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St. Gregory of Nazianzus, the great Bishop of Constantinople in 389 AD, writes in his famous Christmas sermon, *Once more the darkness is dispersed, once more the light is created. Let the people that sat in the darkness of ignorance now look upon the light of knowledge. The things of old have passed away: behold, all things are made new. The laws of nature are overthrown, for the upper world must be filled with citizens. He who is without flesh becomes incarnate; the Word puts on a body; the Invisible is seen; He whom no hand can touch is handled; the Timeless has a beginning; the Son of God becomes Son of Man - Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever.*

The Incarnation, the Nativity which we celebrate today is indeed glorious. It is a glory surpassing all of our Christmas decorations and celebrations. And yet it is a strange glory, because in every sense it is a glorious humility that we celebrate. In St. Luke's Gospel we hear that an angel appears to of all people, shepherds nearby, and says to them, *Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord...Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.* You shall find the Savior of the world as a helpless infant, wrapped in strips of ragged linen, and among the livestock in a cave made into a stable. This helpless infant, announced not to the worldly and sophisticated but to the simple blue-collar shepherds in such a state, is what St. John refers to when He writes, *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the Glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.* This is the moment Isaiah prophesied hundreds of years before, *the people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.* This Child born in a barn because no one would make room for Him or His earthly parents in the Inn, is the promised Child. *For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, and The Prince of Peace.* This tiny newborn, born in a stable in the back-water town of Bethlehem is He whom the angels of God worship, it is He of whom it is written, *in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands.*

The Infant who's birth we celebrate today is the Begotten Son of God, who in the courts of heaven knew a glory we cannot begin to imagine, and yet delights Himself in humility. I was struck this past week by a comment a friend made in his sermon for Christmas about how the animals in the manger Jesus was born in must have smelled. And while the Gospels do not give us any details of what animals were kept in the stable Jesus was born in, it stands to reason that any manger, barn, or stable in that time and place would have been used. We get a sense of this from our own family crèche. The typical family crèche traditionally includes animals along with shepherds and their sheep. This is because of a verse from the prophet Isaiah, who writes, *the ox knoweth his owner, and the donkey His master's crib.* This goes to prove that the family Christmas Crèche is not just a decoration, but a reminder of that glorious humility which we celebrate each

Christmas. But even our stylized and dusted crèche is palatial compared to what it likely was like. Traditionally the stable Jesus was born is said to have been dark and damp cave filled with dusty and moldy hay and feed, covered in dirt and grime, and filled with stinking and noisy animals. And as anyone who has ever been near a stable knows, piles of animal waste covered the floor. Our traditional A-frame barn-like stables with nice ceramic animals do not do the scene justice, but who really wants a realistic replica of a barnyard on the mantelpiece?

God came down from Heaven, He humbled Himself and became man for our sakes, was born in a humble stable and used a feeding trough as a crib for our sakes. Jesus came down from heaven to become a real human being, so he could save real human beings like us. He came down into an actual family, a family with a checkered past. He came down into an historically troubled nation which was currently living under the boot of pagan foreign oppressors. He came down to live in a territory that was regarded as the outback of his country, a place populated by those considered ignorant. He came down to be born outdoors in a stable to a woman who was worn out from a long donkey ride. But He came down anyway, and he came down into it all, and He redeemed it all, and He saved it all, just by coming down and becoming part of it all. And that means he can come down into our depressed, stressed out, selfish, disobedient hearts and save and redeem it too, and transform us giving us a new life, new hope, and new joy, and all we have to do is ask Him to come and be born in us.

This is the wondrous Incarnation, the glorious humility of the Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ which we celebrate today. This is the true message of Christmas, therefore as St. Paul has written, *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus: who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Amen.*