

Preacher: Because this is a university, most of the time people are here busy, growing up, becoming adults, becoming mature, big, but not tonight. Tonight this Holy Night, Christmas Eve, everyone feels young. Tonight everyone is given the ability to see the world again through five-year-old eyes. Tonight we come together over something so small and fragile and wondrous as a baby. Tonight surrounded by cyclotrons and millions of books in the library, and lasers and macroeconomics and hyperbaric chambers, this whole great big university world telescopes on the chapel. To focus everything in one moment on a small vulnerable baby, named Jesus. Emmanuel. God with us. Don't you find it interesting that when the great magnificent Lord of the universe, the one who hung the stars, who set the planets whirling in their courses, that when this great big God chose to come among us, as our scripture tonight has reminded us, He choose to come among us, something so small and vulnerable as a baby. And when that baby grew up, as Jesus told His disciples, you cannot get into my Kingdom, unless you turn and become as a little child. Here is a strange Kingdom, with a very small door. You can't get in, Jesus says, if you're all grown up and adult. You cannot get in unless you can revert, unless you can turn and become as a little child. And that's good news, tonight, because this night has a way of making children of us all. We turn, we return, we revert and become as little children. That's rather amazing feat, here at a great big, all grown up university. Now I tell those of you who are young, that as you grow older, you are gonna find, most of you, that your vision gets worse. The day I became 40, I noticed I couldn't see things quite so clearly. I thought it was sort of a psychological reaction. I went to Doctor Mitchell, over at the Eye Center, and he says no, this is, we call a geriatric, in other words, your muscles are getting weak in your eyes. Your eye is getting rigid. It can no longer focus. You need glasses. That's what happens to you, when you get all grown up. Sometimes you just can't see, as well as you could see when you were young. The older we become, the less our eyes are able to focus on the small and the wondrous and the delicate. Remember those of you who are older, remember the first time you ever looked through a microscope and that sense of awe at that world which awaited you. Remember the first time you ever saw a circus or a Christmas parade. As we grow up, our eyes become dull, vision is lost and some of the edge dulls of our sense of wonder. But not tonight. Tonight everybody gets to look at the world through five-year-old eyes. Tonight we all at last, become obedient to Jesus's invitation to turn, to turn and become as little children and there by to enter His Kingdom of the small door. At the heart of this university is the belief that the only way to get smart, the only way to become wise is to grow up, to become adult and mature and big and independent and liberated and self-sufficient. At the heart of the Christian faith is the story that the only way to get wise is to become small, to turn, to return to vulnerability, the openness, the naivety of childhood, in short, to revert. As the babe at Bethlehem so often has a way of reminding us, none of us are as big and grown up and independent, and liberated and self-sufficient, as we like to think. We're all much more needy, dependent, small, vulnerable, than we admit, on the day of our graduation. We are children. Some anonymous author said it well, only half I think in humor. "Life is tough. "It takes almost all of your time. "All of your weekends. "And what do you get in the end of it? "A watch, a pat on the back from the boss? "I think that the life cycle is all backward. "You should have to die first, "get that unpleasantness out of the way, "and then you should live 20 years in an old age home. "You get kicked out "when you are to young to be there any more. "You get a gold watch and then you go to work. "You work for 40 years "until

you're young enough to enjoy your retirement. "So you go to collage. "You party until you are ready now for high school. (laughter) "You go to grade school. You do nothing but play. "You become a little kid. You have no responsibilities. "Then you become a little baby. You go back into the womb. "You spend your last nine months floating "and you finish up as a gleam in somebody's eye." (laughter) For me the highlight of this service, during this Christmas Eve communion, is when we are all singing and at some point in the communion, there comes that point when we're singing maybe, "Away in a Manger" and for the first time in the evening, you can hear the children's voices over the adult voices. That's a special moment. Now there are probably musically better, more sophisticated hymns sung in this chapel, but at that moment there is nothing more right about the fact that we should be here and that the children should be leading us in this song. It's wonderful. And how appropriate that that should be sung at the moment when all of us are coming forward with our hands open and empty, ready to receive the body and blood of Christ. Ready to be fed, needy, dependent, just like little children, we have turned, we have returned, we have become as a child. And that basic childlike, open, receptive posture, Jesus says, is the only way you can get into His Kingdom. I used to teach Worship over at the Divinity School and while we were studying the theology of holy communion, the Eucharist, someone would always say, "Now how old should children be, before they are allowed to come to communion?" "Don't you think that they, they ought to be old enough?" "They ought to wait until they know what it really means." Fortunately I learned to answer, the body and blood of Jesus, should be served only to the young, because you can just never be too small to know what all this really means. Tonight, tonight, this Holy Night, little ones, even the most disastrously adult of us, has the good sense to know, here, this is what it really means. Amen.