

John 1:1-14
Isaiah 52:7-10

Psalms 98 (818-819 UMH)
Hebrews 1:1-3

12/25/16—Christmas Day

A Home for Christmas

I'll be home for Christmas. You can plan 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.

That song was recorded by Bing Crosby in nineteen forty-three. Its poignant words make us think of a World War Two-era soldier writing to his family at the home he's longing for. At Christmas, home is a good place to be. Now I know that some folk like to spend Christmas lying on a sun-drenched tropical beach. Or taking a cruise. Or hitting the ski slopes.

But for others, there's a tugging at the heartstrings. There's a yearning for Christmases long, long ago, Christmases that live in memory. It's been many years, but I can still remember the painful homesickness of the first Christmas I couldn't be at my parents' house, where Christmas had always happened. For many of us, the place where we want most to be at Christmas is home.

You have left *your* home this Christmas morning to come to God's house. I'm so glad you did! It's not too often that December twenty-fifth falls on a Sunday and we get to celebrate this day together. You know, I heard that some mega-churches actually *cancel* services today, so people can be with their families.

But you're with your family *right now!* With your brothers and sisters in Christ. In an intimate gathering of committed believers. What day could be better than today to be in God's house? On this Christmas morning, you've come. On this day of days, you've come in hope, in faith, to hear the message of Christmas.

And on this day, the church reads the soaring prologue to John's Gospel. Now you might be more familiar with the other gospels, the ones that tell about the manger in Bethlehem, the song of angels, the witness of shepherds, the worship of wise men. We know the nativity stories in the other gospels. But today we hear John. This Gospel is different from the others. The Gospel according to John is all about who Jesus really *is*.

John's Gospel starts with the words "In the beginning." Words that remind us of Genesis' first verses and of what was before creation.

On this Christmas Day, John the evangelist wants us to understand that the divine Word who was with God outside of time, the pre-existent One *who was and who is and who always will be God*, is the very One who breaks into human history—and into our world—as one of us. As Jesus.

On this Christmas Day, John opens our eyes and opens our hearts. John invites us to embrace the deep mystery of the Incarnation. John leads us to the realization that when we look at Jesus, we're seeing the face of God. Who leaves a heavenly home to come into the world. Who comes to walk the earth, yet has no place to lay his head.

On this Christmas Day, John proclaims that *the Word became flesh and lived among us*. That Greek word we translate "lived" actually means *tabernacled* or—literally—pitched a tent. If you've ever taken shelter in a tent, you know that it's not a real home. God wants so much to be with us that God comes to earth, God pitches a tent, God camps out—so to

speak—to be near us. Because we can't get to God, God comes to us in Jesus.

Jesus is the bridge across the great chasm that has separated us sin-damaged human beings from God. Jesus accomplishes what no one else could: God and sinners reconciled—as Charles Wesley famously puts it. Because of Jesus, you and I are children of God!

For on this Christmas Day, John affirms that *to all who received [Jesus], who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God*. Through Jesus, you and I become part of God's family.

And family makes us think of home. Home is where your family gathers. Home is a place of comfort where, in the circle of your family, there's a feeling of connection. A feeling of belonging. A feeling of intimacy. A feeling of relationship.

But on this Christmas Day, John also tells us that the Word made flesh—through whom the world was made—comes into the world unknown and unrecognized. This One who fashioned human creatures is not received by his own people. Not accepted. Not welcomed. He was without a home.

Because home is defined as the place that when you go there, they take you in. Home—to borrow the words of an old TV theme song—is *where everybody knows your name, and they're always glad you came*. Home is where you're welcomed. Home is where you're accepted. And home is where you're forgiven. By the One who saves.

The One who is full of grace and truth.

The One who has become homeless for you and me in order to make a home for us.

We envision home as a place not of darkness, but of light. When a home listed for sale is shown to prospective buyers, real estate agents always advise sellers to turn on all the lights. And you've heard about a particular motel chain that invites guests to think of their lodgings as a home away from home. Their slogan goes: *We'll leave the light on for you*. Home is where the light is.

And on this Christmas Day, John announces that the light of the world has come. The true light of *all* people, shining into even the darkest corners of this weary old world. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Cannot overcome it. Will *never* be able to overcome it! There will be no darkness at all. But only the light, the glory of the One who is preparing for you an everlasting home.

Beloved, there's one more thing about home. Home is where you share a meal. Home is where you gather around a table with your family. And on this day, that's what we, God's family, God's children, do. So come. Celebrate the great glad tidings that God has come to us in Christ Jesus! Feast at his table. Be filled with him. Be filled with the bread of heaven. Be filled with the cup of salvation. Be caught up in the miracle, the wonder, and the joy of the gift of God's love, the gift of Christmas. Let him be born in you today. For he is your home, and all you long for is in him, this blessed Christmas Day and forever.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.