

Christmas Comings and Goings! December 20, 2020 at The Village Church, Garden City, UT

Text: **John 16: 25-33** (Special emphasis on verse 28)

Introduction: IL- AAA has released its forecast for Christmas travel by automobile and Zeta Global has issued its estimates on airline travel as well. The numbers show a major decrease in travel- 43% by car and 58% by plane this year. The numbers would likely not be even at that level except many travelers say this is the first time since Covid-19 that they will have gotten together with family! Throughout the centuries people have travelled to be with their loved ones or to begin a new life in a new location. Whether by camel or donkey or horseback or Conestoga wagon or train or bus or across our modern highways or through the sky, people have come and gone with a purpose in mind! Rarely ever have people journeyed long distances without a clear reason behind their efforts.

*There was one particular Christmas journey that changed the course of human history forever and that was when Jesus Christ left Heaven's glory to come to earth, live among us for thirty-three years, and then die on a Roman cross for us, rising again on the third day and returning to Heaven, where He awaits the perfect time to return and take us to be with Him for all of eternity! Not only did He come and go with a perfect purpose, but He invites us today near the end of 2020 to make OUR comings and goings count for the glory of God as well! Let's look together in **John 16, verse 28** especially, at HIS comings and goings and then at OURS. Today, let's joyfully determine that Christmas 2020 and the year ahead of us will count in big ways spiritually for God's honor and glory!

HIS Coming- His original situation: Set the context of **chapters 13 to 16** and then zero in on **verse 28** and the phrase- "**I came forth from the Father**". Jesus, the very Son of God, existed in Heaven's glory and greatness throughout eternity past! He came down here to earth and took on human form, but He never stopped being God. While He was on earth, even from His boyhood days, He knew where He had come from and why He was here! On one occasion, when He was twelve, He stayed behind in Jerusalem to talk to the Jewish leaders in the synagogue while His parents headed back home from the Feast of the Passover. When Joseph and Mary realized He was missing and they returned, they found Him in deep discussions with the religious leaders. They asked Him what He was doing. His response, in **Luke 2: 49**, was- "**Why is it that you were looking for Me? Don't you know that I must be about My Father's business?**" So, even as a youngster He knew what His mission was and its importance! He also knew all along that He had always existed as God, long before He came to earth in Bethlehem! As He spoke to the Pharisees one day, He told them, in **John 8: 56-58**- "**Your father, Abraham, rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad!**" The Pharisees scratched their heads and responded- "**You are not even fifty years old, and You claim You have seen Abraham?!**" Jesus confidently answered- "**Before Abraham was born, I am!**" [the GREAT I AM!] Another time Jesus spoke to His own followers about how He was the 'Bread of Heaven' that had come down to fill the hungry souls of spiritually dying men. The disciples had a hard time figuring out what He meant by calling Himself the 'Bread' that enables men to live forever. In **John 6: 62** Jesus

answered their dilemma this way- "What if you should behold the Son of Man ascending where He was before?" He clearly knew where He had been in eternity past and what His original situation was as the Second member of the Triune Godhead. But, just as importantly, He knew where He was headed when He came to this earth-bound collection of sinners...

