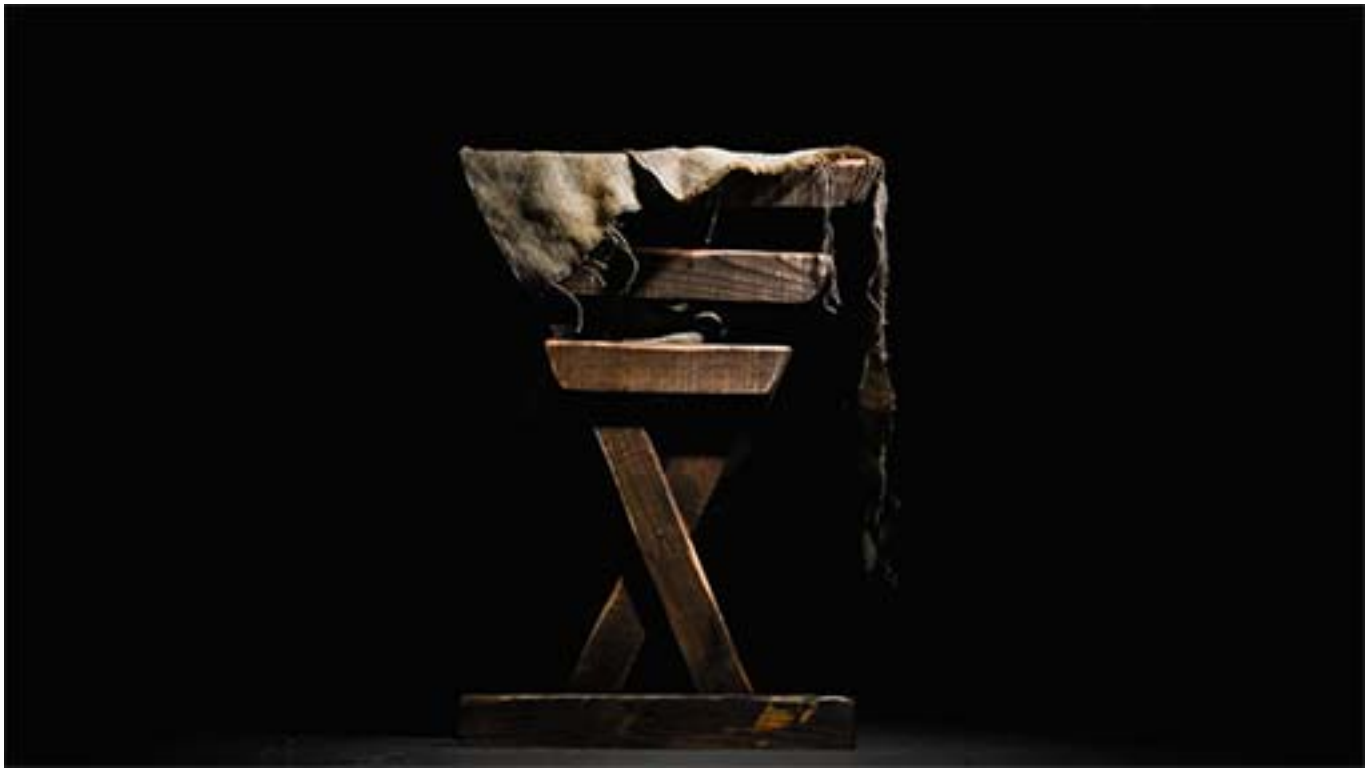


Our ordinary experience of God, if I can use that term, is one of distance, a distance which seems to belong to the nature of things. God is God, after all, the one beyond whom it is impossible to conceive of anything greater - and we are who we are with all our human limitations. But it is also a distance that we ourselves create by our sin, by all the sad ways we turn away from God.

The deep joy of Christmas is that this distance, in both of its forms, which we feel down to the very marrow of our bones and which largely accounts for the distance we experience in our relationships with one another, has been bridged in a most wonderful and surprising way. This is what accounts for the joy and warmth of Christmas: God is both **for us** and **with us** in ways that are utterly astounding.

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