

The Road to Bethlehem
“The Road Home”
Luke 2:1-20

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In a Tom Wilson cartoon, Ziggy is standing in front of a large directional sign at a shopping mall. The familiar “You Are Here” arrow is pointing to a particular spot. Under the sign this question has been added: “ISN’T IT ABOUT TIME YOU HEADED HOME?” That’s what I’d like to talk about tonight.

The dictionary defines home as a house we inhabit, often with other people, a pet or two, and enough room to accommodate the in-laws for special occasions. Its not square footage I’d like to discuss with you tonight. Home is where the heart is. Home is where the soul dwells. Isn’t it about time you headed home?

COME HOME TO A SELF YOU CAN LIVE WITH!

There’s an old story about actor, Kirk Douglas, picking up a hitchhiker on a California freeway. As the fortunate passenger settled down for a free ride, he suddenly recognized the star with whom he was riding. Excited and frightened to be in the presence of a celebrity, the hitch-hiker shouted: “Man do you know who you are? That’s what I want to ask you. Do you know who you are?”

Some would have us believe we are WHERE WE CAME FROM! “*So Joseph went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to Bethlehem, because he belonged to the house and lineage of David.*” Talk show hosts and late night comedians have had a heyday with Tara Connors, the reigning Miss U.S.A. from Kentucky, who evidently couldn’t handle the night life of New York City. Their punch line is always the same—“After all, she is from Kentucky.”

Some would have us believe we are what we DO! We are doctors, lawyers, business women, and home-makers. We do invest a lot of ourselves in our vocations and occupations. If we are what we do, then who are we when we retire? Some of you are asking that question.

Some think we are what we HAVE! What if a tornado strikes, the stock market crashes, thieves break in and steal, or enemies invade our country? Does loss of possessions mean we are out of existence? Some people think that. That’s why suicides soar in difficult economic times.

Let me tell you who you are! **YOU ARE A CHILD OF GOD.** Before you were wounded by family, or weary with work, or worried about your possessions, you were

created in the image of God. Before we were sinners, or addicts, or perfectionists, or control freaks, we were loved with an everlasting love. Jesus said it well: *“Anyone who loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him and make our home in him”* (John 14:23).

COME HOME TO A GOD YOU CAN TALK WITH

“And while they were there, the time came for the baby to be born and Mary gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2: 6-7). Some of us have heard that so many times we are numbed to its meaning.

Our three-year-old granddaughter called us the other night. She wanted to sing us a song. This is what she sang:

Jesus loves me, this I know,
For the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to Him belong
They are weak, but He is strong.

Remember when it was that simple? When everything was believable? When you couldn't wait for Christmas? When life was full of mystery? Then we grew up. Parents fell from perfection. Life became difficult. Questions flooded our minds.

Exactly how did the sperm of the Holy Spirit impregnate the reproductive egg of Mary? Exactly how many angels were there in the Heavenly Hosts? How come only the shepherds could hear them? If God came to save the world, how come it isn't saved yet? Why is there illness, poverty, suffering, death? We need to ask the questions. We need to move beyond them too.

We need to be born again. Not necessarily in some dramatic fashion, but nonetheless renewed in mind and spirit. We need new eyes for seeing, new ears for listening. We need faith beyond the questions, and hope beyond the doubts. *“O Holy Child of Bethlehem, be born in us today.”* For ultimately faith is not about creeds, but about a relationship, a relationship of a Divine kind.

COME HOME TO A CHURCH YOU CAN CONNECT WITH.

The shepherds said to one another, *“Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”*

I think the hardest thing I've ever had to do on Christmas Eve, was deliver the news to a young father and his two children that his wife and their mother had been killed in an automobile accident. I was chaplain of a rescue squad back then. Christmas presents were under the tree. The children were in a back room playing. The stunned father in disbelief said, *“Surely, you've come to the wrong house.”* The police officer with me assured him we hadn't. After a while, I said to that crushed

family, “Do you have a pastor or priest that I could call?” The father mumbled, “No. We don’t go to church.”

I remember coming home and saying to Sandy, “I don’t ever want to face life alone.” That was a long time ago. I know it better now than I knew it then. I don’t want to face life alone. I need my friends. I need a church family to rejoice with me and weep with me. There are plenty of good ones around.

Oh, I know, church people are far from perfect. Sometimes we want other people to do for us what only God can do, that is love us unconditionally. Being in a community is not always easy, but community is essential for survival.

So, we gather at the table for Holy Communion tonight. We gather not because we are good, but because we are needy. It’s a strange meal. It’s about a broken Body and spilled Blood. It gets kind of messy at the table, but life is messy. Whosoever will may come; the rich, the poor, the young, the old, the glad, the sad, the sinners, the saints.

Theologian, Marcus Borg, says, “To separate from community is like turning your back on a banquet right in front of you, and deciding to go and forage for food by yourself.”

Isn’t it about time you headed home?