

Welcome Home

Come Home for Christmas: Part 5 “Welcome Home”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – December 24, 2021

Christmas Eve

Readings: Isaiah 9:2-7; Isaiah 11:1-4a,6-9; Luke 2:1-20

Reflection: Psalm 96

Greeting: In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and made his home among us. We have seen his glory, full of grace and truth. (*John 1*)

Prayer: God, you welcome us into your light in this happy season when we celebrate the birth of your holy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Be with us this night that we may be filled with his Spirit, that we may joyfully join together at your table. Help us to unite in love as we sing your praises and remember all you have done for us. May you bless us with hope, peace, joy, and love in this Christmas celebration. Through Jesus, our Emmanuel, we know we are welcomed home. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 96

O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples. For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be revered above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Honor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts. Worship the Lord in holy splendor; tremble before him, all the earth. Say among the nations, “The Lord is king! The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved. He will judge the peoples with equity.” Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord; for he is coming, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth. (Psalm 96 NRSV)*

We reflect today on the great joy that comes from the birth of our Savior. How will you share that joy with others? How will you bring the light to those around you? Does the Christmas story inspire love in your heart? How can we come together in love to celebrate God with us? How can we come together to share the light? What is Christmas to you?

Prayer: May we know your blessing Lord, blessings of peace and goodwill. Help us to sing of your great love. Let us remember our salvation, born to us this Christmas Day. May we carry that love with us in our hearts always. Hear our prayers and let there be joy wherever the story is told. May we always remember your love is there for us. 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 Isaiah chapter 9 verses 2 through 7.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. (Isaiah 9:2-7 NRSV)*

Our next reading for today comes from Isaiah chapter 11 verses 1 through 4a and 6 through 9.

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:1-4a,6-9 NRSV)*

Our last reading for today comes from Luke chapter 2 verses 1 through 20.

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were

there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. (Luke 2:1-20 NRSV)*

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

And here we are, once again on this Christmas Eve, celebrating the birth of our Savior. Sometimes it's hard to think about what to say on a night like this. You might think of trying to come up with something that people have never heard before. Telling the story in a way that makes it new and fresh. Trying something bold and different. I thought about all of those things, but I think there's a comfort in this story. The comfort that comes from it being a story that's well known. A story dear to our hearts. A story of love coming to us in the form of a child, swaddled up and lain in the manger. There's something beautiful in its simplicity. Maybe it doesn't need something new and something flashy. Maybe it doesn't have to be reworked to give us brand new ideas. But maybe it's the old, old story that rekindles hope in our hearts. It's the well-known tale that lets us sit and listen in peace. It's those tidings of comfort and joy that give us cause to celebrate. Because it is a story of love. I think it's because it's familiar, because we may know it by heart, that it always speaks a new to us anyway. Because no matter how old the story may be, it never gets old. Because there's something in it that always brings a smile. That those who have walked in darkness discover light. That the Prince of Peace comes to walk among us. Because it is a story of goodness. It's a story of the everyday, a mother gives birth to a child.

But that child is our Emmanuel, God with us. And I keep coming back to that idea of God with us because, for me, that's what Christmas is. The recognition of God's great love. A love for you and me. The Word become flesh, to make his home with us. And that alone gives me joy. I like to think of those shepherds coming from their watch in the night to come see this great and wondrous thing. And they come and they find a baby. Not a strong and powerful warrior. Not a commanding presence. Not a royal celebration. But a newborn child, held in his

mother's arms. And it makes me wonder if they could feel it. The peace and the joy, the hope the love, all of it right there in that little bundle. Did they treasure all of those things the way that Mary treasured their words? I hope so. Because that's the feeling that swells up in me when I hear this story. The story of a savior born in the city of David, that little town of Bethlehem.

We sing the songs. We watch the movies. We bake the cookies. We make Christmas treats. We wrap gifts. We mail cards. We decorate the tree. We do all of the things that bring us comfort. All of the things that remind us that it's Christmas. So, take comfort in the old, old story. Listen to it and tell it in all of its simplicity and all of its happiness. The story of how God loved humanity so much that he brought his Son into the world to give us a message of love and hope. A message of good tidings. Good news for the weak and the weary, good news for the poor and the hungry, good news for the downtrodden and the hopeless, good news for you and for me. The light will never be extinguished. The love is everlasting. The joy is always ours. Because God is with us. Because God made his home among us and in doing so welcomed us home. So, on this night I say to you: merry Christmas and welcome home. 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; Isaiah 11:1-4a,6-9; 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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