Recently, I received an e-mail about real signs found in the real kitchens of real people.

“A messy kitchen is a happy kitchen and this kitchen is delirious.”

“A clean house is a sign of a misspent life.”

“If we are what we eat, then I’m easy, fast, and cheap.”

“Thou shalt not weigh more than thy refrigerator.”

“My next house will have no kitchen, just vending machines.”

“A balanced diet is a cookie in each hand.”

These sayings point to some of our society’s attitudes about food: ‘only junk food is enjoyable’, ‘food is meant to satisfy us’, ‘if I had to cook it, it doesn’t taste good’, and ‘as long as it’s not good for me, I should eat as much as I want’.

We stuff ourselves, trying to fill the hole inside of us with food, as if we could eat something that would satisfy us. But we could stuff ourselves at every meal and still be hungry for something deeper!

Jesus became Incarnate, was born, died and rose again to provide us with something deeper. Jesus was born in a manger – a feeding trough for animals. Mangers, typically either of stone or masonry, were a common fixture in Palestinian homes and also in caves. It is very likely that the manger mentioned in Luke’s Gospel actually was found in a cave stable that was an ancillary building to a private home. Jesus, born in this feeding trough, becomes for us the bread of life – the spiritual nourishment that fills us completely as it brings us closer to God, as it strengthens us, as it saves us. Just as the manna from heaven supplied the physical needs of the Israelites as they journeyed in the wilderness, Jesus will supply the spiritual needs for us as we journey through life – with its times of clarity and times of wilderness.

Kimberly Bracken Long, assistant professor of worship and coordinator of worship resources for congregations, at Columbia Theological Seminary writes, “That the shepherds greet God incarnate not only in a barn but in the animals’ trough – points us to the Table. This baby resting in a manger on the night of his birth will be the bread of God which comes down from heaven and gives light to the life to the world, the very bread of life. Each time the community gathers around the Table it remembers this mystery; that though it is beyond our comprehension, God took on human form, lived among us, suffered for us, died and was raised, that we might know true life, in this world and the next.”

We celebrate this night as holy because it represents the night of Jesus’s birth. And Jesus, God Incarnate, was Lord at His birth. But, this mystery reaches beyond even what Luke tells us in this account.

The birth of Jesus is an inbreaking of the holy, as is his presence with us at the Table and his presence among us and within us every day. Jesus sustains us with the spiritual food of His body and blood. That spiritual food nourishes and provides us with all we need. Because of the sacrifices Jesus made for us out of his love for us – the first by leaving His glory in Heaven to become one of us and the second by dying and rising again so that we could be reconciled to God and each other – we are worthy to come to the Table. We are worthy to stand amid that holiness, to eat and to drink until we are full. Jesus, the Bread of Life, fills that hole in us. Jesus alone completely satisfies. Jesus alone provides what we need in our journey through life.

How appropriate it is that on this holy night, when Jesus was born in a feeding trough, that we celebrate at the Lord’s Table. Because through that celebration we remember that Christ who became one of us now joins us each time we come to the table, providing the nourishment we need to be His body in the world.