

The Blessing of Home

Come Home for Christmas: Part 4 “The Blessing of Home”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – December 19, 2021

4th Sunday of Advent

Readings: Micah 5:2-5a; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-45

Reflection: Luke 1:46b-55

Greeting: Glory to God in the highest. And on earth peace, good will toward men! (*Luke 2:14*)

Prayer: O God everlasting, the prophets spoke your word so the path to your salvation could be made known with the message of repentance. Be with us this day and prepare our hearts to receive your love. Strengthen us in faith that we may celebrate the birth of our Savior. Warm our hearts to welcome our Emmanuel, God with us. Let your hope, peace, joy, and love be the light that guide us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Luke 1:46b-55

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.” (Luke 1:46b-55 NRSV)*

We read the words of Mary from Luke and hear of God’s love. Mary expounds upon God showing love to those in need. That God gives justice and help while bringing the powerful down. In this season of Advent, do you celebrate God’s love for you? Do you see Christ’s active presence in your life? How do you show love to others in this season? Does the Christmas story speak of love for you? How can we come together in love to celebrate God with us? How can we come together to share the light?

Prayer: In this season of preparation, we praise your constant presence in our lives, O Lord. Help us to celebrate the love that you show to all people. Help us to recognize our home with you and may we treat each other as family at your table. May we find hope as we follow our Risen Savior, born into this world to make us free. We raise up our prayers to you this day that you may comfort, guide, and lead us into the light of your love. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from Micah chapter 5 verses 2 through 5a.

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace. (Micah 5:2-5a NRSV)*

Our next reading for today comes from Hebrews chapter 10 verses 5 through 10.

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, 'See, God, I have come to do your will, O God' (in the scroll of the book it is written of me)." When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), then he added, "See, I have come to do your will." He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. And it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Hebrews 10:5-10 NRSV)*

Our last reading for today comes from Luke chapter 1 verses 39 through 45.

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." (Luke 1:39-45 NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This final Sunday of Advent is the Sunday of love. And in it we speak of the blessing that we have, the blessing of home. Our readings highlight the unexpectedness of how love comes about, how these blessings reach us. And they reminded me of the Christmas classic "It's a Wonderful Life." And they reminded me of it because in the movie we have a man who thinks that he isn't of importance, that people would be better off without him in their lives. Things would be better if he had never existed. And he's shown how wrong he is. The difference that one person can make. I first thought of it because of our reading today from the prophet Micah. Because Micah begins by talking about Bethlehem, one of the little clans of Judah. And even though Bethlehem is small, even though Bethlehem might be overlooked and

forgotten, Bethlehem matters. Because love will come from Bethlehem, the one of peace comes from Bethlehem. And we hear an echo of this unexpectedness in Hebrews. The unexpectedness of how this love would take place and take form. That it's not sacrifices and offerings that God wants, not the traditions of old, but simply to do God's will. Through God's will we have been sanctified through Jesus Christ once for all, through love. That we are blessed by that new covenant, that new relationship with God. And maybe we get the greatest echo of that same idea that we get in "It's a Wonderful Life," of the difference that one person makes, in our reading from the Gospel of Luke. Mary goes to see Elizabeth and Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit. She knows how blessed Mary is.

Now Elizabeth has a lot to already feel blessed about. Elizabeth being barren and in her old age is blessed with a child and it's that child that leaps in joy when Mary comes around. Love overflowing, knowing what comes from Mary. And who is Mary? Just a woman, young enough that we might call her a girl. But she believed what the Lord said. She believed in the message that God had given her. As we heard earlier, in her own words in our reflection for today. "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed." She sings of the glory of the Lord and what has been done and what is being done through her, of all people, through her.

One of the other things that this reminded me of about "It's a Wonderful Life" is that it isn't just the story of what one man does. But it's the story of a way that one man changes those around him and changes things for the better. That because he's there, the lives of those around him are changed for the better. And really, that's the blessing of Christmas. That we are blessed with God's love to know that we have a home where we belong. That we have a place we can call home. A place of hope, of peace, of joy, of love. But it also began to make me think about something else about that blessing of love. Because Christmas is also about the way that God works through those things we don't expect. The people wouldn't expect Elizabeth to become pregnant and give birth to John the Baptist. They wouldn't expect John the Baptist to be the one who would call out to make a path for the Lord and make it straight. They wouldn't expect John to baptize the Savior. They wouldn't expect the Savior to be born of this young woman, virtually a nobody. They didn't expect him to come from Galilee. It had to be looked up by Herod in order to know that a king was to be born in Bethlehem, this little town.

