

Homily: “Waiting on Jesus... with Hope”

Do you know the tune “I’ll be home for Christmas”?

It was first recorded in 1942. It takes the form of a letter from a soldier stationed overseas. They sing of family, far away in a home they can only visit in their dreams. The author hoped to capture the sense of any person who was unable to make it “home” for Christmas, for any reason. And no matter what age we are, we respond to this message. We all share a hope for a true home.

What is a true home? For some of us, the question isn’t easy to answer. We may experience a constantly changing sense of what it means to be home. Maybe we’re moving or we feel unsettled in some way. Maybe we have a home, but we don’t feel comfortable there. It’s difficult for some people to find home, to find a place where hope lives.

Mary and Joseph experienced this. They left home to travel a long distance because the government wanted them to register to pay taxes. Mary was nine months pregnant, but they had no choice, just like some families today. They also didn’t know what the trip really meant or who the baby truly was. Joseph and Mary had no idea of the challenges to come, like so many who seek true homes. They were hoping for the best, trusting God to watch over them.

Finding hope is hard for many people in our day and age.

There are those who are homeless tonight, without a place to be. Sometimes it’s by their choice. Sometimes it’s forced by things outside their control. Even when we make healthy choices, it isn’t easy. There’s a lot to it. This is true for every generation. Hope has never been easy for many of us. Yet our hearts call us to “come home,” not just at the holidays, but throughout our lives.

If you can afford a home, I encourage you not to take it for granted. Circumstances change. Jobs end. Relationships evolve. Our health may decline, leading us to need assistance. You may have a home during one season only to leave it when life evolves. And we can’t get too attached to things because God is always calling us to be on the move.

God nudges us in mysterious ways. Just ask the shepherds.

Like the shepherds, we're startled when we encounter angels among us. We want more of the supernatural. But it's different for us, because Jesus isn't lying in a manger today. Jesus is in the world. We need to actively seek out the places where God is appearing.

And God is appearing. God is appearing just as profoundly today as when God appeared on that starry night long ago. Hope lives among us, all we need to do is have the faith to seek and find it.

So, we have a choice. We can be anxious, give in to our fears and crawl into private caves where we hide until we think it's safe to come out.

Or we can be like shepherds. Even though we're afraid, we find the courage to get up and go find the promised Messiah. We can follow their example. And when we find our true home, we can share the good news with joy. Tell it to everyone! This is how we find meaning, purpose and satisfaction like never before. This is the best hope we'll ever find.

But let's be clear about one thing as we follow the shepherds.

The manger isn't just for you and me, any more than it was just for the shepherds. It's not just for the privileged or those who live in any nation. It's not just for family members we like, or approve of, or agree with. It's not just for those who live and think like us. It's not just for some.

The manger is for the entire world. The angels invited everyone to come and see or, as they say in some parts, come and sit a spell.

The manger is the place where the world comes to kneel on this holy night. This is our eternal home, the place where we're always welcome. It's where we soak up Christ's peace, Christ's love, Christ's good will and hope for all people, for all time. Emmanuel, God with us, is the Messiah who came to save YOU. Alleluia!

It doesn't matter who you are or where you live. It doesn't matter whether you've come alone or you're celebrating with a family you made for yourselves. It doesn't matter what you've done wrong or how much you have in your bank account. It doesn't matter what your status or identity or background or culture or beliefs are. It doesn't matter whether you live in a mansion or an apartment or a car or a tent or a shelter. Earthly homes are temporary. Spiritual homes last forever.

I know of one eternal home. It's the home we make with Jesus. Tonight, we don't just celebrate his birth. We look forward to the day when Jesus returns and the world will celebrate love without fear.

So, gather close. You're invited. The manger is here. Come close. Take a peek. See the baby Jesus. Look with the hope of Joseph, the joy of Mary and the boldness of the shepherds of the field.

Christ is our hope, and he's worth waiting for.

Let us pray ...

Luke 2:1-20 (CEB)

In those days Caesar Augustus declared that everyone throughout the empire should be enrolled in the tax lists. This first enrollment occurred when Quirinius governed Syria. Everyone went to their own cities to be enrolled. Since Joseph belonged to David's house and family line, he went up from the city of Nazareth in Galilee to David's city, called Bethlehem, in Judea. He went to be enrolled together with Mary, who was promised to him in marriage and who was pregnant. While they were there, the time came for Mary to have her baby. She gave birth to her firstborn child, a son, wrapped him snugly, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the guestroom.

Nearby shepherds were living in the fields, guarding their sheep at night. The Lord's angel stood before them, the Lord's glory shone around them, and they were terrified.

The angel said, "Don't be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. Your savior is born today in David's city. He is Christ the Lord. This is a sign for you: you will find a newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great assembly of the heavenly forces was with the angel praising God. They said, "Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors."

When the angels returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go right now to Bethlehem and see what's happened. Let's confirm what the Lord has revealed to us." They went quickly and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw this, they reported what they had been told about this child. Everyone who heard it was amazed at what the shepherds told them. Mary committed these things to memory and considered them carefully. The shepherds returned home, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. Everything happened just as they had been told.