DAY 25

JOHN 1:14

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Nativity sets are usually colorful, artistic, even ornate. The stable is surrounded by shepherds kneeling with lambs, Magi bearing jeweled gifts, archangels pouring forth praise. Mary looks ready to host a party despite just enduring hours of labor pains. Joseph seems more tired, leaning on his staff. It's appropriate for a manger to be magnificent since, as John's Gospel says, this is where we see "his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father."

Yet visitors to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem are often surprised by two features. Jesus' birthplace is marked by a cave beneath the altar and a trough carved in the rock. Though adorned with candles and icons today, the birthplace was anything but glorious on that holy night. Try to sense this unsanitary scene: the aroma of animals, a delivery room so dark and cold you can see your breath. It's here the Word became flesh.

All this is a sign of an even greater sacrifice when the Creator of the universe put on human skin. Jesus willingly accepted our limitations and weaknesses, our temptations, trials, and troubles. For thirty years he lived a poor, simple, anonymous life enduring all that is foul, frail and fragile about our existence. Then, coming full circle, He was wrapped and laid in another cave just up the road in Jerusalem after bearing the crushing weight of all our sin on the cross. Some-

times, when we don't dress up Christmas, when we peer into the darker, painful side of His nativity and life, we see the greater glory of His grace and truth. He came to be among us, to be one of us, to be with us even in the darkest caverns of our world. He came to be the light which the darkness has not overcome. He came to lead us into the light. He came so we would be His light in the world.

His mission is our mission. Celebrate His birth this year by taking a step into someone else's darkness. Offer a listening ear, a helping hand, a comforting presence, an invitation to believe, a generous gift that provides a need. Enter in as He did, quietly, anonymously, humbly.

For that is the other feature that surprises visitors to Bethlehem. The only way to enter the massive Church of the Nativity is through a tiny door so low that all who approach His manger must humbly bow down.

REFLECT

Where in the midst of this Christmas Day do you long to find Jesus most? Look for opportunities today to slow down and worship, to get low and remember the weight and the sacrifice of what it meant for the Word to become flesh.

PRAY

Word of God, please become flesh in each one of us so that, through our words and deeds, those walking in darkness will see Your glory, grace and truth. Help me not to move through today so quickly that I miss the beauty and the mystery of the Incarnation. Let today be full of worship and adoration to you, our King. In the strong name of Jesus, amen.