

# “Home For Christmas”

Titus 3:4-7

December 25, 2013

Christmas Day

*I'll Be Home For Christmas* the familiar Christmas song says. Another proclaims, *There's No Place Like Home for the Holidays*. Why are these songs so beloved? Because Christmas is a time when we turn our attention to home. The idea of “home” is emphasized so much in our Christmas celebration, far more than any other holiday, it seems. Why is “home” idealized so much at this time of year? Home is more than a building with four walls and a roof to protect us from the cold. Home is a special place for each one of us. Home is where we find peace and contentment.

But home is even more than that. Home is where we find love. Someone - a husband or wife, mother or father or children - is always there to welcome us and care for us. Someone - a husband or wife, mother or father or children - is always there to love us and accept us no matter what wrong we have done. That is why we want to go home at Christmas. We go home to find a special kind of love. I've heard many people say, “We had our Christmas last week.” By this, they didn't mean they had changed the calendar. They merely meant that they had a time when they either went home or had family come home.

In my 30 years in the ministry, I often had people ask me, “Will you get to go home for Christmas?” meaning by that, would I be journeying to Indiana where I grew up. My answer would always be, “No, I have to work that day. It's an occupational hazard.” It made me feel sad for a while, but then I realized that I wasn't the only one who could not be home for Christmas. There are plenty of people who will not be home for Christmas. Some people can't travel home because their family lives far away. Other people have to work on Christmas and can't leave. Some do not have a family to go to. Their parents have died and they have no children. At Christmas time those people feel isolated and without hope. It is an awful feeling.

When we read the story about the first Christmas many years ago, I find one interesting thing: no one mentioned in the Christmas story was home on that Christmas. Joseph was not home. His home was Nazareth. But he had to leave home and travel to Bethlehem to register for the census. Imagine how he felt leaving his family behind. Mary was not home. She went with her fiancée, Joseph. Imagine her feelings -- she was very pregnant, ready to give birth to her first child in a stable, and she was far from home. She did not have her mother or friends to help her. Most everyone in Bethlehem and surrounding country were not home. They, too, left their home in obedience to the order by Caesar Augustus to travel to their ancestral homes. The shepherds in the Christmas story were not home. They were out in the fields working, watching the sheep. We in the twenty first century are not the first ones to feel the pain and separation of not being home at this time of year.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if all people could be home for Christmas? Wouldn't it be wonderful if all people could be with family on Christmas? There seems no way that this could happen, but it can! Our text for today informs us that we can all be home for Christmas - home with God. We can all be with family on Christmas - with God's family. And all that happens because one other person was not home on Christmas.

When I was telling the story about the first Christmas and all the people who were not home - Joseph, Mary, and the shepherds - I omitted one Person who also was not home for Christmas - our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus left His home in heaven and came to earth. Jesus left God the Father and all the angels to come and live among people. Jesus left His golden throne in heaven and all of the glory to recline in a manger amidst the humble surroundings of animals. And why? Jesus left His home with God to bring us home again to God.

God had originally created all people to live in His family. He wanted us to live in His home with Him forever. But sin changed all that. When people began sinning, it was like leaving His home, abandoning Him, and wandering off. We, too, were born apart from God - not in His home, not in His family. We were lost and could not find our way home again. God was always here to love us, but

we wouldn't go back to Him. We were stubbornly proud sinners and didn't want Him or His help. We wanted to make it on our own. As a result, we wandered further and further away from God.

Our text for today says that God has saved us, not because we came back home to Him, but because He left His home and came to us. Jesus left heaven and was born a tiny baby in Bethlehem.. He was born to be our Savior from sin. He came to break down the barrier of sin which kept us out of God's home and separated from God's family. He did this not so much by reclining in a wooden manger on Christmas Day but by reclining on a wooden cross on Good Friday. It was there that He took all our sin upon Himself and died in our place. When Jesus shouted, "It is finished!", it meant our sins were forgiven. Our separation from God was finished. Our spiritual loneliness was finished.

Each of us received a place in the family of God, "not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit". When you were born, you were born into the family of Adam which results in sin, death, and hell. When you were baptized, you were born again into the family of God which results in righteousness, life, and salvation. This changes our whole perspective of life, especially at Christmas time.

You, I, and all people who trust in this Babe of Bethlehem are home for Christmas, whether we celebrate the holiday in the home we were born in or we are physically separated from the place where we grew up or lived for many years. We are home with God. We have joy, peace, security, and safety with Him. God is always with us and loves us, comforts us, takes care of us, no matter what happens, no matter what we do wrong. He welcomes us to His house, speaks to us His words of forgiveness and hope, and feeds us with His Holy Meal.

And you, I, and all people who trust in this Babe of Bethlehem are with family on Christmas - whether or not our children or parents are physically with us today or they are far away or even dead. We have been born into a new family by baptism - God's family. Peace Lutheran Church is more

than just a religious organization located in Great Falls, Montana. It is God's family in this place. We are all brothers and sisters in Christ. None of us is really alone for Christmas. We have gathered together as God's family this day to fellowship with one another. .

The most wonderful thing about this home and family is that it never has to end. Someone once said that the church is different from all institutions and organizations in that you don't forfeit your membership in because of death. Rather, this home that we have here, the fellowship that we enjoy, the meal that we share are all only a foretaste of what is to come.

We are heirs of all our Father has: heirs of eternal life. We will have an eternal home in heaven. We will be with all of God's family forever -- from Adam and Eve to Abraham to King David, to all the prophets and the apostles and followers of Christ for all time. We will engage in a time of celebration, worship, and praise in the wedding feast of the Lamb, Jesus Christ. There will be no more separation or loneliness. We will be home, not only for Christmas, but forever. It will be as Revelation, the last book in the Bible says, "They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (Rev. 21:3-4).

Back to my personal plight, the song, "I'll Be Home For Christmas" used to be a very sad song for me after graduation from seminary because I knew that I would never again be back to the place where I grew up for Christmas to spend Christmas with my family. But it no longer affects me that way. Is it because I have become less sentimental? No, not really. Is it because you have made my family and I feel so at home here in Great Falls? That does help. But the real reason for feeling joy and peace this day is that, because Jesus Christ, the Son of God was not home for Christmas, I am home for Christmas here at Peace or wherever I may be. I am with family - God's family - you, His sons and daughters. My Christmas wish for you this day is that, despite whatever situation you are facing in your personal lives and no matter where you, your children, your parents, or any of your earthly family are, you realize that you are home for Christmas, too. Amen.