His intended destination: "...and have come into the world..." He knew, from eternity past, that He would be leaving Heaven's glories and coming to a world of lost sinners like you and me. He knew then that the conditions would not be favorable for His ministry, nor would everyone be receptive to His message, but He came anyway! And that meant taking on a body born through a virgin, entering the world through the birth canal of a woman in a miraculous way by the Holy Spirit's power. Scriptures resound with the delightful reminder that He became one of US- His ultimate destination was planet earth as a gift from God wrapped in skin and bones and swaddling clothes, laying in a manger that day so long ago! **Hebrews 2: 17** reads- "Thus He HAD to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation (be a mercy-giver!) for the sins of the people!" And in **Philippians 2: 6, 7** Paul tells us- "Although He existed in the form of God, He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant and being made in the likeness of men." So, His intended destination was earth and more specifically a body. Geographically that meant a certain part of the world, namely Palestine and, to be exact, Bethlehem. The prophets foretold that He would be born in Bethlehem of Judea (**Micah 5: 2**). Racially, it meant being born through a Jewish lineage, particularly the line of King David. Yet **John 1: 11** reminds us- "He came to His own and His own received Him not!" referring clearly to the Jewish people individually and as a nation. Additionally, He came at a pre-determined time. **Galatians 4: 4** says- "In the fulness of time God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem those who are under the law." That specific time frame included certain political factors as well. Caesar Augustus of Rome ruled that part of the world. **Luke 2: 1-** "There went out a decree from Caesar August that all the world should be taxed..." which is exactly why Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem, their ancestral hometown. King Herod was on the throne in and around Palestine. All of this was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy but its effects impact today, and I mean WAY beyond the Christmas carols we sing! **IL-** Christmas isn't an invention of man- God started all of this when He sent His only Son into the world on that first starry Christmas night in Bethlehem. The gifts were for Jesus, the praises and carols were to magnify HIM and were directed to Him. And by the way, through careful study over many years I have learned that there are many reasons to believe that Jesus was born on December 25th on our calendars. That date fits perfectly with the Biblical account. AND I am convinced that it is fine to celebrate Christmas with trees and all the trimmings and a special Christmas Eve service at 6 PM! It is wonderful to give gifts to those we love IF that exchange reminds us of God's greatest gift of eternal life through Jesus! And if our focus for that special day is to honor the Savior- both the tiny Baby Jesus in the manger and the full-grown, fully alive Son of God and Man who went to the Cross for you and me- then God gets the glory!

HIS Going- His holy ambition: "...I am leaving the world again..." The whole time Jesus was on earth and especially while revealing truth to His disciples, His love went hand in hand with His teaching. John 13: 1- "When Jesus knew that His hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end!" Jesus didn't just swing by earth, take a few looks, wish everyone His blessing and keep going! He wasn't here for a parade down Main Street Bethlehem or State Street Jerusalem where maybe more people would be waving banners. He came with the expressed purpose of saving lost souls and redeeming sinful mankind to bring them to Heaven to live with the Father for eternity. Again and again while He lived among us and preached truth, He spoke of His holy ambition. Matthew 9: 13- "But go and learn what this means- 'I desire compassion and not sacrifice', for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance!" Matthew 18: 11- "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost!" Matthew 20: 28- "The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." John 10: 10- "I am come that they might have life and have it more abundantly." Many similar verses could be quoted or read to make the case that Jesus knew exactly why He was here and how long He would be around to accomplish His mission. And that holy desire was fulfilled! Just before Jesus went to the Cross, He prayed to the Father in John 17: 4 and said, "I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work Thou hast given Me to do!" Please note that He said that prayer BEFORE He went to the Cross, but He spoke in the past tense- "I accomplished the work..." Jesus knew it was as good as done right then. He planned to perfectly fulfill the Father's plan of redemption! He had every intention of following through with that awful crucifixion. Once that work was completed and He rose from the tomb, He could go back to the Father and leave His disciples, then and now, to carry on the work of sharing the message of salvation because of that accomplished work! All His accomplishments centered on truths about lostness, salvation through His shed blood, resurrection life here and now, life to the full and the completion of the plan that includes living in the presence of Jesus for all eternity, praising Him!

His present station: "...and going to the Father." After Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, He went back to Heaven where He started. His work HERE was done and as promised, He sent His Holy Spirit to live in us who know Him as our Savior. The Spirit is IN us to guide us through the completion of the work He assigns US to do! So, on this Sunday before Christmas as well as on Christmas Day, Jesus receives the praises of angelic choirs and saints who have gone on before us, AND He receives our worship! IL- The hymnwriter challenges us all- "Oh worship the King, all glorious **above**!" That's where He is now, ruling with all authority, just as He exemplified divine authority while on earth. He has the absolute right to give us orders, jobs to do, missions of our own to fulfill! IL- Tony Campolo, in his book, "The Power Delusion" writes that, "Authority is the ability to get others to do what you want because they recognize through your life and words that what you are asking is legitimate and right!" That quote leads us to consider OUR comings and goings in response to the authority of the Babe of Bethlehem!

