

Come, Let Us Adore Him: Home

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael –December 29 2024

1st Sunday after Christmas

Readings: 1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26; Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 2:41-52 NRSVue

Reflection: Psalm 148

Greeting: Jesus declared that a home is prepared for us in the house of his Father. Christ is the way, the truth, and the light. All come to the Father through him. Whoever loves Jesus will keep his word, and because he lives you too will live. Jesus said: “My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.” (John 14)

Prayer: O God our Father, you have brought us again to the glad season when we celebrate and give thanks for the birth of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Grant that his Spirit may be born anew in our hearts this day. Open our ears that we may hear again the angelic chorus of old. Open our lips that we, too, may sing with uplifted hearts. Open our eyes that we may see your true light. May we celebrate our Emmanuel, our God with us, as we celebrate the miracle of Christ’s birth. Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace. Let there be goodwill to all as we celebrate Christmas. Help us as we reflect on the Preparations and the Passion of Advent so that we might embrace the Presence and Promise of the Christ who comes. May you bring us together to worship in Joy, remembering the comfort of Home as we prepare to look Ahead. Come, let us adore him, Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 148

⁷ Praise the Lord from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps, ⁸ fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command! ⁹ Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! ¹⁰ Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds! ¹¹ Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth! ¹² Young men and women alike, old and young together! ¹³ Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven. ¹⁴ He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his faithful, for the people of Israel who are close to him. Praise the Lord! (Psalm 148:7-14 NRSVue)*

We read the words of Psalm 148, and we hear of praising God. That we know that we should be thankful for having a place we belong with the Lord. That we will always have a home in the presence of the Almighty. What is it you are praying about as we reflect on the birth of our Savior? Who can you lift up in your prayers this week? How will you be reflecting on home during this Christmas season? How is it that you will come to celebrate the birth of our Savior this year? How will you carry that feeling with you in the new year?

Prayer: Eternal God, we praise you for your presence with us. You sent your light into the world to dispel the darkness. We pray you will help us to remember home as we remember the birth of Jesus Christ, our true light. We thank you for your many blessings in this Christmas season. We seek you in our prayers this day. We lift up our many joys that we may celebrate with you. We lift up our sorrows that you may wipe away our tears. We lift up both the prayers we have spoken aloud together and the silent pleadings that we hold in our hearts. For we know that you are never far from us and that you hear every prayer we raise to you. May we know your presence in our celebrations and our sorrows, in both laughter and tears. May we remember that you are always with us. May you grant us hope, peace, joy, and love as we celebrate a child born and laid in a manger. May our hearts be overflowing with your steadfast love and faithfulness all the days of our lives. And it is in Jesus' name we pray. 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 Updated Edition. Our first reading is from 1 Samuel chapter 2, verses 18 through 20 and 26.

¹⁸ Samuel was ministering before the Lord, a boy wearing a linen ephod. ¹⁹ His mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. ²⁰ Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife and say, "May the Lord repay you with children by this woman for the loan that she made to the Lord," and then they would return to their home. ²⁶ Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and with the people.
(1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26 NRSVue*)

Our next reading is from Colossians chapter 3, verse 12 through 17.

¹² Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³ Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.
(Colossians 3:12-17 NRSVue*)

Our final reading is from Luke chapter 2, verse 41 through 52.

⁴¹ Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. ⁴² And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. ⁴³ When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents were unaware of this. ⁴⁴ Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵ When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸ When his parents saw him they were astonished, and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously looking for you." ⁴⁹ He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he said to them. ⁵¹ Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them, and his mother treasured all these things in her heart. ⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years and in divine and human favor. (Luke 2:41-52 NRSVue)*

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

This Sunday marks the first Sunday after Christmas, and it marks that we are close to the end of our Advent and Christmas series. We talked about the preparations that we make during Advent, the passion that we have for the birth of our Savior, the presence that we have with each other, and the promise that we recognize on Christmas. We have celebrated the joy of the birth of our Savior, and today we think of home. Home can mean many things to us. A return to normal is one of them. A return to the way things usually are. This may be relevant to those that traveled during the holidays. That it also relates to all of us with the way that things are very different during Christmas. Our decorations around the house change, our schedules change, we do extra shopping, extra baking, all sorts of things. We change the music we listen to, the movies that we watch, and as we head into the new year, we start to shift back to the usual. But a question arises, do we return home unchanged? And that's something that we explore in our readings today.

I wanted to start with Colossians because Colossians is the only one that doesn't have people returning home. Colossians is almost more of the way that we should be thinking about our return home, because we should return home changed by Christmas. Because we should be altered when we think about the birth of our Savior, our Emmanuel. And in Colossians, we hear about the ways that we should treat each other, and the things we should remember. Because we are called to be kind and compassionate, and to live our lives in Christ in a way that honors Christ. One of the things that we can do is to clothe ourselves in love, because it brings us together in Christ. For me, thinking about the love of home was one way to think about all of this, because there's often this idea of returning home as part of Christmas. That we can think about those who have traveled a long way from home and the fact that Christmas may be one of the only times they return to their childhood home. It may be one of the few times they return to where they grew up. It may be the only time that we get to spend with

family that you don't see very often. But Christmas is a time where we prepare ourselves for how we want to live out the rest of our year, that Advent and Christmas are the beginning of our Christian year. And as we shift into a new year, we have to ask ourselves how we want this year to go. And this idea of making sure that we love and forgive each other, I think is a good way for us to think about home. Because we have to think about how it is we want to behave for the next year. I think wanting to live out a life in Christ of love is a good thing for us to do.

