

Home for the Holidays. No other holiday stirs such focus as to be home or with family. I don't hear people say, "Got to get home for Easter!" Got to get home for Memorial Day!" But Christmas is different. People travel thousands of miles to be with family, wherever family meets at Christmas. But did you realize at that first Christmas, no one was at home.

Mary and Joseph certainly weren't. It hadn't been that long ago that they were in Nazareth... minding their own business *at home*. But God changed all that. Think of what had transpired in the last 9 months: Angel visits to each of them telling them of their part in God's eternal plan. An edict from the king – or emperor actually, Caesar Augustus, telling them that they had to leave what was their home and go to where their ancestor was born.

Ponder that one for a minute. Just to get Mary and Joseph where he wanted them, where he had promised us they would be in His Word – in order to make that happen, God manipulated world history. He gave Rome such total dominance that the word of one man caused nations to shift and masses to move so that virtually no one was home for Christmas. All because God had made a promise and he wanted to keep it. So our text says that "**Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.**" A journey of between 70 and 100 miles depending on the route they took... that far away from home...and she was about to give birth, so it could not have been a comfortable trip. Mary and Joseph were certainly not home for Christmas. In fact, you know the story, they weren't even in *a* home. No, they spent that night out with the animals.

And scan the other characters in the text. The angels weren't home that night. They had special duties – to go visit some shepherds and explain what Christmas really is, really explain what "home" really is too – but we'll get back to that later. If not for their explanation of the events of that night – no one would have seen the completely hidden glory of God.

And the shepherds weren't home. They were out **in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night**. And then they made a trip to some feedtrough in town to see Christmas, to see what the angel was talking about and to tell those poor new parents what had been told them about the birth of this child.

And the child – he certainly wasn't home. But here's the difference. He's the only one in the story that really had a choice. Mary and Joseph had to fear the emperor's wrath if they didn't leave home. The angels had a command from God and weren't able to resist that even if they wanted to. The shepherds had the compulsion of curiosity and miracle – you can't just ignore a skyfull of angels. But Jesus, he chose to come and look at how far from home he came. He chose to leave his heavenly throne and set aside the use of his glory and power and honor and dominion. That stuff is home for him. Think of how far from "home" he came for Christmas to come here, because he loves you and me, and he wants us to be home forever.

You see, without him, we would never be home. As a race, God made us to be with him. We were created to be in God's presence. That is our home. Remember that conversation God had with himself that first week? "**Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.**" And he did. And we were at home with God in that perfect garden. We experienced perfect unity with His will and perfect expression of his love – and we were home, with all the comforts of home and security of home and peace of home...until sin came in and destroyed that image of the holy God, that likeness of his perfection. I know "The Fall" is ancient history, but it is history that changed us and it is history that we just keep on repeating, so much so that we hardly can tell what home is.

Every mistake you make, every selfish decision, every hurtful word, every prideful thought, every failure of weakness – every single one destroys what we were made to be – every

sin means we don't get to be home with God. Truth be told, you can probably list some of your family history that makes your physical home here not always feel so much like a place of peace and love and support. That's dealing with people like us, fellow sinful humans.

But if our real home is a place of absolute perfection – our sins mean we are NOT home for Christmas or anytime. In fact, our sin puts us so far away from God that there are times when we pretend like this sinful lifestyle IS home, as we get so caught up in the things of this life that we stop focusing on our true eternal home. That's a problem.

So Merry Christmas! God himself, the second person of the Trinity, the eternal Son of God and judge of all, through whom all things were made, who, the Bible says, "**sustains all things by his powerful Word**", who holds the stars in the sky and the planets in their courses, who rules the sea and wind and sky, ...**God** left his home, and made this place of sin and stress and selfishness his home for a while. And Luke records it so simply: "**The time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.**" God became man.

Think of how far from his home of perfection and peace and power he had come – to be born a Jew in a town filled with Jews who were being oppressed by those Romans, to a family of an unwed mother, to a couple that couldn't even provide him a room his first night. And look at the subject in Luke's record of this glorious entry of God into our world. "She gave birth...She wrapped him...She placed him in a manger." An unwed Jewish girl, probably a teenager. To all appearances, she is the one doing the action here. She is the one getting the credit for what appears to be going on that day.

That's how far Jesus came from his home of glory, honor and power – for you. Because, after all, the angel tells us what he came here to do. Look at verse 11: "**Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ, the Lord.**" He came to be our Savior, the Christ, the one promised to come and save us from sin, the one God promised at the time already of that first sin, the one who would crush Satan's head. So Jesus came, born in that manger to live in our place, to suffer our shame, to bear our guilt. Jesus came here to give his life in that excruciating, humiliating death on a cross. He was content with a manger here so we can have a mansion when we die

Jesus left home for Christmas. All so that we can be home, forever. For us, let's be real, this place will never be home. Our houses may fill up with family here, but you know that that also brings with it the stress of past arguments and jealousies. And even with that, God gives us opportunities to see and show and feel love and encouragement and support here, foretastes of our real home.

Or take your church home here, this beautiful place, designed to be a picture of our eternal home of saints living together in love, even this can bring personality differences and conflict, feelings of overwork and underappreciation. And yet God uses this place and these forgiven people to remind us of our real home, to teach us what he's done to guarantee it for us, and to demonstrate the love and peace and joy that will one day be ours together forever in fullness in eternity. So, I guess this time of year isn't necessarily about being home for Christmas. It's about the fact that one day we will be home because of Christmas, forever. See you there. And, in the meantime, see you here as we prepare for it. In Christ. Merry Christmas! Amen