

Welcome Home for Christmas

December 24, 2006

(The Nativity of Jesus Christ - Year C)

Luke 2: 1-20

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

There is an old Christmas song that sings about being home for Christmas.

Now, you'll just have to imagine that I have the same voice as Bing Crosby, but the song goes like this:

{sing}

I'll be home for Christmas,

You can count on me.

Please have snow and mistletoe

And presents on the tree.

Christmas Eve will find me,

Where the love light gleams.

I'll be home for Christmas,

If only in my dreams.

All of us have memories of being home for Christmas.

As a boy, I remember the smell of homemade apple cakes being baked by my Mom, which we would deliver to our neighbors and friends. I remember waking up on Christmas mornings to find an electric train set and Hot Wheels and a Light Brite under the Christmas tree.

And, I have fond memories of Christmas at home as an adult, as well. I remember Susan and I buying our very first house (with our very first mortgage) and laboring for hours and hours to put up hundreds of little white lights, so that our home would outshine the houses of my new neighbors.

I remember being a young father, where I quickly learned to take one whole day off from work in mid-December, to pre-assemble all the boys' toys that had been advertised as: "*Some assembly required.*"

Like many of you, I have many wonderful memories of home at Christmas.

But, some of us do not always have wonderful memories of home at Christmas.

Some of us are alone on Christmas because the grown kids now go to be with their in-laws.

Some of us are experiencing pain and grief over the loss of a loved one. Some of us are unemployed, or sick, or disappointed because Christmas never turns out quite the way it seems to turn out in the movies.

Christmas at home can be wonderful, and sometimes Christmas at home can be painful.

Two thousand years ago, outside of Bethlehem, the shepherds were visited by an angel, and were told to leave their homes.

The angel told the shepherds to go and look for a new home, to look for a new family.

So, the shepherds said to one another:

“Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.”

So, the shepherds went with haste and found a home that was not filled with the aroma of homemade apple cakes, but with the aroma of dirty cattle and sheep.

The shepherds went and found a home that was not owned or even mortgaged, but they found a manger filled with hay.

The shepherds went and found a family that did not write a perfect Christmas letter to insert in their Christmas cards, but they found a family that was homeless and poor and suffering from the pain of recent childbirth.

The shepherds left their fields and their sheep to find a new family and a new home, where *both* the wonderful *and* the painful memories are welcomed.

For, the birth of Jesus creates a brand new family, with a brand new home, where *everyone* is welcome.

The mission statement, the motto, of St. Alban's Episcopal Church is this:

St. Alban's is a family of God welcoming everyone home.

And, on Christmas Eve at St. Alban's, we gather together as a family of God, to remember that night when God called the shepherds out of their fields, when God welcomed the shepherds into a new family and a new home.

The poet Robert Frost once said:

"Home is the place where, when you go there, they have to take you in."

When you came into this church tonight, we took you in.

We did not ask you if you were having a wonderful or a painful Christmas at home.

We did not ask you for your HEB Points Card or for your PIN number. We did not ask you for a detailed statement of your doctrines or your doubts.

Because, when you leave your fields and your sheep and come into this church, we will take you in and welcome you into God's family.

For, as we sit in this church on this night, the one thing that we have in common is that, like the shepherds, we have all said to each another:

"Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us."

And, when we get to Bethlehem, we find Mary and Joseph and the child lying in a manger.

And, when we get to Bethlehem, we find *each other*, gathered around this new born child, who gathers us into a *new* holy family.

For, the one thing that we have in common as we sit in this church, on this dark and rainy night, is that...we are family.

Bing Crosby used to croon out:

"I'll be home for Christmas

If only in my dreams.”

But, the birth of Jesus is not a dream.
The birth of Jesus and of his family is a reality.

For, the Christmas angels sing to the shepherds.
And, they sing to all of us:

“Glory to God in the highest,
And peace to God’s family on earth.”

My dear family:
Welcome home...for Christmas.

AMEN.

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