

# The Most Convenient Place

“Your home is a barn.”

Luke 2:1-7

Fifth in the series, Wishin' and Hopin'

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## Home for Christmas

The light from one of the branches was captured by an ornament's prism, then bent with separation of color and directed to my eye. It was an invitation. I sat before it, now, and just watched.

The kids were asleep. Laura and I had wrapped the final package and the television that had aired endless services was silenced. All the push to shop and send cards, cut a tree and trim it, decorate and clean, step up the production of ministry for the church, write articles and sermons and deliver my best in preaching extend my schedule way too far as though Christmas depended all on me: all this was over.

All there was now were the lights of the tree, stockings hanging –discernable through the shadows of the room, and the quietest of Christmas flutes and oboes singing their songs, music of angels it seems, wafting through the room.

Quiet. Peace. It was all finished. And that is when the work began. It started as a feeling like I was letting go. Christmas would have happened anyway, whether I had made an effort or not. Now in this quiet moment I let go and in that feeling I sensed that I was being held by a hand much greater than me. It held my family. It held my church. And it was holding the world.

I felt...I felt more than anything else...like I was home. Home, in the hand that held me.

Are you going to be home for Christmas? Whether it means at first blush that you'll be back to the place of your childhood, where most of your growing up took place; or that you will simply be with someone with whom everything just seems better; or that you'll return to a particular place where the richness of life appeared *en force* for you and you were swept in the wonder of it all, or whether it will be a place which you have never been before, will you be home...for Christmas?

Will you practice the traditions: the familiar hanging ornaments on the tree; take in the smells of fir or spruce, cinnamon and ginger? Does there have to be snow? (This year, I hope not.) Do you have to open the packages on Christmas Eve after worship, or wake to empty the stockings, then and wait to open the rest after a bite of Christmas stolen, a good cup of coffee and breakfast eaten with all in the household seated together, for once, around the table?

It seems most important, that home will be the place you'll be if it's Christmas. Bing Crosby sang it:

*I'll be home for Christmas  
you can plan on me.  
Please have snow and mistletoe  
and presents on the tree...<sup>1</sup>*

It's a universal, fundamental longing: home for Christmas. What has to happen for you to be home? What has to happen for your Christmas to be perfect?

### **Away for Christmas**

Perhaps there's a touch of irony here, when you consider a husband and wife who were *not* home for Christmas at all; especially given the couple they were. A census had been demanded. All over the Roman world people were in movement: going to the places ancestors had lived. Nazareth was not an ancestral town. It was a hill town in the District of Galilee: a frontier settled a century before by pioneer families. The carpenter Joseph and Mary his betrothed were, perhaps, great-grandchildren of the first to settle in this rugged wilderness.

Nazareth was home; and it was from this home that the couple traveled as Roman law commanded to Judea, to the little town of Bethlehem 100 miles away where King David had grown and tended his sheep and perhaps played upon his harp. They journeyed there, through the perils of the countryside where thieves and wild animals threatened their safety and the heat of the day or a surprising storm could compromise their strength. Then, they had no assurances of a protected place to stay once they arrived and, as if Murphy's law had already been invented, there indeed was no place for them in the inn. Little went right for them; so they made do in a cave or a barn. That is where their baby was born. That is where Christmas happened.

Mary and Joseph were not home for Christmas.

Christmas: how do you handle it if you can't be home? What happens if your song says, "I *won't* be home for Christmas, you *cannot* count on me..."? How can you cope when you have no holly or lights or familiar hearth with its crackling fire?

Look to Mary and Joseph. If anyone would know about Christmas, it would be them. Mary leans back on fresh straw Joseph has prepared for her. He cleans a manger, a feeding trough, lining it with more straw to fashion a cradle. It's not a new invention. It's been done countless times by young couples in the warmth of their own houses so infants are kept safe-off-the-floor. They lay a baby in it; it is here they start their family. Angels sing, a star shines, shepherds gather and salvation comes. This is home, now, for all its strangeness; it is home for them.

And this is *home* for you.

How can you cope if it's not all perfect? Know where your home is.

### **Christmas Links**

Home is not so much a place as it is a connection.

The year *The Nativity Story*<sup>2</sup> was produced Laura and I made our way to the theater to see it. Watching, something moved deep within me, the way it moved that night by the Christmas tree when all was finally at rest. The presentation of the story was so beautifully, thoughtfully done: the visit by the angel and Mary's willingness to risk obeying the voice, Joseph's compassion and bold reversal of choice when he dreamed a dream and received a promise, the birth of a prophet, an arduous journey. Each turn of the story spoke to something way...down...in the depths of my heart. In the end, the light of a star shown in all its brilliance; it pierced through an opening in a cave where cattle were kept. It illumined a father, a mother, and a child.

At the sight of it I knew deep within, no matter what: that's my home.

Spiritually, that's where I find my place.

Perhaps it is true for you. For all that we treasure: the holly and the candles and the songs in the air, **your home...is a barn...**where the Savior is born. In a barn, where everyone who loves him is your brother, your sister and a family that's forever. When you know that, you can be anywhere...and it will be Christmas.

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<sup>1</sup> "I'll Be Home for Christmas", The Library of Congress Presents...Music, Theater and Dance Web Site. <http://memory.loc.gov/cocoon/ihas/loc.natlib.ihas.200000010/default.html>

<sup>2</sup> *The Nativity Story*. Directed by Catherine Harwicke. Screenplay by Mike Rich. New Line Cinema (A time Warner Company). © 2006.