



South Dakota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Bishop Constanze Hagmaier's 2025 Christmas Message

Dear South Dakota Synod,

Most years, I stand at the edge of Christmas like a skeptic. Not because I doubt God; it's more that I wrestle with what this season has become.

Decorative religion and a perfectly staged nativity feel hollow to me. I sense the sighs, too deep for words, of people white-knuckling through their lives, holding on by a thread.

And all I want for Christmas then is a God who looks at the world and says, "I'm going in."

That's precisely what John offers us, no manger, no angels, no pageantry, just the frank announcement that God steps into the world as it is, not as we pretend it to be.

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

John names the darkness. It's real.



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But God refuses to let the darkness overcome life and sends the one God loved into the creation he loves even more so that the light outshines the darkness.

Martin Luther, in one of his Christmas sermons, put it this way:

"Christus geht in unsere Finsternis ein, nicht daß er schrecke, sondern daß er erleuchte, tröste und selig mache."

Or, in English:

"Christ enters into our darkness, not to terrify but to enlighten, to comfort, to save."

Christ becomes flesh in the wounded places, in the complicated places, in the spaces where the hymnals go quiet, and honesty has room to breathe.

He doesn't come to decorate our faith.

He comes to disrupt it, to move us from comfort to courage, from polite distance to embodied mercy, from sentiment to the kind of compassion that costs something.



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So, if this season feels heavy to you, you're not behind. You're not doing Christmas wrong. You may be closer to the truth than you realize.

God did not choose the perfect silent night; quite the contrary, God chose *our* discombobulated complex darknesses.

This Christmas, I pray that you find the Christ child's light piercing through your darkest of times to illuminate you with hope and good courage.

Merry Christmas.

The Word became flesh, right here, in the world we actually live in.