

COME HOME TO THE ONE WHO MADE THIS WORLD HIS HOME JOHN 1:10-18

Home. It has a powerful hold on our imagination. In 1986, five-year-old Saroo Munshi Khan and his older brother were searching the streets for spare change in their home city of Berhanpur, India. They got separated somehow at a railway station and Saroo fell asleep waiting for his brother's return. Hours later, Saroo woke up in Calcutta - 1000 miles away from his home and family. He survived on the streets for weeks, was taken into an orphanage, and was adopted by an Australian family and grew up in Hobart, Tasmania. Twenty-six years later, in 2011, he found his way back to his hometown with the help of Google Earth. Accessing his own vague memories and Google Earth imagery, Saroo identified his home town in India. Saroo spotted one vague landmark that led him eventually to a neighborhood, a street, and then a home with a tin roof that looked familiar. In 2012, Saroo embarked on a trip from Australia back to India. Once he arrived, he shared his story with locals, who helped him find his way back home to his mother and surviving brother and sister. Twenty-six years after accidentally leaving home, Saroo Munshi Khan finally found his way back home.

This Advent season we've been considering the biblical connection between Christmas and home. We might think of Psalm 90:1 (NLT) as a kind of theme verse for this series of messages. It says, "Lord, through all the generations, you have been our home!" From the Bible's perspective, your real home and mine is not a place ultimately, but instead a Person – a specific, unique Person – none other than God Himself. Today, I want us to zero in on Jesus Himself. He didn't get lost accidentally like Saroo Munshi Khan, and somehow find his way back home. No, instead Jesus deliberately and thoughtfully made this world His home. That's the point that's made in the first chapter of the Gospel of John which we could think of as John's nativity story. John was one of Jesus' original twelve disciple. But John's version of Jesus' birth was very different from Matthew's nativity story which focuses on Joseph and the wise men or Luke's nativity story which highlights Mary and the shepherds. John's nativity story begins in the first verse of chapter one and goes through verse eighteen, but we're going to read just part of it today beginning at verse ten. Now all of those verses are deeply meaningful and powerful, but I want us to drill down today on verse fourteen, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (Jo 1:14 NIV) I also like this translation of that same verse. "So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unending love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son." (Jo 1:14 NLT) The coming of Jesus is about three great miracles, three great facts, or three great truths. First, ...

THE COMING OF JESUS IS ABOUT HIS INCARNATION.

That's a big word – incarnation. What does it mean? Literally, it means "to become flesh" or "to become human." John 1:14 says, "The Word became flesh...." That's the incarnation. You probably already know that the word "Word" is John's way of referring to Jesus. It points to the fact that Jesus was and is God. Up in verse one, John said, "In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was

God." (Jo 1:1 NLT) Christians believe that God the Son – the second Person of what we refer to as the Trinity which includes God the Father and God the Holy Spirit – allowed Himself to go through a tremendous and permanent change. While remaining fully God, the Son of God also became fully human in the person of Jesus. He took on humanity – or as John puts it in verse fourteen - "the Word became flesh." He was born as a baby in Bethlehem over 2000 years ago. When Jesus went back to Heaven after His death and resurrection, He didn't somehow revert back to being God the Son in the same way that He was before His birth as Jesus. This is amazing to me! No, instead, God allowed Himself to be changed forever, by becoming a literal human being. When we get to Heaven one day, we'll see Jesus, the man, the human, who is also God the Son. Jesus is forever and ever both fully God and fully a human being.

What's so meaningful about the incarnation? For one thing, it establishes the fact that just being a human being is a great thing. God made human beings special forever by becoming one Himself! God would never have become something bad or worthless. No, when God became a human being in Jesus, it proved that human beings are God's special creation and have intrinsic value and worth. Frankly, it's we ourselves – not God – that have a hard time believing human beings are something special and should be treated so. I think it's very sad that many school age kids are taught in science classes that they've become who they are by nothing but random chance through a process called evolution. When you tell people that they accidentally evolved from a microscopic one cell amoeba, how can that possibly convey any sense of worth or value? The Bible, on the other hand, tells us we're made in God's image. When we tolerate ideas that unborn children shouldn't have the right to live, or that people should be treated differently because of their skin color, or that the amount of money you have in the bank defines your value, or that the lives of the elderly and sick should be cut short so the rest of us can be better off, we tell people something that God never tells them. In fact, God has demonstrated just the opposite. Every human being regardless of age, economic background, skin color, health, country of origin - or whatever other criteria you want to suggest - matters to God. Human beings are so important to God that He become one at Christmas in the person of Jesus and He stayed one forever.

What's so meaningful about the incarnation? I realize this might be an odd thought to some of us today, but the plain fact of it is that the incarnation made it possible for Jesus to die. By definition, God cannot die. You can't kill God. But because God became a human being in Jesus, Jesus was able to die on the cross. In fact, the Bible makes it more than clear that Jesus was born in order to die and rise again from the dead. God the Son deliberately made this world His home for the specific purpose of being your substitute and mine. This is God's universe and He had established long before He made the world that the just penalty for any and all sin was death and eternal separation from His presence. God, in the person of Jesus, took your place and mine on the cross. He died in our place. He could only do that by becoming a human being. The deepest meaning of Christmas is that Jesus' birth made Jesus' death and resurrection possible. Christmas gets us to Easter. Because of Jesus' death and resurrection it's now possible that your sins and mine can be forgiven, our broken

relationship with God the Father can be restored, the Holy Spirit can now indwell us, and we can receive the gift of eternal life.

