

Home At Last
Luke 2:1-20

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Dr. J. Howard Olds

I'll be home for Christmas
You can count on me
Please have snow and mistletoe
And presents under the tree
Christmas eve will find me, where the love light gleams
I'll be home for Christmas if only in my dreams.

35 million Americans will take that beloved ballad seriously as they board planes, trains and travel highways heading home for the holiday.

It seems that Christmas has always been a time for travel. Characters on the stage of the original Christmas story were certainly on the go. Mary and Joseph go from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Shepherds go from the fields to the stable. Wise men follow a star from the east. God moves from the his throne in heaven to his home in a manger. Come Christmas everybody is traveling. Everybody's traveling home.

In that spirit, I invite you to consider just two movements of this wonderful story of our savior's birth.

I. THEY WENT UP

A. v. 4 So Joseph went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem, the town of David, because he belonged to the line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him.

1. For Joseph, the trip to Bethlehem was a journey home. Every 14 years the Roman gov't required people to return to their places of birth for the purpose of a census. Joseph was born in Bethlehem. He had family there. So when Caesar Augustus decreed a census, Joseph had no choice but to make the 80 mile trip back home.

2. However sentimental we become about the story, let us remember the journey home for Joseph was no cause for rejoicing. He went because he had to.

a. The census was conducted for the purpose of assessing taxes. Who enjoys going out of their way to pay taxes?

b. Mary to whom he is engaged but not yet married is 9 months pregnant. How would you like to explain that to your Aunt Martha, Cousin Lucy?

c. Worst of all things have changed. Joseph gets home only to discover there is no place for him anymore.

d. That night in Bethlehem Joseph discovers what Thomas Wolf describes in his 1940 novel--You can't go home again, You can't go back home to your family, back home to your childhood, back home to a young man's dream of glory and fame, back home to the escapes of Time and Memory. Joseph goes home but there is no room for him at home.

B. I'LL BE HOME FOR CHRISTMAS. YOU CAN COUNT ON ME.

1. There is a deep primal urge in the soul of humanity to find our way home. We must see the place from which we have come and hear the voices that helped to make us what we are. It is as powerful as the pull which sends birds south for the winter. Come Christmas we are willing to go to great expense and considerable sacrifice to find our way home.

2. IF ONLY IN MY DREAMS, come Christmas, I still taste the homemade candy my Mother used to make, and her virgin custard served with Angel food cake. I still smell the burning wood from the big stove that sat in the middle of the living room, and not so pleasantly I can still feel the frosted seat of the outdoor privy before the days of indoor plumbing. Come Christmas, I need to travel home.

3. Even when the memories are not so charming, I need to remember them. How lonely I felt in a world of adults, how hurt I was when teased and taunted by people much older than I. I need to remember. For the good, the not so good have made me what I am.

4. Christmas cannot come to pass without Ebenezer scrooge facing what he is, or George Bailey discovering the significance of his being.

C. YET IN THAT SOULFUL JOURNEY, WE MAKE AN ESSENTIAL DISCOVERY.

1. Things have changed. "The moving finger writes, and having writ moves on. All our piety and all our wit will not call it back to cancel even half a line."

2. I am no longer welcome at the place of my birth--It is no longer my home.

3. Jim Harnish, "the place where I used to hang my stocking is a parking lot. Nobody in the neighborhood knows my name."

4. Would be travelers to Bethlehem find it silent tonight, not in

reverence of a birth but in fear of a war.

II. HE CAME DOWN.

V. 6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born.

A. THE MYSTERY IS PROFOUND

1. She gave birth to her firstborn baby, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger.

2. Max Lucado puts it this way. God became a human being. Divinity arrived. The omnipotent made himself breakable. He who had been a spirit made himself pierce able. He who was larger than the universe became an embryo. God is given eyebrows, elbows, two kidneys and a spleen. The angels watch as Mary changes God's diaper." Its more than my mind can comprehend.

3. I'll be home for Christmas. You can count on me. Its not Bing Crosby singing it, its GOD PROCLAIMING IT. Christmas is not just about Mary and Joseph coming home to Bethlehem and finding no room. Its not even about our own desire for a homecoming. We couldn't go to God so God came to us.

This Christmas eve you can find him.

Where the love light gleams

God is home for Christmas

That's more than an wishful dream.

B. HE CAME DOWN! WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN FOR US?

1. Nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord. Immanuel. God is with us.

a. If I could paraphrase a line from Diana Ross, I want to say
Ain't no mountain high enough

Ain't no valley low enough

Ain't no river wide enough

To keep God away from you.

b. If God can be born in a stable, who knows what lengths he might go in pursuit of you. When you feel most rejected, most abandoned, most neglected, you may be in the very spot to discover the wonderous birth of one who fails us not.

c. Leith Anderson, traveling in Manila when my hosts confronted me with something beyond belief. They took me on a tour of 10's of thousands of people who make their home on a garbage dump. They have

constructed shacks out of things that other people have thrown away. They send their children out every morning to scavenge food out of other people's garbage. People are born there, and live their whole lives there, and even die there without knowing any different. ----Then I discovered something else. There are Americans living on that garbage dump too. They have chosen to leave their homes of comfort to communicate the love of Jesus to people who would never hear it otherwise. As profound as the ministry of those missionaries are, even that is not as amazing as the coming of Christ from heaven to earth to show us they way home.

2. What does it mean? IT MEANS WE CAN MAKE IT HOME FOR CHRISTMAS.

a. Stop running. You ought to know by now that you cannot find your way in the dark. Nostalgia which taste good with the first bite grows bitter with the second or third chew. You cannot turn back the pages of time, nor make your fantasies a reality. You cannot go home again. But you can let God make his home in you!

b. Dallas Willard tells the story in his book Divine Conspiracy Gary smith was under zero religious influence until he was about 30. Trained and employed as a meteorologist, Gary was living in a suburban setting. He and his wife Diane started sending their children to Sunday School thinking it was the suburban thing to do. After some time Gary became concerned about the things the children were being taught. Who was this Jesus and why was he special?

So Gary started a search of his own. One night he was awakened by a "yearning" to go to the living room with a pencil and paper. When I walked in that room, says Gary, I was surrounded by love and I "knew" the presence of Jesus Christ.

c. How silently, How silently, the wondrous gift is given
So God imparts to human hearts the glories of his heaven.
No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin
Where meek souls will receive him, still
The dear Christ enters in.

Will you be home for Christmas? No that is the wrong question. Make a home for Christ into your heart this Christmas. And you will be home at last! Thank God almighty, you will be home at last. .