Now, in our other readings, we do hear about change and about people returning home changed. In 1 Samuel, we hear about Samuel, and we hear about Samuel's mother and father. See, his mother makes a little robe for him because he is serving as an assistant to the priest Eli. He does not live at home with his family. His home is with Eli now. But every year his parents journey, and part of that journey is to see him and give him his new robe. And Eli blesses them, and after they are blessed, they return to their home. And I kind of think that they would return home changed every year. I could see parallels to Christmas in this story as well. Every year a family gathers up their things, and they travel, and they visit, and they bring gifts. They celebrate this once a year, giving their child a gift, and then they are blessed, and they head home, moved by what they have seen. And they return home waiting for next year to bring a gift to a child. But I don't think they would return home without being changed by seeing him, seeing how he has grown. Because the boy Samuel continues to grow physically and mentally with the people around him and with God. Every year they would see how he has grown and how he has changed. And every year they could be thankful that the Lord has taken care of Samuel, and the Lord has taken care of them. They would not return home simply not thinking about him, but they would return home thinking about what God has done for their family.

We hear of another kind of journey in our readings. Luke has the one story that we get about Jesus from the time between his birth and his public ministry. This story takes place when Jesus is about twelve years old. Mary and Joseph are traveling with Jesus to Jerusalem for the Passover. When it is done, they head back home as a group. Almost everyone heads back home. Our young Jesus stays behind and his parents don't notice until they're about a day away. If they were traveling as a group, they likely just thought he was with someone else. Eventually they notice he is gone, and they return to Jerusalem to find him. They finally find him in the temple among the teachers. Now Jesus is there listening and asking questions. He is not just hiding there. He is interacting with the teachers. This astonishes his parents. They want to know why he's done this. They've been worried, and he seems unfazed because in many ways he has gone home. Because he asks them why they're searching. Didn't they know he would be in his father's house? And I would imagine that would be home for him. A place where he felt he belonged. A place that would be natural to find him. A place where he is at ease. For him, it's the natural place he would be. His father's house. But it's not the place that his parents call home. So, there's a bit of conflict there. He has found this comfort of the place he belongs but knows that it's not the place that his parents need him to be. And so, though he belongs there in his father's house, he decides to go with them, and they head back home to Nazareth. And there he is an obedient child. He listens, he follows directions, and he is treasured by his mother. And Jesus increases in wisdom and in years and in divine and human

favor. He grows physically, emotionally, and spiritually both with the people around him and with God. It's a similarity that we hear both in Samuel and in Luke. That they don't stand still.

Now I would imagine Mary and Joseph return from this wondering about the way that Jesus was interacting at the temple with the teachers. The way that Jesus simply goes there and interacts with people that should be so far above him. And I can imagine that they would be changed, thinking much more about what the future holds. And this got me to thinking about the way we think of home. For me, home is a place of comfort. When I think of home, I think of a place where I can be me. That I can be vulnerable. That I can be content and not have to show off to anyone. That it is a place of peace and a place of rest. I thought about the way that we think of home around Christmas. And we have the usual songs. I'll be home for Christmas. That there's a longing to return to a place we belong. That there's no place like home for the holidays. And I felt like there was a yearning for this place where we could belong and a place that we could feel was ours. And I started to think about the way that Christ declares that for us in God's kingdom. That Christ makes a home for us. But that it's not a place we go to not be changed. It's a place we go because we are changed. Change by the birth of a child. Because it's hard to say that we celebrate the birth of Christ without feeling that change in ourselves. That we feel the love of God demonstrated to us in the birth, the life, the death, and the resurrection of Christ. And that when we celebrate his birth, we celebrate the way that our lives are changed because of this new place we can call home.

As I thought about it as part of our Advent and Christmas series, I started thinking about the way that we will carry that with us throughout the year. That in the year to come, we will carry with us all of the expectations that come with Christmas. Peace on earth and goodwill towards men. That we will carry with us the idea that we are allowed to care. That we can do wonderful things when we band together to help the least and the last. That it is right and good for us to think of those less fortunate and to share what we have with one another. That it is good for us to give a gift to one another. To celebrate each other. And all that we are and all that we do. That Christmas is a time to remember the love of Christ so that we may love one another.

So, this year, I encourage us to reflect on everything that Christmas means to us and to think about how we can carry it with us back home. That it becomes part of our new normal. That it becomes part of how we live our daily lives. That we allow ourselves to be changed by God's grace and God's love. That we let the Holy Spirit move us. That it becomes part of how we care for each other. That it becomes part of how we love our neighbor as ourselves. That it becomes part of how we are able to love God with our whole being. And that we let the love of our Savior guide us to be more kind, compassionate, and caring. So come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and

lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. 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, Let Us Adore Him

This year our Advent series is "Come, Let Us Adore Him." We reflect on all that we do to remember the gift of our Savior through old stories, favorite songs, and many traditions. This season we reflect on the Preparations and the Passion of Advent so that we might embrace the Presence and Promise of the Christ who comes. And through it all, we will gather to worship in Joy, remembering the comfort of Home as we prepare to look Ahead. So, come, let us adore him.

12/1: Preparations	12/8: Passion	12/15: Presence	12/22: Promise
12/24: Joy	12/29: Home	1/5: Ahead	

Neoga Grace UMC

752 Walnut
PO Box 610
Neoga, IL 62447
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Worship 10:30am

Toledo UMC

Madison & Ohio St
PO Box 267
Toledo, IL 62468
Worship 8:15am

Etna UMC

2799 Etna Rd
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