I started to think about all these things, and it made me think about another way in which we are blessed. Because we are blessed with the knowledge that because God works in unpredictable ways, in unexpected ways, that we too are part of that blessing. And we too may be instruments of love. Sometimes I think we get so caught up in the story, that Christmas only becomes a story. It's a story that we tell over and over about a child born and laying in a manger. That shepherds come and proclaim who he is. Wisemen bring gifts and angel sing. And that becomes Christmas. But Advent reminds us that Christmas is something more. Because the birth of our Emmanuel, our God with us, is just that: God with us. Never to be

removed, never to be away, never to have that presence gone, but always with us. A presence that, in love, suffers and dies. A presence that rises again to conquer death. A presence that loves us each and every day, each and every one of us, that blesses us to know that we are loved. And to me that's part of the miracle of Christmas. Not a story about a birth in a faraway place, but a story about love here and now. A story of love that overcomes all hate. A story of love that gives us hope, even when things seem desperate. A love that allows us to experience peace, even when sometimes it feels like there's no peace to be found, because that love gives peace to our hearts. A love that allows us to find joy wherever we are and wherever we go because God is with us. Because God is ours and we are his. Because no matter how unimportant we may feel, no matter how much we may think we don't matter, that's not what God sees. That's the blessing of Christmas. The message that love is here for all.

So, as we prepare our hearts on this last Sunday of Advent, knowing that Christmas is almost here, let us know the blessing of home. That we have a place where we belong, where we are loved. And let us share that message. That Christ was born that we may know love. Not that we are called to give sacrifices and to always follow prescribed procedures, but to know that we are blessed that God simply wants us as we are to turn from our folly and to follow him in love. That we accept his blessing so that we may walk secure. Secure in that love, knowing that we are loved beyond this life to the next. That we are loved beyond anything we could ever have hoped for. We are given a love that lets us share peace and live in peace. That love gives us hope. Not just that tomorrow may be a better day but hope that because of Christ's love that we are part of all of it. That we matter. That we have a part to play. That we have a role in the kingdom because we have a friend in our Savior. So, we prepare our hearts for the birth of that Savior, born to set us free, born that we may love, so that we may welcome all to the table. So that we know when it's time to come home. So that we don't have a fear of home, but we know the joy and the blessing of the home that we have because we celebrate the birth of love into our hearts. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: O Lord, the God who saw fit to walk with us, we thank you that you judge us not by the perfection of our actions. We know that we fall short, both in what we do and what we fail to do. Help us, as individuals and as a congregation, to trust you and follow where you lead. Help us to proclaim the Good News and to live it. Help us in our weakness and forgive us. May we remember your love and redemption are forever with us, born to call us home. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Come Home for Christmas

Our Advent/Christmas series is *Come Home for Christmas*. Advent is an invitation to celebrate Christ coming into the world, a reminder that God is with us. We celebrate the longing for God's kin-dom, the true home in God we hope for. The invitation for all is this: Come home for Christmas.

November 28th – *Time to Go Home* – Jeremiah 33:14-16; 1 Thess. 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36

December 5th – *The Fear of Home* – Malachi 3:1-4; Philippians 1:3-11; Luke 3:1-6

December 12th – *The Joy of Home* – Zephaniah 3:14-20; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18

December 19th – *The Blessing of Home* – Micah 5:2-5a; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-45

December 24th – *Welcome Home* – Isaiah 9:2-7; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-20

December 26th – *Lost at Home* – 1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26; Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 2:41-52

January 2nd – *The Light of Home* – Jeremiah 31:7-14; Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1:-18

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Angie Veach	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Nancy Hoke	Don Wells
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Annie McMorris
Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gable	Sage Martin
Dalton McFarland	Darrell Quick	Ruth Ann Finley	Sandy Starwalt
Jodie Bunch	Gene Laymon	Tom Finley	Family of Jim Nichols
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd
Leo Smith	Bonnie Hite	Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer
Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	Sue & Bob Smyser

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