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*To an open house in the evening
Home shall men come,
To an older place than Eden
And a taller town than Rome.
To the end of the way of the wandering star,
To the things that cannot be and that are,
To the place where God was homeless
And all men are at home.
(G. K. Chesterton, *The House of Christmas*)*

Dear People of West Texas,

Among the many wondrous and beautiful truths of Christmas is the reminder that God chooses to make his home among us. Jesus is Emmanuel, which means “God-with-us.” And he is God-with-us who is also for us—not just sometime, but all the time; not just somewhere, but here; not just eventually, but today; not conditionally, but fully and completely. In making himself at home with us, God opens a way home for us, a way that brings us again to the manger at Bethlehem.

Of course, when we arrive at the stable, when Christmas Day dawns at last, we discover the story is just beginning. As small and crowded as that plain place is, it opens into an unimaginably spacious dwelling, spreading beyond the distant horizon, soaring higher than the night sky. That little town of Bethlehem becomes a doorway into the new creation. The star over the manger becomes like a dim nightlight compared to the light from within that blazes outward and upward and forevermore.

Upon entering, we find those we fully expect to see—shepherds and kings in bathrobes, sweet angels with pipe cleaner halos, restless donkey-eared pre-teens and cotton-puff toddler sheep; frazzled parents and weary retail employees; smartly dressed visitors eager to get to dinner after church and rumpled regulars who wish they could stay till morning. And all of them—all of *us*—turning to and leaning in toward this baby in the crib.

The Light is relentless, shining unfailingly in the dark, and it bids us to keep looking, to see those we expected and those we never expected gathering round. Who would have thought that both Frosty and the Grinch would be admitted? And the neighbor who never speaks to you, unless it’s to complain about your raggedy yard? How can there be room here, how can there be light enough, for the ones who have wronged us, broken trust, broken our hearts—the ones we just can’t forgive? It’s not just those “Christmas & Easter Christians” who are sitting in our seats, it’s all the unlikely, unprepared, and unnoticed people, too, who have seen that Light and read in it the clear message of “Now Open” and “Vacancy”.



The Love coming to birth is relentless in its pursuit, and we are asked to keep looking, to look and look and look until we can see ourselves, and "God-with-us," in all those we did not expect to see here in this place. "Coming up close, everything sounds like, 'Welcome home, come home!'" as an old song by 'Til Tuesday puts it.

In the birth of Jesus our Savior the way home opens, the way to the home that heals and dignifies, redeems and beautifies, all other homes. Our way home is lit now. The manger beckons, and unto *us and the whole world* a child is born. Come, let us adore him.

Welcome Christmas! Welcome home, Emmanuel!

Bishop Rayford High, Ann, Patti and I wish you the merriest of Christmases, filled with wonder, joy and beauty. May the wandering star rest over your church this Christmas; may the church doors be entry to the manger; and may you know the beautiful truth that Jesus has come to make his home with you.

Love in Christ,

**+David Reed
Bishop of West Texas**

