

“A Reminder” – Pr Jim Sprenge – Advent Midweek 3

December 17, 2025

- I. **1 John 1, Philippians 2, and Matthew 1** – previously read
- II. **People all over the world** decorate for the time leading up to Christmas Day.
 - a. Christmas trees, evergreens, electric lights, light up frames of animals, snowmen, and snowflakes... along with a huge assortment of blow-up displays are in yards everywhere.
 - i. Even non-Christians and secular people love to put up displays for the holiday season.
 - b. However, there is a decoration for this season that is distinctively Christian.
 - i. You might say it is a snapshot of the true story and message of Christmas.... because it is a three-dimensional model known as the crèche, or the nativity scene... which helps us prepare for the coming of Christ.
 - c. I have to admit, I was not aware of the background of the crèche, or that the name crèche is used interchangeably with nativity scene.
 - i. I thought a crèche was pointing only to the manger... but now I know that crèche and nativity scene are basically the same thing to most people.
 - ii. Of course the crèche or nativity scene means much more than all the other lights and decorations to us, because it is whole point of Christmas...
 - 1. The crèche presents the characters involved in the birth of Christ, such as Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the Wise Men, and even the angels and stable animals.
 - 2. Although as a side note, the Wise Men were not at the scene of Jesus' birth, because it they arrived some time afterward.
 - 3. It would be nice if we had a nativity scene outside our church, but when we put one out a couple of years ago, the baby Jesus was stolen on the first night.
 - 4. I see the Catholic church up the street puts their nativity scene behind a fence to keep things safe... I guess the grinch is always out to remove the real reason behind Christmas.
 - 5. But many times, as Christians, we use the crèche as a witness to the community to highlight the real reason for this season.
- III. **As with Christmas trees and lights**, the tradition of the crèche also started in Europe and spread from there throughout the rest of the world.
 - a. The word crèche comes from the Latin word for “nursery”... and the French still use crèche to describe nurseries and childcare.
 - i. In fact, in many European countries, a crèche is what we in America call a daycare center, where babies and kids go while parents work.

- ii. Somewhere along the line, Americans stopped using the word crèche for baby care, and began using it to describe the scene of the most important Baby in all history... what we also call the nativity scene.
- b. Now, many artists in the early Church made nativity scenes in their artwork... but the first time it was done with real people was in Italy with St. Francis of Assisi in the year 1223.
 - i. I guess it was displayed in a cave with people and live animals, and it was so popular that live nativity scenes started popping up in the surrounding areas... and within a hundred years, nearly every church in Italy was holding a live nativity.
 - ii. So, the first manger scenes were not the little models we see on our coffee tables, but they were done with living characters.
 - 1. Over time, plaster or wooden statues were used in place of the live people and animals... that way, the display could be left up much longer.
 - 2. Finally, these statues became small models with little figurines of Mary, Joseph, Jesus, the shepherds, Wise Men, the angels, and the animals.
 - a. These model scenes are especially associated with the word crèche.
- c. By the 1800s, many Christian denominations, including we Lutherans, embraced the use of crèches in our churches.
 - i. Christians also started using them in their homes.... which were made of plaster, wood, wax, paper, porcelain, or plastic, with a miniature stable and a star.

IV. **The crèche is a reminder to us** that Jesus, both God and man, was actually born at a point in history.

- a. The crèche is a visible representation of the characters who were there at the birth of Jesus as we read in the accounts of Matthew 2 and Luke 2.
- b. I assume most all of you played with the little figurines of the nativity scene as they reminded you of Baby Jesus and His birth... I certainly did as a child.
 - i. We see with our eyes and touch with our hands the way that God chose to save us – through the birth of His Son.
 - ii. You might say that God created us with different senses, and the crèche is a way to see and touch something... along with the hearing of His Word... as it connects us to the story of the birth of the Messiah.
 - iii. The crèche is a tangible scene that reminds us that God came into the world in a very tangible way.
 - 1. I know that some people don't get this, but the arrival of our Lord didn't happen as a fairytale or fantasy, but it was a real event.

2. John wrote about this in his first letter, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life . . . that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:1, 3).
3. John is very clear that Jesus is real, based on real encounters.

V. **As with the evergreen trees and the lights that are all around us**, the crèche points us to the first Advent of Christ.

- a. The crèche shows us the lowly place that our Savior was born... the Son of God was born in a stable, likely with animals nearby... and laid in a manger – or a trough for feeding the animals.
 - i. God broke into the world from heaven as a helpless infant... completely dependent on His mother for everything.
 - ii. The little dioramas of the crèche give us a picture... the reality that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).
 - iii. It’s a humble setting that shows the One “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.” (Philippians 2:6-7)
- b. Our salvation came out of an animal stable... talk about a humble place to be born... and yet it continued to the lowly setting of the cross.
 - i. Christ was born for this mission and purpose... to die upon the cross to save us from our sins.
 - ii. The passage from Philippians we read earlier goes on to say that God the Son became a human being in order to die for us: “And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” (Phil. 2:8)
 - iii. Jesus came in humble circumstances to share our humanity and become the Savior of sinners.... and the crèche reminds us of His humble beginnings on earth.

VI. **Do you remember “A Charlie Brown Christmas”?**

- a. I hope so, with how many times it’s been on TV! But Charlie Brown gets so frustrated with all the hype and commercialism of the Christmas season.... he blows up... yelling and asking if anyone knows what Christmas is really about.
 - i. All the kids are shocked that he lost his cool, but Linus says he knows what Christmas is all about and proceeds to tell the story of the birth of Jesus from Luke 2... describing the scene from the nativity.
- b. The crèche shows us what Christmas is all about.
 - i. In a visible, tangible way, the characters and events of Jesus’ birth are shown from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

- ii. So let the decoration of the nativity scene be a reminder for you to celebrate the arrival of the baby... the humble infant who was born to save His people from their sins. Amen.¹

¹ Based on © 2025 Concordia Publishing House, *Every Heart Prepare*, Advent-Christmas series