

Christmas Eve 2021

This is no way to treat a tiny little baby!

You may think I mean the birth out in a barn, unsanitary conditions, neglected of any care or concern by society, not to mention putting the little tyke smack dab in the feedbox, right in line for a hungry donkey inadvertently to nip off some of his toes.

Sure, that's no way to treat a tiny baby, not to mention no way to treat God Almighty who has arrived to put on human flesh.

But I'm actually thinking of a prayer in funeral services that starts like this: "Give courage and faith to all who mourn, and a sure and certain hope in your loving care—" Now, if that prayer is to Jesus, it may seem silly we could even conceive of having sure and certain hope in a baby's loving care; we tend to figure care is what a baby should be confident to receive from her parents, not what parents (much less strangers) should expect from the baby!

The prayer continues: "that, casting all their sorrow on you, they may have strength for the days ahead." That's been on my mind throughout the season of Advent this year and leading toward this celebration of Christmas and the birth of Jesus. "Casting all their sorrow on you." That really seems like no way to treat a baby.

Just the reverse, we usually act nice and bring something to show tender affection, baby shower gifts for any baby, especially this one. Even wise guys show up eventually with gold and frankincense and myrrh. We think we should at least greet the baby with oohs and ahs, maybe some praise this evening, a cradling embrace and kind regards.

But the "casting all our sorrow" prayer is more like greeting the new arrival by unloading a wheelbarrow full of barnyard dumpings. Hey baby Jesus! Welcome to the world! We've been waiting for you. See, baby Jesus, we've been dealing with a lot these days. Besides my personal details and struggles and griefs, I have to say that most of the news seems to be of the bad variety. Oh! And my oh my omicron, there's a pandemic on, and it's

been pretty rough, not least that some of us haven't seen friends and family for a couple years now. So that's fun, baby Jesus. Anyway, I could go on, but I know you were just born and all, and maybe need to nurse or nap or something. Still, I've got more sorrows to cast on you, so I'll just hang around a while. You can take it.

Of course, that seems rude, if not pointless—venting to an infant. It's no way to treat a tiny little baby.

But this is exactly why this baby came, why God comes into our midst, why Jesus was born, even at this start of his life. It's not about our praise or worship or being nice to him but the good news of his saving. He came to exchange all the wrongs and set things right, to exchange oppression for freedom, exchange emptiness for meaning, exchange even death for life, to exchange certainly your sadness for joy and celebration. So, indeed, cast all your sorrow on Jesus in strength for the days ahead.

I'm not sure how you might practice that, what your prayer and unloading may look like, the mechanics of your casting, how you build the trust you can hand it over and find relief and more. But doing it is worthwhile, since you have this amazing promise.

You said it yourself: "All out of darkness we have light, which made the angels sing this night. When sin departs before his face, then life and health come in its place. Then why should we on earth be sad since our redeemer made us glad? Then why on earth should we be sad since our redeemer made us glad?" (ELW 274)