

Christmas Eve 2018

Isaiah 9:2-7

Psalm 96

Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-14

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Grace and peace to you all from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – Amen.

Merry Christmas to you all!

Whether it is the love and the welcome of friends and family that drew you here, the joy that you feel as we raise our voices in song, or simply the hope that comes in the midst of the darkness of our world, as we remember that Emmanuel – God with us – has come to make a home with us all. Trust and know that you are welcome here, just as you are, and we are so glad you have gathered with us this evening at Holy Spirit.

Tonight we hear a story we have come to know so well.

Joseph had been called to make his way back to his ancestral home.

A long and hard journey for both him and his partner Mary, who would come to bear their son in this new and unfamiliar town. A calling neither of them would have opted for on their own, but as it was a decree made by the Emperor they had no way of turning him down. So the Holy family made their way to Bethlehem that first Christmas Eve, along with thousands of others who had gathered to be counted from across the region.

And as I paused to think about this story this year – I couldn't help but think of the ways it continues to unfold today as many of us pack up our lives, our families, and our presents journeying halfway across the province or even country to be "home" for the holidays each December.

While we may only have a parental request - not a royal decree ushering us home, we have gathered here in Edmonton tonight because there is something greater that has drawn us together.

Though our situation is different from the Holy families all those years ago – I think in a way, we are all looking for that same connection they felt at the inn as shepherds, angels, and animals came to surround them – a place where they could be named, known, and loved in a home away from home.

Yet, tonight's story of the Holy family and Christ's birth also remind us that this feeling of "home" can be both a blessing and an ever changing place to find in our world. Home

after all has come to have many different meanings for us all.

Sometimes, by “home” we mean a sense of the familiar, a feeling of safety and security. A place where we can truly be ourselves. Where we can forget to wipe our feet at the front door. Where we can nod towards the potatoes at the dinner table and someone will still know to pass them without question. Our home can come to represent stability – a rootedness that we can’t seem to find anywhere else – a connection to our past that helps us find ourselves.

And if that’s the home we are looking for, then I wonder if Christmas is really the place we can truly find it.

Christmas is after all, a story about people on the move without much more than a star and a song to find their way.

Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem without much of a plan to fill out a government form. Baring a child in the most temporary of places, before being shuffled off as refugees to a different country.

And then there are the shepherds who wandered with their sheep from watering hole to watering hole. The wise men who followed a star in search of a king, and the angels who flew throughout the countryside disrupting anyone who would listen to them sing.

The story of Christmas isn’t as settled and calm a tale as many of our nativities tend to portray. It’s a story that left everyone involved wondering what was going to happen next.

Kind of like most of our lives today.

Constantly busy, on the move, and wondering how we will get through the coming day.

Maybe that’s why we’ve tried to nail this story down, through the calming words of our hymns, pageants, and readings. To try to plant it firmly beneath our feet because our lives are in perpetual motion, in our ever changing world, spinning faster and faster and we simply need to take a mental health break, to settle down, kick back and bathe in the familiar for a while - if only to catch our breath.

And even if we find our way home to this familiar narrative for Christmas, “home” might not look as homey as it did last year.

A few extra grandkids spilling juice on the new carpet. A bigger turkey to feed the extra mouths. The noise of the football game competing with the latest gaming system downstairs.

Or maybe there's the empty chair at the table this year, the stocking not filled as much as you had hoped, the smaller bird to feed fewer mouths. All the Christmas traditions where everyone takes a part is now a more solitary exercise, and the memories that rise up to meet us remind us of who is not there.

Perhaps this was your best year ever, and the changes in your life were definitely for the better. You finally feel like your life is on track, your health, your relationships, your career have all been enriched in 2018, and you see greater possibilities waiting for you in the year ahead.

Or maybe this was the year the x-ray found the spot, or your marriage disintegrated, or you lost your job. Maybe this was the year that you suddenly realized that all you worked for all those years was collapsing around you, and there was nothing you could do about it but watch it happen.

Maybe you have found yourself somewhere in between – wondering if this tired old world will ever change.

I think this is why it is fitting, that Christmas comes around the same time as the winter solstice each year - the darkest night of the year. While we don't know the exact date that Jesus was born, we do know that December 25 already hosted two other related festivals celebrating the return of the earth's light from the unconquered sun.

And while there was likely many reasons for Christmas to come to be celebrated around this time - I like to think that December 25 was chosen because the days are starting to get longer after six months of increasing darkness. And with the longer days comes the promise of spring.

A time that echoes the truth of the moment God chose to make his home with and among us all. Jesus – Emmanuel – God who promised to be with us – made a home in the midst of our darkness and death, so that we would be welcomed into the midst of Christ's light and life here and now.

Forever making a home here in our midst, even as we gather hearing God's saving story in this moment – a story that tells us that where ever we come to find ourselves, no

matter how far from home we may go, God comes again and again to us to make us whole.

So that wherever grief is being born amidst life's pain, God makes a home.

Wherever life's hope, joy, peace, and love find expression, God makes a home.

Wherever people think of each other before they think of themselves, God makes a home.

Wherever a prayer is said, whether with a smile or through clenched teeth, with the hope that someone, somewhere is listening, God makes a home.

Wherever God is praised with heartfelt joy, or wherever the rumour of God is a hunch, a suspicion that we aren't alone, a longing to touch the divine, there God makes a home.

So, maybe we have it backwards after all.

We're not the ones who are supposed to find our way home on Christmas.

In Christmas, God comes to find a home in us.

In our families, our relationships, our cares, and within our world.

At Christmas Jesus makes his home in us.

That we might share that home with others.

Sharing the great hope the Christ child has brought to us all.

And it is my prayer that this would be true for us all – Amen.