

Friends in Christ, grace, mercy and peace from Emmanuel, Christ the Lord.

**At this darkest time of the year, with northern climes most distant from the sun; we lift our voices together and cry: O COME, O COME EMMANUEL!**

**And the wonder of this night is that God hears our cry—and answers:  
Fear not, for I am with you; and this will be a sign for you:**

**You will find a babe, wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.**

**IT'S SUCH A SMALL SIGN. CAN IT BE ENOUGH?**

**One of my favorite Dr. Seuss books is HORTON HEARS A WHO.  
Remember the story?**

Horton the Elephant, while splashing in a pool in the Jungle of Nool, hears a tiny voice on a speck of dust call to him. And he discovers that this speck of dust is the home of not just one tiny person but a whole planet full of tiny people—the Whos of Whoville.

Vowing to protect their world, Horton places it on a piece of clover and starts telling his jungle friends about his discovery. But they don't believe him. They think he's nuts.

**So they make it their aim to destroy Horton's illusion and the bit of clover with it.**

As the story goes on, Horton takes heroic steps, enduring all manner of trials, to protect Whoville and to convince the others that "a person's a person no matter how small."

In the end, to prove their existence, the WHOS of WHOVILLE combine every voice and instrument of every citizen, to produce just enough sound to—FINALLY—be heard.

With their ears and minds finally opened, Horton's jungle mates vow to join him in protecting the tiny, fragile community...

*"From sun in the summer. From rain when it's fall-ish,  
[We're] going to protect them. No matter how small-ish!"*

**The sign we're given this Christmas night seems so small compared with the world's need: a babe, wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger...**

**A sign so easy to overlook; so easy to dismiss.**

**We yearn for greater signs than what the shepherds were given, for revelations grand enough to match the intensity of the catastrophes—both natural and humanmade—that brutalize our world...**

**But God chose a different way.**

“Go to the crib,” declares Mother Theresa, “and see how small he became, how he lived that total surrender to the full.”

**Tonight we learn once and for all that God’s ways of transforming the world are not overt or coercive, but subtle, humble, and surprising in their vulnerability.**

If I had been God, says Brother Martin, I wouldn’t have done it that way. I would have just called in the devil and twisted his nose and said, “let my people go!”

But God is amazing. He sends a little baby, weak as an earth worm, lying in a donkey’s feedbox. And that little baby... overcomes all the power of hell and sin and death.

**If 2020 was a year in which presumptions of in-vulnerability at every level were swept away, 2021 has only solidified that position.**

From our nation’s ongoing racial reconning, to the accelerated pace of climate change and its effects, to assaults on democracy itself—and now a THIRD WAVE of COVID—we have felt the cracks in our worldviews widen and our deafness deepen.

**Left to our own devices, the salvation, healing, and wholeness we need—we long for—cannot happen!**

**We must look elsewhere for it.**

**And tonight, the shepherds lead the way as they go, with haste, to find Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.**

**Whatever motivations brought you here this night, consider this one too:**

That you and I have come because we know—or at least sense—that the sign given to the shepherds is meant for us as well;

and that the quest for wholeness and peace for ourselves, our families, and world, must begin here, at this manger.

**WHY THIS NIGHT?**

**Because this is where God has promised to meet us—and does—in Jesus. Amen.**