

SERMON- Christmas Day (A)
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Isaiah 9:2-7

Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-14

St. Timothy's
December 24-25, 2022

Psalm 96

OPENING:

“Are you going home for Christmas?”

Such a simple question “Are you going home for Christmas?”

Now Christmas sermons can be saccharine, a little schmaltzy.

So remember that coffee commercial from *Folgers* that used to run *over and over and over* during the holidays?

You have seen it, it's the one where the college aged son named “Peter” comes home on Christmas morning, unbeknownst to his sleeping family, and puts on a fresh cup of (you guessed it) *Folgers* coffee. The aroma wakes up the whole family who celebrate now that everyone has come home for Christmas.¹

Maybe that image of homecoming is what we are looking for this and every Christmas. I'll give it away up front, I am going to preach about how Christ is coming home to you on this Christmas, BUT...maybe that does not cut it, and instead you just simply want your family here, home.

GOSPEL:

SO: “Are you going home for Christmas?”

The answer to that question for the Holy Family is both “Yes” and “No.”

Joseph had been forced to travel to his birthplace in Bethlehem on account of the Roman census. Mary, meanwhile, was decidedly not home for Christmas. She might be wondering why SHE had to travel the 80 some miles to her in-laws in the later stage of pregnancy. All because her husband needed to pay his taxes. The marriage has already gotten off to a rough start.

Rougher, of course, because the nature of her pregnancy; God knows the conversations that were going on between the two newly betrothed!

The late-great comedian (and Episcopalian!) Robin Williams did a bit where Joseph comes home from a long day at the carpentry business and Mary says: “I have got some news, I am pregnant... via immaculate conception” and Joseph responds: “It better be!”²

¹ [Folger's Coffee "Peter Comes Home For Christmas" Full Length - YouTube](#)

² [Robin Williams speaks on Jesus - YouTube](#)

FAMILY

For Mary and Joseph: “are you going home for Christmas?” takes on a life of its own. Think of the questions of legitimacy, social shame, and then on top of it, this perilous, uncomfortable, unnecessary journey to Bethlehem, to satiate the Roman Emperor’s ego and the needs of the Empire.

The question might not be quite as perilous for us this year, but it still can still a difficult one to answer/ ask. Think of the arguments you have had with your family this year or any year about “going home for Christmas”

They can be tough questions, so can... “Are your kids able to visit?”

OR “Are you getting together with folks for the holidays?”...

It’s a lot to ask and to answer

BUECHNER

A story—Frederick Buechner, the author and priest who died earlier this year, was living in New York city as a 20-something in the 1950s. He was at church one December morning, and he heard a sermon from the renowned preacher George Buttrick.

In the sermon, Buttrick talked about something *he* had overheard the previous Sunday leaving the church. He overheard someone asking another person our very question: “Are you going home for Christmas?”

Buechner wrote: “I can almost see Buttrick with his glasses glittering in the lectern light as he peered out at all those people listening to him in that large, dim sanctuary and asked it again:

‘Are you going home for Christmas?’-and (he) asked it in some sort of way that brought tears to my eyes and made it almost unnecessary for him to move on to his answer to the question, which was that home, finally, is the manger in Bethlehem, the place where at midnight even the oxen kneel.”³

“Are you going home for Christmas?” There was something in the way that Buttrick delivered it, and that Buechner heard it, that changed his life forever.

Buechner said that that very question was the reason he decided to devote his life to the ministry, to set out to find it... in the answer to that powerful question of

³ Frederick Buechner. 2006. “The Longing for Home” in *Secrets in the Dark: A Life in Sermons*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 234.

“Home.”

CHRIST:

We want the *Folgers* Christmas, we want the *Hallmark* Christmas, and we should. Christmas is where God comes home to us, and I would rather be “home” with my loved ones as that happens.

But, if that’s not the case or if in two or three days it just feels like everything is back to normal, know that Christ knew what you are experiencing. That he spent his life and ministry homeless, never actually close enough with his own family who raised him, with “never a place to rest his head” during his ministry⁴, in a world that did not know him or recognize him (according to John’s Gospel), in a world where he would pay the price for coming home to it.⁵

CHRISTMAS DAY:

Now I know that some of you are double-dipping like myself and attended last night’s service in addition to today. But, not to play favorites, let’s go ahead and give special shout out, a Christmas gift if you will, to those who avoid the Christmas Eve service from last night to enjoy this service on Christmas Day.

Those of you tuning in particularly for today have some of the “true Christmas spirit” because, I suspect, maybe last night is a little too much planning and production with the beautiful music and, usually, the Christmas pageant, and all the people. Instead, similar to that 1st Christmas, you prefer the simplicity, the stripped-down version of this service, to the pomp and planning of last night.

Know also, again, that the Holy Family knew what that felt like to.

Mary’s ‘birth plan’ was not to travel 80 some miles in the last trimester. Joseph did not want to show up back home with his new not-quite bride, already great with child. But they both make it work despite it all

They made it home for Christmas because in the words of the great Yiddish proverb: “If you want to hear God laugh, tell him all your plans.”

Our *planning* ultimately does not matter, our best efforts are not what achieves Christmas. Even in the best of years, we were never really able to plan our way into it. God is the one doing the work all along, coming to us, making “home” for us in the most miraculous way possible.

⁴ Luke 9.58

⁵ John 1.10, 14.17, 16.3

If we were planning it, the *plan* for the Messiah would not be a baby in a manger. If we were planning it, the *plan* for the Incarnation might have had a bit more majestic setting.

If we were planning it, the welcoming party would not have been these illiterate shepherds from the field over.

CONCLUSION

So the answer to the question: “Are you going home for Christmas?” is

“Yes, I am here... I am already there.”

I’ll say it aloud:

“Merry Christmas, welcome to St. Timothy’s Church,
and know that you are HOME.”

Be it COVID, a BOMB CYCLONE, an Artic Freeze, you name it.

You are home, not because where you are viewing this service from, or who is around you, or even because you belong to this particular Church community. You are home for Christmas because Christ has come home to you, and to me, and all of us.

Maybe, Christmas sermons can tend towards the overly sweet but gosh do we need to hear that message of good news.

Know that you are home, you have made it Bethlehem, the angels are here with you, so are the shepherds, and the ox and the ass and whoever else needs to be.

It does not matter what we did to make all that happen, God made it happen, God figured it out. A pregnant virgin, a worldwide census, Old Testament prophecies, iffy travel arrangements.... God made it work.

So, if you are surrounded by family, or by your lonesome. If the tree is better than ever, or if the Christmas cards did not get sent. God has made it happen, by the mystery of the Incarnation, by the reality of what we celebrate on this day.

You are home because Christ has come to you on this day and always.

AMEN