

Home for Christmas

Dear Friends,

There is something about being home for Christmas that stirs the childhood dreams of Christmas. Dreams that Bing Crosby sang about, "I'll be home for Christmas, if only in my dreams," but for many this year, this is not possible.

You may be one of those who don't have a home, or you may be separated from family and friends. You feel like a cosmic orphan set adrift in a hostile universe. For some of you, home is a shack with frozen water pipes, no heat or lights. But you are not alone; in fact, Christmas is the story of a road weary homeless couple who found themselves in a stable among animals because there was no room for them in the inn.

St. Louis, like Bethlehem is actually 2 cities. The first consists of those with money, power, and influence. It is the citizens of this city which continue the politicians, the media, and the power brokers.

The second city is made up of the poor, the elderly, and the homeless. It is this city, where the struggle for daily survival becomes preeminent. It is in this second city, that I meet individuals like Levi and Stella, who were driven to the point of suicide. Their legs started to freeze as they were forced to sleep outside. But they are not done.

There is also Heather, Bo, and Michelle who sleeps outside without shelter, with no heat, or a hot meal to eat.

Much of these individuals suffering is a result of the fear of the first city, the city that is made up of the officials who want the citizens of the second city out of complete sight and mind. Intoxicated by a cocktail mixture of fear and greed, they panic when they see the citizens of the city in need in their community.

When the voices of the oppressed and impoverished people are too loud, the police are called; because the officials want their peace, power, and properties at all costs; without regards to human life, and because they lack the knowledge and understanding of the homeless community. That's somebody's son or daughter out there. That's the next doctor, preacher, teacher, or lawyer out there suffering in silence.

The homeless know what it is like, to be locked out, unable to find an apartment they can afford, as developers receive tax abatements, CDA grants and the power of eminent domain.

If you find as a part of the second city that you are locked out in the stable, realize you may be penniless but you are not powerless. You may feel hopeless but you are not helpless – Rise Up – turn to the source of absolute power – The Christ of Christmas.

Come home to Him now and discover there is a light that is not only shining over you but desires to shine in you. Jesus is the light of the world, who died and rose to give all of us, rich or poor, life both now and for all eternity.

I come to you right now as one who can testify from personal experience that it is the living Jesus who has given me the strength to go year after year finding a home in the presence of the Heavenly Father.

Tragically enough many this Christmas season, even though they have homes, feel hopeless and homeless. They have lost it among the neon lights, the downtown advertisements, the Christmas parades which promotes everything from Bugs Bunny to Santa Clause, different parties, and no family.

They forget that the true meaning of Christmas is the Celebration of the birth of Christ. God entrusted His only son not to Herod or to city hall, the state capitol, or the Roman government, but to a homeless couple.

Mary and Joseph had submitted themselves to Caesars census, but when they got to Bethlehem, they discovered that Herod's friends got all the rooms in the Inn – sounds like St. Louis and Jefferson City, doesn't it? Herod's friends got the money for stadiums, and luxury condo's while you and your children get the hard pavement of the streets.

But Mary and Joseph didn't crash under the pressure of the bureaucracy. They ultimately turned to God. Sure they ended up in a stable. Yes, Mary could have died in child birth, and indeed Jesus was swaddled in rags because His mother – like so many of the homeless mothers had neither diapers or pampers, But God had everything predestined and under control.

Mary and Joseph probably were not aware that above them, beyond the darkness and hopelessness of their situation, a beautiful bright star was shining. And the star was not going unnoticed.

Three wise men saw the star and they decided to respond - by becoming directly involved – they went to the homeless child – a star is shining over these conditions that so often seem so hopeless.

These wise men and women will not return to Herod's camp where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. They will rise up and declare – “Enough! Herod, we won't accept your defense of an electric company, that would shut off the electricity of

thousands of families, in the dead of the winter, subjecting tens of thousands of little babies to a potentially slow winter death in their cold dark homes.”

Others will say, “Herod, we have had enough! No longer will we return to your camp for we have seen Christ the child. You will no longer keep us paralyzed or bound by fear. We will no longer allow fear to keep us from opening our church doors to the homeless and hurting when it comes to providing shelter, food, and assistance as Matthew 25:31-46 states, and portions of scripture direct.” As we do this, we will discover what it means to come home to God’s love and presence in a new and powerful way.

Christmas is also a time of miracles, which reminds us of God’s desire to work miracles in our lives. Reflecting on the miracles of Christmas causes us to realize that, “all things are possible to him who believes” (Mark 9:23).

The miracle of Christmas involves the miracle of the incarceration where Jesus was conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit without the involvement of a human father (Luke 1:53). This made it possible for God, the Son to become a human being without giving up His deity.

When we accept the reality of this miracle, we are then able to realize that the celebration of Christmas is the celebration of God’s miracle power which enables us to come home to Him in a new and powerful way. This means that when things look impossible, we are reminded that Jesus is the living miracles who can make it possible for all of us that accepts this. For the Word of God declares, “all things are possible for those who believe in the Lord.”

Why do we always associate Christmas with home? Many of our best memories are built around being home at Christmas. I remember the Christmas tree with presents under it. The Christmas carols I would sing with my brother and sister Christmas Eve, and then how we would go home after the Children’s service and open those presents. I felt so at home.

Perhaps Augustine expressed this feeling best in his prayer, “Thou have made us for thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.” At Christmas we see that the door between heaven and earth is opened to the point we can almost envision the angels singing.

The German poet Holderin has written of the essential homelessness of all of us – our inability to ever feel completely at home in this world. There is always a longing, a yearning for something more, for something beyond, for a life we can suspect but cannot touch. It’s this homelessness that haunts the works of our greatest writers, musicians, and artists.

They know that our humanity is so limited that there is a mystery of that which lies beyond us. It lures, seduces, draws, and teases us. Some curse it – others go down the dark path of the occult led by their daily horoscopes, drug usage, candle burnings, Ouija boards, etc. but God forbid you would take such a route. That is not God's will for you!

Let's take another look at Christmas. The Christmas story is God himself contacting us from beyond. It's God getting in touch with us through a baby born at Bethlehem saying, "Here is my gift of love. You have a home with me."

Jesus himself later said, "In my Father's house are many rooms... I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am you may be also" (John 14:2-3). At Christmas we should all feel so at home that whatever we face in this world, even if we are homeless, we have a home forever with Christ and forever.

Of course this is very difficult for those who lock their hearts and minds to the needs of others. They expect God to project the same coldness and hardness of heart that they do. Maybe that is why Christmas is such a wonderful time of the year to re-direct our lives toward our eternal home.

We all have to decide to come home to God – to surrender our heart and life to Him with a fresh commitment. That's what Christmas is really all about, isn't it? It's about being contacted by God and given a chance to make some better decisions about our lives. God has reached out to us and said, "I love you and I'm looking forward to your coming home. I have outstretched arms to receive you."

Now it's up to us to respond. Let's tell Him now. "I'm glad God that you have gotten in touch with me through Jesus, and I do want to go home. I'm going to make some very important changes in my life. I'm coming home to you now through Christ who came to me at Christmas. Thank you for your gift of Jesus. O God, I am receiving Him now and coming home.

May this indeed be the Christmas that you receive the eternal gift that only God can give!

Yours in Christ,



Larry Rice