OUR Coming- Our original condition: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

While some people may cringe when I read or quote **Romans 3: 23**, it is obvious that we are ALL sinners before our holy God. We didn't come here to earth from Heaven! We are creations of God through our mother's womb and we all have been born in sin ever since Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden. King David recognized this simple truth when he wrote, in **Psalms 51: 5**- "In sin did my mother conceive me." If we had not sinned, we would not need a Savior, but the fact is, as stated on **Romans 5: 12**- "Just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, so death spread to all men, for all have sinned." Adam's sin affected all of us, but we can't put today's blame on him- we too have sinned, like he did, and we fall short of God's holy standards and of His glory! Jesus, on the other hand, didn't sin, couldn't sin because He is God! He lived all of the holy standards perfectly and died taking OUR place, then rose in glorious fashion. Through His finished work we can know life of the kind that only HE could provide. Oh, what love and what mercy- He was plainly "born to die"! Once we receive His gift of eternal life, brand new life in exchange for the old, sin-cursed life, we are ready to do His bidding. But let's not get ahead of ourselves! That new life starts with our glad reception of His open invitation...

Our glad reception: "Come unto Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!" Yes- in **Matthew 11: 28** Jesus invites us to come to Him and find life that is REALLY living- living for God, basking in His love, and yet being burdened by what burdens His heart! So, starting at the beginning, let me ask- have YOU gladly received His gift of eternal life? Have you come to Him in simple, child-like faith and accepted the greatest gift ever offered to mankind? If not, you can grab hold of it today- it's yours for the asking. And you will never be more glad to receive ANY gift than this one! In **Matthew 18: 3** Jesus, with a little child on His knee, said to His followers- "Truly, I say to you- unless you are converted and become like children, you cannot enter the kingdom of Heaven." **IL-** Think about that statement by Jesus considering Christmas and presents under the tree. Most, if not all, children excitedly await Christmas morning, and they dream about the gifts under the tree. How odd and awkward would that be if, on Christmas Day, a little child is handed a nicely wrapped gift, carefully unwrapping it, looking it over, leaning close to Mom or Dad and saying- "This is a really nice item- how much do I owe you for it? I have a surprisingly good amount saved up in my piggy bank!" No- a gift is a gift- and this most wonderful of gifts is not for sale, can't be earned or paid for by sinners like us, no matter how much we could pay or how much work we could perform. It can only be received by faith with a glad heart and a life-long "Thank you, Jesus for all You've done!" Paul writes in **2 Corinthians 9: 15**- "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" If you truly know Jesus as your Savior from sin and have come by faith to Him and found spiritual rest, as He promised, then I'm sure you are thankful too for this gift that keeps on giving! That gift also keeps on prompting- prompting us to step and serve the Giver of gifts by sharing His wonderful gift with others! Let's talk for a moment about OUR going...

OUR Going- Our special vocation- "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel..." [Mark 16: 15] The very One who IS the gift of life tells His followers, those who have gladly received the

gift, to go and preach or proclaim the Good News all over the world! Love for Jesus and love for those HE loves is the ultimate evangelistic tool and the ultimate reason to go to lost people with THE gift! It's not about, "Where do I want to go?" It's all about, "Where and to whom does **He** want me to go?" We need to observe where people are hurting and what God is doing around us and then respond to the obvious needs. **IL-** Karl Marx, in "The Communist Manifesto" written back in 1848, told his followers- "You have a world to win!" Communism has worked its way into many places in our world since Marx was alive. But we have a world to win for God- not to a political persuasion but to the conviction that Jesus is God in the flesh, that He came to "seek and to save that which was lost", and that those around us who are still outside of Christ are, in fact, the lost ones He came to save! Jesus calls us to a bigger purpose as individuals and as a church. We are not here to please ourselves! The church is not here in Garden City just so we can come and fellowship and worship together and then go home until the next Sunday. Jesus told some of His followers who had been fishermen by trade about a grander, more powerful calling. In **Mark 1: 17** He said, "**Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men!**" And whatever job or trade or profession you have, you too have a calling bigger and higher in purpose! **IL-** I am calling on the men of our church to consider and pray about joining a Bible Study starting in January that will lay out God's job description for male leadership in the church as elders and deacons! The material is excellent and totally Bible-based, and we can decide later about a day and time to meet, but if you would like to know more, please sign up today and I will fill you in. But just let me state that the calling I'm talking about is a divine calling for men to be HIS tools to accomplish HIS purposes in and through HIS church- our church! And a pointed word for all of us- knowing we are called is different than responding to the call! We all need to make a passionate confirmation that we're ready for our assignment.

