

**Vigil 4-8 pm** "...and they shall name him 'Emmanuel'—which means 'God is with us.'"

**Vigil 10 pm** "She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger."

**Day 9:30-11 am** "And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."

**"In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit"**

**Once upon a time**, there was a man who **didn't believe** in God. And he didn't hesitate to let others know how he felt ...especially so for all the religious holidays.

His wife, however, **did believe**, and she raised their children to have faith in God and Jesus, despite of all her husband's disparaging comments.

One snowy, Advent evening, his wife was taking their children to church in the farm community in which they lived. The priest was to talk about the birth of Jesus & some lost customs. She invited her husband to come along, but, of course, he refused, commenting:

*"That whole story is nonsense! Why would God bother to lower Himself to become a 'mere human being?' The whole story's ridiculous!"*

With that, she and the children left for church, while he stayed home. Sometime later that evening, the winds grew stronger and the snow turned into a blizzard. As the man looked out the window, all he saw was a blinding snowstorm. Knowing his wife and children were safe in church by then, he sat down to relax and read a book before the cozy, blazing fireplace. Suddenly, he heard a loud thump. What happened next is best described in his own words:

*"Something had hit a living room window. I looked out, but couldn't see for more than a few feet. But, when the snow let up a little, I went outside to see just what, exactly, had hit the front window and if there were any damage.*

*In the field near the house, I saw a flock of wild geese. Apparently, they had been flying south for the winter when they were caught in this blizzard and couldn't go on. They were lost and stranded here, on my farm, with no food or shelter. They just flapped their wings and flew around the field, in low circles, blindly and aimlessly. Apparently, it was one of them that had flown into the window.*

*I felt sorry for the geese and wanted to help them. The barn would be a great place for them to stay. It was warm and safe; surely, they could wait out the storm there, I thought. So, I walked over to the barn, turned on the light, and opened the doors wide. Then I watched and waited, hoping they would notice the open, barn door and go inside. **BUT** ...the geese just fluttered around aimlessly and didn't seem to notice the barn or to realize what it could mean for them. I tried to get their attention, but I just seemed to scare them, and they moved further away. Exasperated, I went into the house and came back with some bread, broke it up, and made a breadcrumb-trail, leading to the barn. They still didn't catch on.*

*Now, I was getting frustrated. I got behind them and tried to 'shoo' them toward the barn, but they only got more scared --and they scattered in every direction except toward the barn. Nothing I did could get them to go into the barn, where they would be warm and safe.*

*"Why don't they follow me?" I exclaimed out loud. "Can't they see **that** is the only place where they can survive the storm?" I thought for a moment and realized that they just wouldn't follow a **human**. "If only I were a goose, then I could save them," I concluded.*

*Then I had a brilliant idea. I went into barn, got one of my own geese, and carried it in my arms under my coat. I circled around the field and got behind the flock of the wild geese. Then, I released it. My goose flew right through the flock of lost geese and straight into the barn! Then, one-by-one, the other geese followed it to safety. I stood silently for a moment, as the words I had spoken a few minutes earlier 'replayed' in my mind:*

*"If only I were a goose, then I could save them!" Suddenly, I thought about what I had said to my wife only two or so hours earlier:*

**"Why would God want to be a 'mere human being?' The whole story is ridiculous!"**

*Suddenly ...it all made sense. That is what God had done! We were like the geese--blind, lost, perishing in the storm of life. God had His Son become like one of us ...so He could show us the way out of the storm and save us in the process."*

As the winds and blinding snow died down even more, the man's soul became quiet and he pondered his new, wonderful thought. Suddenly he understood why Christ had come. Years of doubt & disbelief vanished with the passing storm. He fell to his knees, there, in the middle of the field, in the snow, & prayed his 1<sup>st</sup> prayer:

**"Thank You, God, for coming in human form to show me the way out of the storm!"**

And this brings me to the practical message of Christmas... of not only how we get **out** of the storm, but also ...how we **get home** from here.

**'How so?'** you ask. Well, **I am glad you asked that question.**

You see:

***"When the song of the angels is stilled, when the star in the sky is gone,  
when the kings and princes are home, and the shepherds are back with the flock,  
then the work of Christmas begins:  
to find the lost, to heal the broken,  
to feed the hungry, to release the political prisoner,  
to rebuild the nation,  
to bring peace among brothers & sisters,  
to forgive, to reconcile... and to make music with the heart!"***

*Merry Christmas, everyone! And... may Almighty God, our Abba, bless you all...  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*