

Isaiah 9:2-7
Titus 2:11-14
Luke 2:1-20

Sermon Christmas Eve 2018

God Draws Us to the Manger

When we hear Bing Crosby's classic "I'll be home for Christmas. You can plan on me." We feel all warm and fuzzy inside, as we look forward to reconnecting with family and friends over the Christmas season. As we remember Christmas' past and the meaningful memories we share with those we love.

We also feel anxious and stressed over the travel we often have to do to come home for Christmas. Over all the memories of dreaded road trips where the snow was relentlessly falling on the road creating our best friend ice. While the children fought over the travel packs you had purchased for them. Of course, with the hopes of keeping them quiet. And let's not forget the constant back seat driving that your spouse seems to have mastered. "Slow down. It's icy you know." Or the often-never-ending question we hear from the mouths of our children: "Are we there yet? Are we there yet? Are we there yet? Is he done his sermon yet?"

In our Christmas story this evening Joseph and Mary are coming home for Christmas. They load up the donkey, the mini van in those days. Mary is nine months pregnant. But, the trip will only take them eight to ten days. Piece of cake. Right ladies? I actually googled the distance between Nazareth and Bethlehem and it is about 157 kilometers, which takes about 33 hours by foot. I can't imagine Mary being comfortable at all for this long stretch at her stage of pregnancy.

When they arrive in Bethlehem there is no room for them. Originally people interpreted the room as part of an inn. Now, many are arguing that Joseph and Mary would have been trying to stay with family, and so, more likely the guest room at the family home is full.

No problem. Joseph's family has it under control. Mary and Joseph can stay in the room where the animals stay. "I'll be home for Christmas." Isn't sounding all warm and fuzzy for Mary and Joseph.

Then Mary gives birth to Jesus, and places him in a manger or a feeding trough. This vacation keeps getting better doesn't it? I'm sure we all have had those Christmas vacations where not only the road trip was a struggle. But, also, had to deal with the stresses that sometimes come with reconnecting with family. Like having to sleep on that forty-year-old pull out couch in Grandma's basement with her ten cats. Or tolerating that in-law that seems to always rub you the wrong way. Or awkwardly laughing at your uncle's weird and inappropriate joke. Or forcefully listening to unwanted advice on how to parent your children.

Now for most of us here the Christmas story is this beautiful piece of literature that warms our hearts. We don't really think about the fact that Jesus was born in a feeding trough surrounded by stinky barn animals. Or that Mary trekked across rugged valleys on a donkey at nine months pregnant.

We focus on the baby Jesus who lays there contently as some light shines down on him from above. We focus on the angels singing in the sky above. Or we shift gears in our heads to Matthew's Christmas story where we think of three well dressed royal figures following a beautiful bright star. Similarly, to the one many of us place on the top of our Christmas tree.

We are drawn to the church on Christmas Eve not only out of respect for Grandma or Mom, but also, because we love to hear the Christmas story. We love to sing hymns that reflect this story in song. We love to reconnect with childhood memories of worshipping in this space. We feel at home here on Christmas Eve.

From our Christmas story we see that God draws us back to the manger this evening despite the travel conditions. Despite the challenges we have faced this past year. Despite the growing conflicts and economic instability, we are enduring as a global community. Despite our own struggles with our faith journey.

God draws us back to the manger. With star, with candlelight, with angels singing. God welcomes us home with a message that says "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those he favors."

Which includes poor shepherds hoping for something new. Which includes gentiles who come from far away to experience something new. Which

includes you and I who come to hear a message of hope. Hope that we will experience peace in our world and in our lives. That we will not be judged, but loved for who we are. That we will come away from the manger, from Christmas Eve Candle light service with warm and fuzzy feelings like the Shepherds who go on to share the good news with everyone they meet.

Or like Mary who sits joyously pondering what has happened in her heart. Seeing that the hard journey we walk leads to the manger where Jesus is. Leads to God's love and redemption for our lives and the world. Leads to a delicious Turkey Dinner with all the fixings and good memories to boot.

Merry Christmas everyone. May you come away this evening feeling refreshed and hopeful that Christ's peace is impacting your lives and the world. Knowing that God loves you no matter how rough your journey has been. Rejoicing that you are home. And hearing Jesus sing to us this night, "I'll be home for Christmas. You can plan on me."

Let us pray, loving God, we give thanks for your Son who gives us hope that we will experience your peace and harmony in our lives and in the world. Like the star, like the angels, may your presence shine brightly in our lives as we walk or drive this rugged journey called life. **Amen.**