

Sermons at
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)
Reggie Denton, Pastor

Christmas Eve
Luke 2:1-20

Before we begin, there's something I'd like you to watch and consider. Pay attention to the WORDS that are spoken, because they're IMPORTANT. (I'm sure the OWNER of this video won't mind us showing it in public.)

(Show BMW Road Home, (30 seconds))

Yes, I know, it's a commercial. An old one actually. But as I've said before, sometimes there's some good STUFF in commercials.

Now, I don't usually pay any ATTENTION to BMW commercials, but a couple years ago, THAT PARTICULAR one caught my interest. HOME.

It SAID, "There's one road that will always remain the same. It's familiar. It's comfortable and its destination is somewhere we never quite left. It's the road home." It was from a SERIES of ads that said, "Times change – the road HOME stays the same." HOME.

THIS year, coming home for CHRISTMAS may be even MORE meaningful, because so MANY of us COULDN'T come home for Christmas LAST year. HOME.

Just SAYING the word STIRS up our emotions. HOME.

I'm reminded of something our presiding bishop of the ELCA, Elizabeth Eaton, said once about HER home. She said,

I remember my home growing up. It was on the west side of Cleveland...I still dream about it. It was a place where I felt safe, where my FAMILY was, and it was full of wonderful Christmas memories. My senior year of college, my parents moved to the shores of Lake Erie. It's every west-sider's dream in Cleveland to get to the lake, and they finally made it. But my HOME was GONE. In fact, I had to find DIRECTIONS to my parents' home for Christmas break. I STILL DREAM about the home where I grew up. I still miss it and can still remember EVERY feature of it.

I REALIZE (now) that ALL of us have a DEEP LONGING for home. At Christmas, I think it's ESPECIALLY poignant and deep for people.

Christmas is ABOUT home, and the comfort it gives us, and the DESIRE to experience the WONDER of it. Many of our traditional Christmas songs talk about BEING home for Christmas, and how HARD it is when we're not. *There's No Place Like Home for the Holidays* says "no matter how far away you roam...For the holidays you can't beat home sweet home!" *I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas* is about the Christmases he "USED to know." *I'll Be Home for Christmas* expresses the melancholy of someone who's FAR from home at Christmas. It ends with the line "I'll be HOME for Christmas, (sing) if ONLY in my dreams."

WHERE IS HOME? I've called MANY PLACES home over the years, but they ALL had ONE thing in COMMON – family. Home is where your HEART is, home is where LOVE is. We may get ATTACHED to a PLACE, the house we grew up in, the church building where we shared so many important life events. But home may NOT be a physical PLACE at ALL. It might be something MORE.

During World War II, four young American soldiers, who had been on the front lines for some time, were sent back away from the fighting to a small French village for a little R & R. When they arrived SAFELY in the village, they suddenly realized that it was Christmas. They began to discuss how they'd like to SPEND Christmas. One of the soldiers said, "You know, as we were coming into town earlier, I noticed an orphanage on the OUTSKIRTS of the village. Why don't we go there

Christmas morning and take some presents to those kids?" The others liked the idea, and the more they talked about it, the more excited they became. So they went out and bought all kinds of toys and candy and clothing, food and books and games, and early Christmas morning, they showed up at the front door of the orphanage with Christmas presents for ALL the children.

The orphanage director was pleased, and all the children were delighted as they opened their gifts. All the children that is, except for one little GIRL who stood quietly off to the side. She appeared to be 5 or 6 years old and she looked very sad. One of the soldiers noticed that she wasn't participating and asked the orphanage director about her. "O, bless her heart," said the director, "We just got her last week. Both of her parents were killed. There was no one to take her in, so we brought her here."

The soldier went over to the little girl and gently, he said to her, "It's Christmas morning, and we have presents here: toys, clothes, candy, food, books, puzzles. What would you like? What do you want MOST for Christmas?" And the little girl said, "I want somebody to HOLD me."

Maybe THAT'S what "home" means – someone to HOLD us. This sacred season comes along every year to remind us that God is, even now, reaching out to us with open arms, to HOLD us in his love.

Mary and Joseph were NOT HOME that FIRST Christmas. They were FAR FROM their home, far from their PEOPLE. They were way down in Bethlehem, FAR from Nazareth. How disorienting that must have been for them.

But the truth is, Mary and Joseph were RIGHT at home for Christmas, because the Christ-child was WITH them. JESUS is our TRUE home. That's our HOPE at Christmastime, and our hope the REST of the year too. We are NEVER FAR from home, because Christ is as NEAR to us as our own breath, our own pulse.

God KEEPS COMING to us, and helps us FEEL AT home, WHEREVER we are. Even though the PLACE may CHANGE, even though the people we SHARED our home WITH may pass away, God PROMISES to COME to us and make GOD'S home with US. Christmas means that God will ALWAYS be WITH us. That why we CALL him "Immanuel," – God WITH us.

There IS a road that we travel on in life. But CONTRARY to what BMW says, it may NOT always be the same. It may NOT be familiar. It may NOT always be COMFORTABLE. It might be a GRUELING road. And we MOVE. We move from the home MADE FOR us as a child, to the one we make for OURSELVES as adults, to the home GOD makes for us.

But we can trust that God is WITH us ON that road. And GOD DOES stay the same – ALWAYS coming to us, ALWAYS holding us, ALWAYS calling us out into the world.

At Christmas, God gives us a slice of the home that we're HEADED for, a foretaste of the feast to come. The LOVE that we SHARE THIS day IS the ROAD HOME, to GOD.

God IS love, and God IS HOME.

So, WHEREVER you ARE, remember that JESUS is WITH you, so you ARE HOME for Christmas, and He IS HOLDING you.

Welcome home. Amen.