Our passionate confirmation: "**Here I am- send ME!**" [Isaiah 6: 8] Those affirming words from the prophet Isaiah to God did not come out of thin air! **Verse one of Isaiah 6** is the context for Isaiah's response. "**In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, sitting on a throne.**" In a vision as clear as the noonday sun Isaiah caught a glimpse of the holiness and glory of God in Heaven. But he also heard two things- he heard seraphim (angels) calling out to God- "**Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is filled with His glory!**" But then he also heard God asking a question- "**Whom shall I send and who will go for us?**" [Reference to the Trinity] After recognizing that he was totally unworthy in himself to be a messenger for God, yet with a passionate heart, Isaiah confirmed that HE was ready to go! THAT is what God is looking for- men and women, old and young, who will heed the call of God to go wherever He sends and to share the Gospel with whomever He puts in our path. Are WE ready to passionately confirm- "Here I am, send ME!"? May our heart's desire sincerely be like that of Jesus Himself who said in **Hebrews 10: 7-** "**Lo, I am come, in the volume of the Book it is written of Me, to do Thy will, oh God!**"

Conclusion: IL- Let me return for a moment to the travel experts who estimate that companies like AAA will have to rescue over one million travelers this Christmas due to breakdowns, accidents or even dead batteries! Jesus came to rescue lost sinners from eternal separation

from God because of our sin. We get to go on "rescue missions" ourselves as His representatives in this dark world!

WHAT IF? What if Jesus had chosen to stay in Heaven and not bother to rescue us from sin? What if there had been no first Christmas? What if Jesus had determined that He preferred the praises of angels to the curses and brutalities of sinful men and women? For Jesus, there were choices He made willingly, and the choices He made to come and go have made all the difference for you and me! Will WE make choices- to come to Him in faith and go for Him in confident trust that He will use us to make a difference for those around us and around the world?

WHAT IF? What if we choose to stay where and as we are and do nothing about coming and going at His command? What if we stay in our comfortable surroundings and ignore the call to reach others with the Good News? Think about that! Aren't you glad someone chose to come to YOU with the Good News, to leave their comfort zone and go where you were and tell you about Jesus? One last emphasis about Christmas comings and goings:

Jesus has every intention of coming again! In **John 14: 1-6** He spells out the particulars of yet **another coming**, and He means what He says!

"Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also...I am the Way, the Truth and the Life- no one comes to the Father but by Me!" And the Bible repeatedly teaches us that we too will be going back with Him- a final GOING to glory and living in His presence for eternity! Listen to **1 John 3: 1-3** "You see how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God, and such we are! For this reason, the world does not know us, because it didn't know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. But we know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as HE [Christ] is pure!" That was God's ultimate purpose for that first Christmas coming- so that sinners could be changed by the power of the blood of Jesus into those who will live forever in sinless purity in that lovely, prepared place in His presence! God desires to use you and me who know Jesus as Savior to tell others about Him and His love. He has a plan and purpose for each of us who are saved to be His messengers. God may not say to you, "I am assigning you to Serbia or Iraq to spread the Good News." But He IS saying to us- like Paul states in **Romans 12: 1**- "**Present your bodies as living sacrifices to Me, which is your reasonable service!**" Are you ready to say, from the heart, "Lord, it IS reasonable- take MY life- because I am Yours!"?

Song: "Take My Life (I am Yours)"