

Come Home for Christmas
December 24, 2019

Over 2,000 years ago, a young, teenage girl, named Mary, became pregnant with God's one and only Son. He left Heaven to come to earth to save the world. At the same time, her good Jewish fiancée, Joseph, did not abandon her, but, instead, chose to believe her, stay with her, and raise this Divine child as his own.

Have you ever thought about how they felt? And yes, Mary, did you know? Could you have had any idea of the power that baby boy you held in your arms would have?

We heard the reading of the true Christmas story by "Grandpa Mike," earlier. It's from the book of Luke in the Bible.

After the angels left the shepherds, they went into Bethlehem to see the baby. They found Mary and Joseph and the baby, lying in the manger. Just as the angels had said. As they returned to their fields and their sheep, they spread the word. We're told that "all who heard it were amazed."

Right after that verse, there's an intriguing statement, "But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart."

The writer of this book, Luke, must have heard this from Mary. No one else writes about it in the Bible.

There must have had a lot of questions, and doubts, and fears for Mary. And Joseph, too. But they overcame them all to raise the greatest man who ever lived. He was fully God and fully human. He had no servants, but they called Him Master. He had no degree, but they called Him Teacher. He had no medicines, but they called Him Healer.

Mary would wonder, and be loving and kind and nurturing as she experienced all that went with having her first child.

And Joseph would be fiercely protective of his beloved Mary, and this very special baby He was told to name Jesus. Emmanuel. God with us.

And Jesus - willing to leave Heaven to be born in such humble circumstances to such humble people.

He would have no army, yet kings would fear Him. He won no military battles, yet He conquered the world. He committed no crime, yet they crucified Him. He was buried in a tomb, yet He lives today. Jesus is the reason for the season.

Jesus left one home to come to another home. He left Heaven to come to live on earth. For just 33 short years. He would have a home with Mary and Joseph, and eventually other brothers and sisters too. They would never leave or forsake Him. Much like God Himself, who never leaves or forsakes us.

Coming home can be something different for everyone.

In most of the TV Christmas movies so popular right now it's usually a good thing. Sometimes there's reluctance, or a previous estrangement. Often the work people do is what keeps them from focusing on what really matters, and these movies are very good at showing them, and us, what really matters in the end. Faith. Family. Friends.

What matters is coming home. Putting down the phone, shutting down the computer, and really spending meaningful time together.

Sometimes coming home can be difficult, though. Or painful.

There are those “Home Alone” movies where that poor boy comes home to an empty house. Then, to make matters worse, there are two robbers who try to break in and steal things.

But we all know how that ends. Thankfully everything turns out all right, with a lot of laughs along the way.

In our own lives, what does coming home look like? Is it a loving thing where people are eagerly awaiting your presence? Or is it something entirely different?

Regardless of any of that, I’m here to tell you tonight that God invites us to come home to Him, with great joy and great love.

In the Old Testament book of Ezekiel, we’re told throughout that “God’s heart was to recapture the hearts of the people...”

It’s still that way today, and has been that way from the beginning.

God is our Creator, and He made us. Just as any parent yearns for their children to come home to them, so does our Heavenly Father.

From the song “Mary did you know?,” we try to imagine how she must have felt. Joseph too. We try to imagine what they were thinking.

We also try to imagine God. In our DaySchool, it’s always fun to talk with the children about God. Their imaginations know no limits.

Spirit-filled, Lutheran pastor David Luecke says, however, that “we live in a culture that makes it hard for people to imagine and be led by God.”

Can you imagine God? Can you be led by God? He invites you to come home to Him this Christmas.

In Ezekiel 11:11 He simply says He yearns for us to be His people and for Him to be our God.

As mentioned earlier, sometimes children can imagine things much easier than adults. Here’s a funny story from a little boy who put his imagination to good use:

“A small boy was writing a letter to God about the Christmas presents he badly wanted. “I’ve been good for six months now.” he wrote. But after a moment’s reflection he crossed out “six months” and wrote “three months.”

After a pause, that was crossed out, and he put “two weeks.”

There was another pause, and that was crossed out too. He got up from the table and went over to the nativity scene that had the figures of Mary and Joseph.

He picked up the figure of Mary, wrapped it gently in a cloth, and put it in a drawer in his room. He then went back to his writing and started again:

“Dear God, if ever you want to see your mother again!”

All joking aside, Mary did you know? Did you know that your baby boy was God? You had to have known, with the unusual and miraculous way you became pregnant!

Did you have any idea Jesus would one day walk on water? That He would be our Savior? That He would restore sight to blind men? That because of Him people would be healed and walk again?

Mary did you know that because of Jesus we would finally have someone to whom to turn for forgiveness, and to be reconnected to God, our Creator?

In Ethiopia, Africa, in the remote mountainous region, there are some very old churches carved out of rock. Some people say angels built them. They are very big and very old and there are eleven of them. They date back at least 800 years.

A TV news magazine did a story on them recently because many Ethiopians, and others, travel long distances to be there on Christmas day.

When a news reporter asked an Ethiopian priest why Christmas, his response was simple and profound. He said, “Because Christmas was the day forgiveness was born.”

If you’re looking for peace, if you’re looking for forgiveness and healing and love, come home to Christ this Christmas.

And if you don’t have a church home, we’d love to have you join us too. God created us to live in community, and in a church, a body of Christ, we share this faith life together. It isn’t always neat and tidy, sometimes we can be downright messy, but at the end of the day we have each others backs. We love God and we love each other and we love you too.

For our final thought tonight I want to leave you with some laughter. It is a joyous night, after all, and tomorrow is a celebration of the greatest gift the world has ever known: the gift of Jesus the Christ. Jesus the Messiah.

So here’s a special poem for you entitled, “’Twas the Fight before Christmas:”

’Twas the Fight Before Christmas

by Tony Cooke and David Beebe

*’Twas the fight before Christmas,
And all through the house,
Not a creature was peaceful,
Not even my spouse.
The bills were strung out on our table with dread,
In hopes that our checkbook would not be in the red.
The children were fussing and throwing a fit,
When Billy came screaming and cried, “I’ve been bit.”
And Momma with her skillet, and I with the remote,
She said, “You change one more channel and I’ll grab your*

throat."

*When on the TV there arose such a clatter,
I sat up on the couch to see what was the matter.
When what to my wondering eyes should appear,
The cable was out, it was my worst fear.
"The Cowboys, the Celtics, the Raiders, the Knicks,
Without the sports channel I'd soon need a fix!"
And then in the midst of my grievous sorrow,
I remembered the times I had promised, "tomorrow..."
"Not now, my children, but at some soon time,
Dad will play with you, and things will be fine."
Now under conviction, I looked at my wife,
Where was my kindness? Why all the strife?
My heart quickly softened; I now saw my task,
Some love and attention was all they had asked.
I gathered my family and called them by name,
And told them with God's help I'd not be the same.
We'll keep Christ in Christmas and honor His plan.
No more fights before Christmas—on that we will stand.
My children's eyes twinkled; they squealed with delight.
My wife gladly nodded; she knew I was right.
It was the fight before Christmas, but God's love had come
through,
And just like He does, He made all things new.*

Merry Christmas. Welcome Home.
Transition to the Lighting of the Candles.