

[Story] An old man in Miami calls up his son in New York and says, “Listen, your mother and I are getting divorced. Forty-five years of misery is enough.” “Dad, what are you talking about?” the son screams. “We can’t stand the sight of each other any longer,” he says. “I’m sick of her face, and I’m sick of talking about this, so call your sister in Chicago and tell her,” and he hangs up. Now, the son is worried. So, he calls up his sister. She says, “What? They’re getting divorced!” and calls her father immediately. “You’re not getting divorced! Don’t do another thing. The two of us are flying home tomorrow to talk about this. Until then, don’t call a lawyer. Don’t file a paper. Do you hear me?” and she hangs up. The old man turns to his wife and says, “Okay, they’re coming home for Christmas and paying their own airfares.”

+++

Home. Christmas. Indeed, they go together in the movies, on TV, in songs like “Please Be Home for Christmas,” “I’ll Be Home for Christmas,” and “White Christmas.”

As we start this message addressing the linkage of home and Christmas, I would first like us to remember all those servicemen and women serving our country now and away from their homes. And, also let us not forget their families. Thank you, the servicemen and women, for the sacrifices you are making so that we can all enjoy the blessing of freedom in the celebration of our Savior’s birth at home with our family. Thank you.

Home and Christmas. There is some connection there. However, it is ironic when we read the Christmas Story account in the Bible because NO ONE was at home on that first Christmas day.

- Mary and Joseph’s home was Nazareth, but they were in Bethlehem;
- The Shepherds were at work that night;
- The Wisemen weren’t home as they were traveling to find the newborn King;
- Even Jesus was not at home!

Yet we all want to be home for Christmas! Home—a place where we belong. Home—a place where imperfection is made perfect. Home—a place where failure finds forgiveness. Home—a place where we can be at peace.

In today's scripture, King David was relaxing in his Lazy-Boy home, watching the Philistines losing to the Amalekites in the fourth quarter. He happens to glance out the window into the backyard and sees what God has been living in since he moved back from wherever it was that he got stolen to; and he thought, "How does this look? Here I am living in my brand-new house, with the full finished basement, full baths on every floor, walk-in closets, and a three-car garage, and there's God living in a pop-up trailer in my backyard. There's something not right here."

So, King David says, "Well, we just gotta build God a house." And Prophet Nathan, who runs messages back and forth from the camper in the back into the palace, says, "Good idea!" at least until he has a word from God.

God says, "Thank you, but no thank you." In verse 10 of today's scripture, God says, "I'm the ONE in the home-establishing business and providing homes for God's people, not David." Here, God is talking about establishing a home while King David is talking about building a house.

God told David that David wasn't going to build God a home, and then verse 12 of today's scripture states that David's son would do it. Later, David and everyone thought that God was talking about Solomon, one of King David's sons because Solomon did indeed build the temple as a home for God. At least that's what everyone thought God meant.

Everyone, but Luke in the New Testament that is. The Gospel of Luke reminds us that God had different ideas than the rest of us did. Solomon's temple was quite a structure, and God liked it well enough—well enough to visit. But it was never really God's home, or so it seems. For one thing, it was always called Solomon's temple.

God had a different Son in mind when He said, "Your son will build my home." God was thinking of the One that Angel Gabriel would call, "the Son of the Most High," the One that would "reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there would be no end." That's the Son who would build God's home. No one quite got that. David didn't understand what God meant. Solomon didn't

understand either, but he got the construction crew out anyway. No one knew what God really meant—no one, but Mary.

But then the indications are that Mary didn't really understand either. How could she? Just imagine, this young, unmarried, soon-to-be-married girl gets a message from God. And the message is, God's coming home. Taking up residence....IN HER. Excuse me?

This nothing special teenager, Mary, was going to be God's home for a few months. And talk about our troubling house guests! Feet on the furniture are nothing compared to this. Those who are mothers, who have experienced the joy of pregnancy and birth, know better than the rest of us the hard realities of this little event.

We are here a few days before Christmas talking about Mary finding out she's going to be pregnant, and then Wednesday night, she gives birth. Pretty impressive, isn't it? Well, not really. She carried this load just like everyone else; she hurt. She sweated. She paced. She groaned. She struggled. She wondered. She worried. She bled, and she gave birth in a barn because no one was willing to provide her with a bed.

"Greetings favored one, the Lord is with you" (Luke 1:28). The Lord has a different idea of favoritism than we do. The Lord has a different idea of a blessing than we do. The Lord has a different idea of home than we do.

"Come home," says the Lord to us at Christmas time. "Come home." David wanted to build a house for God on the tallest hill in Jerusalem, where God could be removed, distant, and overlook all the people who would have to go out of their way to give obedience to God. But God wanted to build His home a little closer to the profound realities of living in this world so that we would be surprised by God where we live. God wanted to build His home where we sweat and labor, where we work and play, where we laugh and cry, where our hearts are lifted up and often broken and sometimes healed.

David wanted God's home on a mountain, but God wanted His home in the womb of a virgin, in the feed box behind an inn in the little town of Bethlehem. God wanted His home in Galilee's backwoods region, on the countryside's roads, in the grassy place where five thousand sat and ate their fill. God wanted His home in the birthing units, wedding celebrations, and dinner parties. God wanted His home in

the tear-filled bedrooms, sick beds, and the graveyards of His children. God wanted His home in the courtrooms, prison cells, and then on the streets of the sorrow of Jerusalem and the dark hill called, "Calvary."

God wants His home in our home, in the living rooms, kitchens, playrooms, and bedrooms of our life. God calls to us at Christmas and says, "Greetings, favored ones! I'm coming home, coming home for Christmas. Is there room for me in your crowded, busy lives? Is there room for me?" And like any baby born in our midst, He says, "I won't take up much room, just all that you have. Is there room for me? I'm coming home." And off to the side, almost out of our vision, an angel waits for our answer. Keep Calm...Christmas is Coming: Peace is Here. Amen.