There's a fictional story about God that underlines an amazing truth. Apparently, God was talking to one of His angels about a man who had lived a very wicked, sinful, and wasted life. God was about to invite this man into Heaven, but the angel interrupted Him. He couldn't believe God was going to allow this creature into Heaven with all of his faults and failings. He said to God, "Can't You see how terrible he is?" God replied, "I can't see his sin because Jesus is in the way!" That could only happen because of the incarnation. The coming of Jesus is all about His incarnation. Now, secondly...

THE COMING OF JESUS IS ABOUT HIS IDENTIFICATION WITH US.

It's important to know and reflect on the great truth that God has fully experienced what it's like to be a human being. Jesus knew what it was like to be a child, to be in a family, to have parents, to be a teenager, and to have a job. Jesus knew what it was like to be happy, to be sad, to be encouraged, to be disappointed, to enjoy the friendship of others, and to be absolutely alone. Jesus knew what it was like to have the closest of friends, but He also knew well the pain of personal betrayal. He experienced what it was like to be loved, respected, and admired, but also what it was like to be hated, despised, and misunderstood. Have you ever been rejected by the nearest and dearest to you in this life? In the verses we read, John says about Jesus, "He came to his own people, and even they rejected him." (Jo 1:11 NLT) The Bible says Jesus even knew what it was like to be tempted to do things that are wrong. The Bible says, "We don't have a priest who is out of touch with our reality. He's been through weakness and testing, experienced it all—all but the sin." (Heb 4:15 MSG) And then to top it off, even though He was God, he experienced death. Nobody claims that Jesus had every human experience possible, but instead that God, in the person of Jesus, had a full, complete human experience. He made this world His home genuinely and authentically. He identified with us. He came and was with us.

Olin Stockwell was a missionary in China when the persecution of Christians by the Communist government became very harsh. Christians are still persecuted there, but not as harshly as in the mid to late 20th century. Stockwell spent three years himself in prison because of his work as a Methodist pastor in China. From time to time he would get a letter from a certain Chinese pastor that told him that the Christians in his area of the country no longer sang Christian hymns, no longer attended worship services, and that he, the Chinese pastor, no longer preached about Jesus. It was all a ruse. That Chinese pastor knew full well that the government was reading every letter sent to Olin Stockwell. Just before signing his name, he used one word that the Communists never did understand. It was the word "Immanuel" which means literally "God is with us." When Stockwell saw that one word, he was assured that despite the awful persecution, the Chinese believers in that part of China and their pastor were alive and growing in their faith. God was with them! Identification!

That means we can bring anything to God and know that we're fully understood. It's the devil who wants you to believe that God is cold, distant, and doesn't care about your problems, your needs, or your concerns. He likes to tell followers of Jesus that God has no idea how tough it can be to be a human being. But God does know! He's identified with us by becoming a human being Himself. That means you can go right to God Himself with any burden, any sorrow, any heartache, or any temptation knowing that you will be completely and compassionately understood. The Bible invites us to come to God as much as possible and to come before Him boldly and confidently. "So let's walk right up to him and get what he is so ready to give. Take the mercy, accept the help." (Heb 4:16 MSG) Jesus has identified fully with you and me.

Then again, because Jesus is human and has fully identified with us, you and I have been given this incredible example of what a life that pleases God looks like. What kind of person truly pleases God? What does it take to please God? Read about Jesus. Get to know Jesus. The more you understand how Jesus looked at the world around Him, the more you'll see how God wants you to look at the world around you. The more you understand how Jesus moved through everyday life, how Jesus dealt with certain situations, how Jesus interacted and related to other people, the more you're going to see a pattern, a model, a template, and an example. Keep your eyes focused on Jesus, and you will discover what it means, as a human being, to please God.

This whole concept of identification also points to another wonderful truth. God wants to be with us. What does the first phrase there in John 1:14 say again? "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us..." (NIV) "So the Word became human and made his home among us.... (NLT) "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.... (MSG) That word "dwelling" or "home" is the same word that gets translated as Tabernacle in the Old Testament – the place where the Jewish people gathered to worship God. The Tabernacle was literally a big tent like structure where God actually lived among His people in the form of this dense, fiery cloud. The Tabernacle was also the place where animal sacrifices were offered to take away the people's sins. John is suggesting that the Tabernacle was actually a symbol of Jesus. It pointed to who Jesus is and what Jesus would do. At Christmas the Almighty God of the universe decided to come down and live with us. He did that in Jesus. God not only lowered Himself to experience so much of what you experience in life, but His greatest desire is to live with you, love you, know you, and cherish you forever. Let's admit it, sometimes we don't like being around other people. Sometimes we don't even like being around ourselves all that much! But God wants to be with you forever. The coming of Jesus is all about His identification with us. Now, thirdly ...

