

Coming Home  
John 1:1-5 and Luke 2:1-20  
December 24, 2019

Clinton G. Roberts  
First Presbyterian Church  
Lake Forest, Illinois

On each Sunday this Advent, we have looked for the Christmas Story in one of the four Gospel Homes: Mark, Matthew, Luke and John. Tonight, let's look in our own home for the true meaning of Christmas...

## I

Whether we listen to Bing Crosby's WW2 rendition of "I'll Be Home for Christmas" or Judy Garland saying "There's no place like home," people have long connected the deepest meaning of Christmas to our deepest longing for home. But what exactly is "home"? Is it a place we can drive to, or a place in our hearts? Is it a cluster of emotions, or a basket of memories of happy Christmas's past?

I can remember creeping out my dormer window onto the roof one Christmas Eve in order to warn Santa about the fire still burning in the fireplace. No matter how hard I tried, I just couldn't convince my smiling parents to put that fire out! I remember putting out milk and cookies on Christmas Eve and finding them half-eaten on Christmas morning with a hand-written note from Santa.

No—it's easy to hold "home" and "Christmas" together...even when the memories they evoke are harder, like the December when Grandpa died or the Christmas Eve when my big sister's boyfriend came home from Vietnam—different; or when I drove home 1200 miles in 21 hours from college because Mom said Dad was depressed and not trying to find a job and she just needed to see me.

No, we remember very well, don't we, all the Christmases we've lived through, and how they capture the very heart of the meaning of "home"—with all its joys and sorrows, its laughter and its tears, its longing and its love.

Nowadays, it's probably the laughter of my grandchildren I long for the most, and "home" has become not just a house, but a skein of relationships that define who I am and to whom I belong.

What do you call "home"? Will you be there, tonight, or do you, like the Poet, have "miles to go before you sleep?" Home is the place where we are truly accepted, where love is not conditional and where we know that we belong. If we are fortunate, it is the same place and the same people we grew up with. But for some, like the Wise Men, we've had "to come home by another way." When Jesus was born, his parents were themselves homeless wayfarers in search of a room. They found a stable instead, and when the child who was delivered there became a man, he said, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Mt. 8:20). Cast out of his own hometown, Jesus walked this world in homelessness, carrying a message about God's kingdom and our heart's true home. That's worth remembering tonight, when too many human beings have been displaced from their homes by destruction, by deprivation, by detention, and by the politics of Caesar.

## II

Have you ever spoken to someone who's lived a long, long time, who's maybe battling illness, and who's lost a lot of friends and family along the way? Such people often say, "I want to go home" and they don't mean someplace here. They're speaking about a home in heaven, the one that Jesus spoke of when he said, "In my Father's house are many rooms" (John 14:2) or "Today I will be with you in Paradise" (Luke 23:43).

Our homes, like the movie, are "places in the heart," and the only way to get there is to open our hearts in faith. So tonight, let's all "come home by another way" by recognizing that we are carrying that "home" within us and it is precisely the place our dear Lord is waiting to enter in.

Christ wants to make his home in our hearts. “Abide in me,” he said, “and I will abide in you” (Jn. 15:4). The question is: will we come tonight with childlike hearts, adorned this Christmas with Love, Joy and Peace?

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock,” he said (Revelation 3:20). Will you open that door tonight, and offer the space within to the One who was born in a stall? Like the Magi, will you bow down to pay him homage, offering Jesus not just your joy but your sorrow and longing, too? Will you accept his forgiveness? Will you show him your brokenness, and shine by his grace?

If you have come with that holy purpose, then I say, the One who was born in a stable can be born again in you. Your heart can become Christ’s home. And when that happens, you will know exactly who you are and to whom you truly belong.

### III

Tonight, we’ve come to be with God because God has come to be with us. That’s what’s brought us together—and holds us together—in a world of deep darkness that is longing for the Light.

-So come home with a humble heart: like the children in the Christmas Pageant, dressed up like lambs and crawling to the Manger;

-Come home with a sharing heart: like my friend Joe who brought enough pizza to the Laundromat for everyone washing their clothes;

-Come home with an encouraging heart: like the carolers on the school bus bringing glory and peace to dark thresholds, singing with less-than-angelic voices Good News of great joy.

-Come home just as you are tonight, and adorn your heart, like this stable, not just with heavenly gifts of Love, Joy and Peace—but with

earthly offerings, too: our longings and sorrows, our need for forgiveness, our trust in God's grace.

### Conclusion

What then is the meaning of Christmas?

That God is with us.

And God is for us.

And that's what "home" means, too.