanence. You know it's easy to think of the incarnation as a 33-year venture in which God temporarily takes on all of the limitations of human flesh. Believe me, that alone would be an astounding sacrifice. But what I didn't realize is that much of Jesus' sacrifice, of his emptying of himself was permanent and not temporary. He is permanently one of us. Paul Harvey used to tell a story. He told a Christmas story about a man dealing with a flock of birds. And it's Christmas Eve, he tells his wife that he can't go to the service at church because he just can't believe why God would become a man. And then while his wife was away at church, it begins to snow and it starts snowing harder and harder and it begins to snow furiously. He hears a thump at his window and he looks up, looks back down, and he hears another thump, then another thump. And he soon realizes that in the middle of this storm

there's a disoriented flock of birds looking for shelter and they're flying right into his window. And he sees them flopping around and he has a whole lot of compassion for them. So he decides, I'll open up my barn to shelter them. Soon enough he realizes how hard it is getting them to understand that safety and warmth is right there. He tries to catch them with a blanket to no avail. He flaps his arms and he tries to shoo them into the barn but they just scatter all around him. He throws out bread crumbs leading into the barn, but they're so disoriented, they simply ignore it. It's clear that they are stressed out, frozen, and facing imminent death, and that stresses him out to no end. Finally he thinks to himself, if I could only become a bird, I could explain to them that I mean no harm, that I'm only offering them safety and shelter. And suddenly it dawns on him why God decided to become one of us. I mean he may not have seen us as harassed and helpless as a flock of birds, but he did say that we were just like a different kind of animal. This is what he said in *Matthew 9:36*. This is Jesus's response, he says: *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.* You see when Jesus entered into human flesh, it was so that he could be our shepherd. And to do that, he willingly became one of us, but the story doesn't end there. I mean it would be one thing for God to temporarily empty himself, to take on flesh for 33 years and then

to go back to the glory that he once enjoyed, but Christ's love for and commitment to us was as permanent as his decision to become one of us was also permanent. See some 2,000 years ago at the very first Christmas God elected to permanently take on our flesh. Jesus exists right now today somewhere in the universe in flesh and blood. He's got arms and legs and a head and a torso just like us. God himself took on human flesh not just temporarily but forever. And the one thing that this God in the flesh has and will forever have is holes in his hands and feet and a gash in his side. See, after Jesus has risen from the dead he confronts doubting Thomas who said unless he put his hands into the very wounds of Christ, he won't believe that he has risen from the dead. And *John 20* said this: *Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."* Those scars were clearly evident on the resurrected body of Jesus Christ. They are a permanent part of who the Son of God is. I mean his glory and his attributes are fully restored as he sits at the right hand of the Father but he is still in the flesh. Do you realize how great the love of God for us is, that he was willing to not only assume human flesh on our behalf but to do so permanently? I mean think about that for a minute. I mean try to ponder the uniqueness of a God who was willing to go from a presence so awesome and terrifying that even mountains are quaking and trembling to a baby so helpless he can't even sit up

and speak to an adolescent fully realizing that he was the former creator of the universe now willing to go back under the authority of his carpenter dad and peasant mom, to a resurrected Christ so accessible and so willing to demonstrate his love for us that he encourages Thomas to put his hands into his very wounds. Those wounds are proof positive of his permanent love for us. God so loved us that he took on the very form that we have and he took it on eternally. For all time God will exist just like us.

I said at the outset of this message that the measure of a gift is its costliness. And again by that measure, Christmas is the costliest gift ever given. It cost God his glory, his majesty, his dominion, and power as he emptied himself of everything to accomplish his Father's will. And you know at the end of time when King Jesus returns, we will know far more of what it cost that babe in the manger, when Jesus ultimately reaps the sacrifice that he has sown.

*Revelation 5 says: Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"* See at the end we see the angels returning to Jesus the

praise that he gave up for us. It's a praise we now give him at Christmas: Hark the herald angels sing, glory to the newborn King. Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled. Let's pray.

*Father, we just praise you for the cost you were willing to bear for the gift that you've given to us at Christmas. Father, it is so easy to get caught up in just the commercialized understanding of how this culture treats Christmas, it's about money, it's about sales, it's about buying. But no, Lord, it's about poverty, it's about passion, it's about the permanence of what you've done for us. We pray this Christmas time you would give us the ability to remember, to reflect, and to bring you the honor and worship you so richly deserve, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*