

Christmas 2013
Luke 2, Matthew 1

“Home”

For tonight’s message I have two stories in mind. The first you just heard. It’s the familiar one from Luke chapter 2, the one Linus read when Charlie Brown asked him, “Doesn’t anybody know what Christmas is all about?” The other is probably familiar to you as well. It’s from Matthew chapter 1. That’s the Christmas story told from Joseph’s point of view. In it an angel appears to Joseph in a dream and tells him he needn’t be afraid to take his fiancé Mary as his wife even though she is pregnant, something he knew full well he had nothing to do with. The fact that he heeded the angel’s message is probably the greatest miracle of Christmas. That was the Scripture we read at our guys’ theology on tap last week, and I’ve been reflecting on it ever since. What has stuck in my mind is that the angel said that Joseph should name the child Jesus because he will save the people from their sins, and that he will be known as Immanuel, God with us. The title of this message is “Home.”

My home church is named Immanuel. I grew up there. Laterally. I went to school there from kindergarten through 8th grade. My family attended worship there just about every week. I sang in the children’s choir. My Dad, who was blessed with a deep, rich, golden, voice sang in the adult choir. I played in its parking lot and on its field. I got to know just about every square inch of the building and property. It was home.

And its name, Immanuel, means home. Immanuel, God with us, means that God in Jesus makes his home here with me and with you. Home is big thing at Christmas time. Across the country people are traveling. Unlike the way it once was, grandparents are leaving home, traveling to visit their children and grandchildren. Children, too are traveling, going home to a place that isn’t quite home any more either because they now live somewhere else or because they are home from college and university where they have been on their own and are now temporarily living with parents—who are still parents.

Home is a big deal in Luke chapter two as well. Luke says that all went because of a decree from the Emperor. People were traveling, going to their home towns to be registered. The gears of the Empire grind, and Mary and Joseph take off for Bethlehem where each had family. But they found no home there. No one took them in. No relative found a spare bedroom or cot or even a sleeping bag for this young, pregnant girl and her fiancé. Not one of Mary’s relatives, and not one of Joseph’s. The best anyone offered them was to stay out in the courtyard with the animals.

No home. And yet God comes here to the homeless to make his home with us, Immanuel, God with us. And the shepherds come, too, those looked down upon people living on the edge of society leave their flocks to come see this thing which has come to pass, which God has done. What a strange little community they and the animals made. What binds them together is the angels’ song, “Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God’s people on earth.”

I hope you find a home this Christmas. If you’re visiting here, I hope your travels are safe and

your homecomings joyous. And know this: God now makes his home among us in the person of Jesus. God's home is here in this place and there in the house you are visiting and there in your own home. Immanuel does not mean that God supports us in every thing we do, think, or say. Some of the things we do, think, and say, deserve no support, no sanction. Jesus came to save us from those sins. But Immanuel does mean God with us in all our moments, good and bad. Immanuel does not mean that God has set up shop somewhere where he can be seen whenever we decide to drop by. Immanuel means God with us, always everywhere in each moment, God with me, God with you, always. Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's people on earth.

Merry Christmas.