

Empty Manger and Stained Glass
Offered in Worship at Broadway Baptist Church, Louisville
December 5, 2010
Rev. Chris Caldwell, Pastor

A note about this prayer: Before offering the prayer, I explained to the congregation that in Eastern expressions of Christianity, visual images are often used as a way to focus during prayer. I then explained the four images forming the foundation of the prayer I was about to offer. The first was an empty manger placed where normally our pulpit rests. The second was an image of angels at the base of our stained glass window behind the pulpit. The third was the images of Jesus at his baptism in the stained glass. The fourth was the image of a dove descending upon Jesus, also depicted in the stained glass. Before offering the prayer, I encouraged congregants to pray with their eyes open if those chose to, or with their eyes closed, and assured them their prayers would be heard either way.

Attached to this email are two files, one showing the placement of the manger before the stained glass, and the other offering a closer view of the stained glass.

Let us pray

How strange it is, O God, to bow before an empty wooden box resting on rickety legs. How daring it is to look for power where there is emptiness.

But this is what we do.

We worship, and we wait.

Waiting as people unaccustomed to mangers, but familiar with emptiness.

We wait as people who know the emptiness of grief, of a place at the table not filled this year.

We wait as people who know the emptiness of illness, of bodies robbed of strength.

We wait as people who know the emptiness that comes from chasing after the thing we know will satisfy, but which does not.

We wait as people who know the emptiness of promises made but not kept.

We come seeking more than emptiness, which is why we find hope in the angels above the manger. Angels come to proclaim the good news of a child who is more than a child, but rather a king, and the good news of a manger that is more than a manger, but rather a throne. Angels come to proclaim Immanuel, God among us.

Send the angels to us, too, Lord. Send them to remind us that “unto us,” a child has been born, who is a savior.

Send through them the promise that your Spirit comes first and foremost to the empty places.

But beyond even the angels, help us to see the promise of Christ above them.

Show us the faithful Christ, his arms outstretched. Show us Immanuel, God among us, who journeyed from a wooden manger to the seeming emptiness of a wooden cross.

Show us the living Christ, who humbled himself, so that he might be exalted. Show us the living Christ, who emptied himself so that our spirits might be filled.

Forgive us when we settle for empty things. Fill us with the fullness of Christ’s love and grace.

And on this Sunday when we light the candle of Peace, may the peace of your Spirit descend upon us even as it descended upon Christ.

Fill us with your Spirit, Lord.

But forgive us if we settle merely for being receptacles of your Spirit. Help us to be instruments of your peace. Let us not forget the image of the disciples standing behind Christ. Teach us, like them, to follow. And make the circle complete by leading us to empty places and to empty people, so we might do our part to bring there the fullness of your love, and the peace of your Spirit.