



Christmas Eve

December 24, 2017

## OUR HOME IS FOUND IN A MANGER

Pastor Vern Christopherson

### LUKE 2:1-16 NRSV

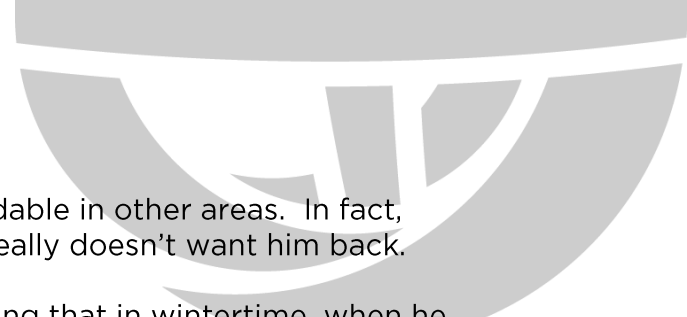
<sup>1</sup>In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup>This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup>All went to their own towns to be registered. <sup>4</sup>Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. <sup>5</sup>He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup>While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. <sup>7</sup>And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

<sup>8</sup>In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup>Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: <sup>11</sup>to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup>This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup>And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup>"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

<sup>15</sup>When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." <sup>16</sup>So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.

Robert Frost has a poem entitled, "The Death of the Hired Man." The poem tells the story of a couple named Warren and Mary. These two often have very different views of the world around them, and of the people around them. Warren and Mary own a farm, and occasionally they need to hire workers to help them, especially at haying time. The hired man who helps most often is Silas. Silas is



very good at putting up hay, but he's not so dependable in other areas. In fact, he's frustrated Warren to the point where Warren really doesn't want him back.


But Silas comes back anyway. He has a habit of doing that in wintertime, when he needs a place to stay. This particular winter has been hard on Silas. One day Mary finds him huddled against the barn door fast asleep. He looks disheveled and weary. She barely recognizes him. When she does, though, she's filled with compassion, because that's who she is. She brings him into the house, and lets him sleep in the back room curled up beside the wood stove. Later, when Warren finds out what Mary has done, he's furious. Silas has let him down. He's not dependable. He does not deserve a place under their roof.

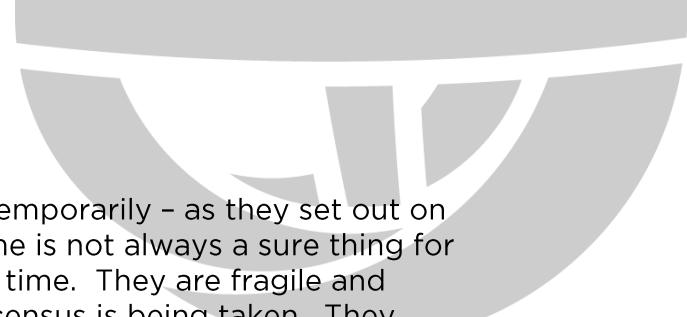
Still, here he is. Silas has nowhere else to go. He has no family that he's close to. He has no real home. "Home," Warren barks through clenched teeth, "it's the place where, when you go there, they have to take you in." The resentfulness rings in his voice. In response, Mary is far more gracious, "[Home is] something you somehow [shouldn't have] to deserve."

Silas continues to sleep beside the stove while Warren and Mary squabble over their differences. Eventually Mary comes to the conclusion that something more is going on. Silas isn't looking for a place to sleep for a night or two, or even a week or two. No, he has come to the only home he knows; to the place where, when he goes there, they will have to take him in. Indeed, he has come home to die. As the poem draws to a close, I find myself hoping that Mary's tenderness and compassion have given Silas a measure of peace during the last few hours of his life.

How important is home for you? Maybe more than you realize. My hunch is that every one of you here tonight has some sort of home to which you belong. Some sort of family to which you're connected, and who may or may not be related by blood. Some sort of place where, when you go there, they have to take you in. And I sincerely hope that, when they do take you in, it feels less like Warren's "clenched teeth" and more like Mary's heart full of compassion and love. After all, home is something you somehow shouldn't have to deserve.

During the season of Advent, we talked about our longing for home. It's a powerful force in our lives, whether we're gathering for Christmas dinner or to say goodbye to someone we love. It's a longing that finds expression in the story of Adam and Eve as they're expelled from the Garden of Eden. Though they don't know it at the time, these two will spend the rest of their lives trying to find their way home. It's a story that continues with Israel enduring exile in Babylon. They're desperately hoping that someday they'll be able to go back home again. As important as home may be in the Bible, however, I think it has less to do with a three bedroom rambler and more to do with a relationship with God. In other words, God has planted in our hearts a longing that is never fully satisfied until we find our home with God.





Mary and Joseph are looking for a home – at least temporarily – as they set out on their journey. They are poor, which means that home is not always a sure thing for them. The journey could not have come at a worse time. They are fragile and weary, especially Mary who’s expecting a baby. A census is being taken. They need to get to Bethlehem, because Joseph is from the family of King David. This is about taxes, of course. And under harsh Roman rule, there is not a tax break to be found anywhere.

The time comes for Mary to deliver. There is no room for them in the inn – that’s what the story tells us – but evidently there’s some sort of stable in the back. We have no idea who owns the stable, but perhaps he’s a kind and gracious soul. And sure enough, a little like our poem with Mary and the ailing hired man, the stable owner cannot turn away a woman who’s pregnant and about to give birth. Not hardly! Home is the place where, when you go there, they have to take you in. That’s precisely what happens. There’s room in the stable. The baby is born. Mary and Joseph wrap him up in bands of cloth and lay him in a manger.

The humble birth is a reminder that, no matter what our situation in life, home is something we somehow shouldn’t have to deserve. And the birth is a hint that the story of Jesus will be not so much about a place, as about a person, a person full of compassion and love who has come to change the world. Ultimately, the hopes and fears of all the years will find their home in this manger.

Friends, I’m not sure what home means for you these days, but I hope it’s something life-giving. I hope that when you go there, and people take you in, that you experience all the love and acceptance you need. That doesn’t mean our expectations for each other are not important – because they are – but the fact of the matter is, rarely are we able to live up to them all. No, sometimes, instead of more expectations, we need to be assured that home isn’t something we have to deserve.

This Christmas I trust you will find moments of love and acceptance in your journey toward home, wherever home might happen to be for you. I pray you will come to embrace the home that is found in the manger, and in the child who has come to change the world.

And above all else, I hope you will feel God’s tug in your heart, and you will know *home* as the place where, when you go there, God is more than ready to welcome you in, because that’s who God is. Amen.

