

Rejoice! Jesus our Savior is born!

We are free!

Free to worship God without fear!

But what's all the fuss? Don't we take this for granted?

Probably – but what if it isn't so straightforward?

What if we aren't as free as we think we are?

Thankfully, we have not been forced to live in a foreign land nor are we under foreign military occupation, as God's people were for so much of history.

But I do wonder if we are not under a forced occupation of another sort – in lonely exile under difficult circumstances we cannot overthrow.

Can it not be said that in our day, **we are at the mercy of technology, even when it is harmful to us?**

Please don't misunderstand me to be saying that technology is inherently bad or that we should all throw away our devices.

But isn't it an aggravation when our credit card company flags a purchase we didn't make?

Or when the check engine light goes on?

Haven't our lives been invaded by the constant presence and pressure of information – much of which is questionable or downright false?

We have new vocabulary to support this notion – **hacking** for the purpose of stealing or manipulating data;

Trolling to circulate false information in order to influence decisions and actions that have global consequences.

Portions of our internet screens are called **clickbait** – and we are the ones being baited for money and to play our part as puppets in circulating rumors and creating fear.

Suicide has risen with the use of social media,

- which can bully and intimidate
- and create a false image of prosperity and success
- that leads some to despair.

We worry about identity theft and foreign interference in elections.

And even if you don't have a smartphone or use a computer,

- your car probably does,
- your oven,
- your TV, and your camera.

Not to mention your bank, investment company, insurance company, and doctor's office.

Technology has led to both good things and evil things and will continue to do so.

But I think in our day, it is the foreign occupation for humanity from which we cannot escape and which often bids us bow down and worship.

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But tonight, we gather around a different story – a low-tech story in the midst of our high-tech lives.

It's a story about God who creates a universe to love – and within that universe, a people.

It's a story about God who creates for personal relationship

– face-to-face and skin-to-skin relationship.

God loves people so much, he creates us with the freedom to love back – or not.

God's love language is a community at peace –

bound together by mutual respect,

- truth, contentment,
- fidelity, honesty,
- and trust in the One who creates.

But from the time the serpent deceived humanity into breaking trust with God, that community has been unsustainable.

- The freedom to love becomes also freedom to hate.
- Contentment gives way to greed and envy.
- Peace is shattered by violence.
- So-called “truth” is whatever makes one person do what another person wants, regardless of any basis in reality.

But over thousands of years, God has not given up on his love for people.

Over and over, God has spoken to his people through leaders like Abraham, Moses, Deborah, Jeremiah, Isaiah and all the prophets and John the Baptist.

God is always seeking relationship with people – seeking to reinforce his love and to see the image of divine love reflected back to Him.

But the people God loves so much

invariably choose to believe the lies of the serpent

and to live for themselves only, choosing death over life.

So, God decided to overturn the curse of the serpent by going into battle himself.

The curse is reversed when God enters our world in human flesh and blood, Mary's baby --Jesus

- Who lived among us with our trials and tribulations, decay and brokenness,
- took it all into death on the cross
- and rose from the dead to destroy it forever.

The curse of sin and death,

of evil and violence,

of all the destructive forces in our lives

has been broken by Jesus,

the Baby in the manger – the Savior on the cross.

The life he offers will never be outdated, need new batteries, or pocket dial because it is **person to person.**

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Tonight, a miracle happens.

When Baby Jesus smiles on us in Holy Communion,

When our hearts warm to the candlelight and singing the familiar carols,

And even when we are singing through the tears of grief or depression,

It is God's gracious love we receive here.

- Love that doesn't care about our Facebook or Instagram profiles,
 - But only our relationship with Jesus and other people
- Love that knows what we post, what we read, what we click on
 - And shines into the darkest corners of our souls with forgiveness,
 - inviting us to come into the light of God's truth.
- Love that knows our struggles with mental illness, addiction, bad habits, and willful rebellion
 - And with tender mercy, takes our hand and leads us into relationship with this Baby Jesus
 - And he gives us his healing touch and the power to change.

At the manger – as at the cross – we don't have to pretend we are somebody we are not.

We don't have to impress anyone – least of all God.

We don't have to be perfect or even okay–

We simply come – just as we are – and adore this Baby Jesus

– who is God – our loving Creator – in our lives.

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And here's some more good news:

After the internet is completely broken and all technology has failed,

Jesus remains – his Word remains – his Love for you never fails.

- O Holy Child of Bethlehem descend to us, we pray.
- Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today.
- We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell.
- O come to us, abide with us, our Lord, Emmanuel.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ncVD3EzxxJE>