THE COMING OF JESUS IS ABOUT HIS INTERVENTION FOR US.

In one sense, Jesus came into the world empty-handed when He came as a helpless baby. But He was no ordinary child! Because of Jesus, God did something only God could do. That's expressed in the last part of the verse, "... We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (Jo 1:14 NIV) We hear that same description four verses later, "No one has ever seen God,

but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.” (Jo 1:18 NIV) That phrase – “the one and only Son” – underlines Jesus’ absolute uniqueness. It literally means not only “unique”, but “special” or “especially loved.” Jesus has seen God the Father. Jesus is the One and Only. Jesus is God in human flesh. Christmas is the reminder that God will not allow Himself to be a remote stranger, or some unknowable Supreme Being, or sidelined as some harsh, distant tyrant. He is, first and foremost, a Father with a heart of unconquerable and inexhaustible love.

What does it mean there by saying Jesus is full of grace and truth? “... We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (Jo 1:14 NIV) Well, what’s “grace” again? It’s God’s undeserved, unearned, and unachievable love for you. You can’t buy it, deserve, or do one thing to merit it. It’s always and forever a gift. It’s really the gift of God Himself. And because you can’t earn it, you can do nothing to lose it. After the North had defeated the South in our country’s Civil War, some of President Abraham Lincoln’s advisors wanted to punish the people living in the southern states for their rebellion against the Union. When Lincoln was asked how he intended to treat people from the Confederacy, he said, “I will treat them as if they never left.” God and His grace are like that. When you receive God’s gift and start to follow Jesus, God treats you as if you never left.

Jesus is also full of truth. Meaning what? God always tells us the way things really are. Jesus and His teachings aren’t just opinions that we can choose to accept or not. Yes, we live in a day and time when most people’s attitude is something like this: “Fine. That may be true for you, but it doesn’t have to be true for me.” But God’s truth stays true whether we believe it or not. You may not always like what you hear from God, but God will never lie to you. He always shows us the truth about life, about ourselves, and about Him. Jesus not only told the truth and proclaimed the truth, He is the Truth. There are times when you and I will sit in life’s shadows. Jesus will make things clear. There will be times when we come to a crossroads. Jesus will show us the right way.

I love that phrase – “full of grace and truth.” Martin Luther, the Protestant Reformer, said the idea behind that phrase is like the flame of a candle. Suppose I had a great, big candle up here with me today that I used to light every other candle in the entire world. Yes, it would take a very long time do that, but if my candle was big enough, I could light every other candle without exhausting the flame of my candle. Jesus is like that. His grace and truth has intervened in your life and mine as well as countless others down through history and even those yet to be born. But Jesus Himself is never diminished or exhausted. He continues to burn as brightly as ever, because He is full of grace and truth. The coming of Jesus is all about His intervention for us.

Bret Harte wrote a story entitled *The Luck of Roaring Camp*. Roaring Camp was supposed to be, according to the story, the meanest, toughest mining town in all of the old West. More murders, more thefts than any other mining town. It was a terrible place inhabited entirely by men and one woman who tried hard to take care of them all. Her name was Cherokee Sal. Then, she died while giving birth to a baby, a girl. The

men took the baby, and they put her in a box with some old rags under her. But when they looked at her, they decided that wasn't going to do at all. So, they sent one of the men 80 miles away with some money to buy a cradle made out of rosewood. He brought it back, and they put the rags and the baby into the rosewood cradle. But, then, the rags looked all wrong. So, they sent another man off to Sacramento with some money and he came back with some beautiful silk and lace blankets. They wrapped the baby in those blankets and put her in the rosewood cradle.

It all looked fine until someone mentioned that the floor under the cradle was filthy. So these hard, tough men got down on their hands and knees, and scrubbed that floor until it was amazingly clean. Of course, all that accomplished was to make the walls, the ceiling, and the dirty windows without curtains look absolutely terrible in comparison. So they washed down the walls, the ceilings, and the windows. Then, they installed colorful, clean curtains. Now things were beginning to look as they should look. Or so the men of Roaring Camp thought. But, of course, they had to give up most of their fighting, because a baby sleeps a lot, and it's kind of hard to sleep during a brawl.

After a while, the entire atmosphere of Roaring Camp seemed to change. The miners took turns taking the baby out in her rosewood cradle and setting her by the entrance into the mine, so they could see her when they came up out of the mine. Somebody noticed that the entrance into the mine was dirty and bare, so they planted flowers and made a very nice garden there. It looked quite beautiful. The miners would bring the little girl shiny little stones they found down in the mine. But when they put their hands down next to hers, their own hands looked so dirty. Before long, the general store was all sold out of soap, shaving gear, and after shave. The baby changed everything.

When Jesus made this world His home it changed everything. I wonder if you have come home to Jesus yet or whether you need to come home to Him again. He changes everything. And He keeps on changing everything. When you come home to Jesus, you come home to God because Jesus is God in human flesh – the incarnation. When you come home to Jesus, you begin to experience the blessings of His identification with you and, also, of His intervention for you. This Christmas come home to the One who made this world His home.