

December 25, 2019 – Hebrews 1:1-12 & John 1:1-18

“I’ll be home for Christmas. You can plan on me. Please have snow and mistletoe and presents on the tree.” Long before Bing Crosby ever sang those words that we know so well, people dreamed of coming home for Christmas. It’s human nature. There’s something about Christmas that draws us home.

If not to our own home, then to the home of someone we love. My family just arrived in town yesterday to spend Christmas at our home. I’m sure plenty of you have children and grandchildren spending Christmas Day with you. Or you’re heading off to someone else’s house to spend Christmas Day with them. I’ll be home for Christmas. You can plan on me.

What’s interesting, theologically, about this little facet of our Christmas celebration, is that Christmas is very much the celebration of people being away from home. Mary and Joseph, away from their home in Nazareth because of Caesar’s decree. The shepherds away from home as they watched their sheep in the fields at night. The wise men, journeying away from their home in the east, to come and worship.

And, most of all, Jesus himself. Away from his heavenly home. So that he might become flesh and dwell among us.

John makes it abundantly clear that Jesus was very much not at home in the incarnation. He should have been. This was his creation, after all. This all belonged to him. He came into that which was his own.

But his own did not receive him. No, he was light and the world was dark. They had nothing in common. And his presence would be a battle of light against dark from the moment he was born to the moment he rose from the dead. Jesus was definitely not home for Christmas.

But then again, neither are we, really. This world that we live in is not the home that God made for us. The home he made for us was perfect. Paradise. It was a garden with every food we would ever need. There was no mourning or crying or pain. It was place where God himself walked with us in the cool of the day. Our home was the Garden of Eden, quite literally.

But we fouled up that home with our own sinfulness. We destroyed that home by refusing to believe that the home God had created was indeed as perfect as it could be. Instead, we believed a lie. The lie that God was holding back. That the world he created could be better if we just added one piece of fruit to it. That the home he had given us could be better if we just broke one little rule.

We thought we could improve upon the home God gave us. And in the process, we destroyed it entirely. Not only were we cast out of Eden. But even the area outside of Eden made wholly inhospitable to us.

Now we produce family through the pain and suffering of childbirth. We produce food and income through the pain and suffering of working ground that is cursed by our sin. That night in Bethlehem, no one was truly home for Christmas.

And yet, there was a time in Israel’s history when they were really and truly home. Even in the midst of their sin. Even in the midst of their suffering. There was a time when they were home with God and God was home with them.

It was called the tabernacle. A tabernacle is just a fancy word for a really big tent. But it’s the word we use anyway. Outside this tabernacle, the priests offered sacrifices for the sins of the people. Inside this tabernacle, the glory of the Lord filled the Holy of Holies and surrounded the Ark of the Covenant. It was the very throne of God on earth.

For forty years in the wilderness, the people of Israel went wherever the tabernacle went. And the tabernacle went wherever they went. And even though they were wandering around aimlessly, they were home.

They were home because all their needs of body and soul were met. They were home because they were together, as one people, united in their faith that God would provide for them and keep them safe. They were home because their sins were forgiven and their eternal resting place secured. They were home because God was with them.

The tabernacle was an amazing thing. But also a fearsome thing. Only the priests entered the tabernacle itself. And only then after they had washed and performed sacrifices and prayers.

Enter into the presence of God with an impure heart or impure hands and you would be struck dead. Much like the Garden of Eden, this was a place of God's provision, but it was also a place of rules. Where you followed God's Laws or you would surely die.

At the end of 40 years, the tabernacle went with them into the Promised Land. Into the land given to Abraham and his descendants. And it made that land home as well. And after several hundred years, the Ark of the Covenant was moved into the permanent installation of the Temple. And Jerusalem became their home.

And it looked from the outside like everything was going wonderfully. The land was prosperous. The people were prosperous. It was the best home they could imagine.

Except that once again, God's children fouled up the home he had given them. Once again, they believed a lie. The lie of sin. The lie of idolatry. The lie that they didn't need God's help. They didn't need God's provision. They didn't need God at all.

And so God let them be taken into exile. Let them be taken from their home. And sitting in Babylon, they learned that there is no home apart from the presence of God. There is no home apart from his provision. There is no home apart from his forgiveness.

It was a hard lesson to learn. And it's one that we never fully learn. That's the nature of our sinfulness. Like the prodigal son who took his father's wealth and ran away to the city, we will always take from our God and then run away to sinful pleasures.

And so rather than continually call us to himself, over and over again, God came to us. "*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*" You wanna know a fun fact? That phrase: "dwelt among us." There's another way to translate that.

"The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us." That's the very specific word that John uses. The Word became flesh, pitched a tent, and camped among us. He was away from home. We were away from home. But with the birth of Christ, a new home was created for all of us.

Because God was with us. Providing for us. Forgiving us. That child in Bethlehem was the Tabernacle of God. The Word made flesh. As our Epistle lesson says, "*The radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.*"

But, thankfully, he was not simply the glory and imprint of God's wrath. He was not the glory and imprint of God's judgment for sin and demands for strict obedience to the Law.

"*We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*" Jesus was the glory of God's grace and truth. The glory of God's mercy for sinners who did not deserve his mercy. Who disobeyed God's Law and destroyed the home he had created for them time and time again.

And yet, to us poor sinners, God sent his Son, full of grace and truth. To lift God's wrath and destroy the deceiver with all his lies. So that on the cross, we might see the exact imprint of God's loving nature. The exact imprint of a God who just wants to have us home for Christmas.

Today, I'll be home for Christmas. Because at that table, I will eat and drink in the presence of the almighty God. Today, you will be home for Christmas. Because at this altar, you will taste the grace and truth of God given and shed for the forgiveness of your sins. Today, we will all be home for Christmas to receive the gifts of our Lord for us. Amen.