

Coming Home: A Manger for the World

Presented By Pastor Scott Walters on 12/24/19

At Crossroads United Methodist Church

Waunakee, WI

This is a wonderful season in the life of this church community: a season of lights and candles; and carols.

Seeing the decorations go up at church for the season. Hearing our Chancel Choir leading the Waunakee community at the Wine Walk once again this year, or listening to Carly Ochoa sing for a doctoral student at the UW or both (the choir and Carly) leading us in the holiday spirit at worship; Having the Kat Trio come to bring their talent (including Roll out the Barrel); it is going around to carol at the homes of members and non-members. Listening to the scripture readings of the season; giving someone a help needed during this time of year. Unexpected gifts and greetings. These are the sorts of things that get me into the Christmas spirit.

Families reunited at home, gathered for Christmas, coming to church together and getting ready for the season of giving and receiving.

There is one thing I've gotten very tired of this year. And that is hearing Mariah Carey's song, "All I Want for Christmas This Year is You." It's not that I dislike the song. It just that I've heard it so often this year. Last weekend, Jane and I ate at restaurant that played that song as background music, at least every third song.

One of the things that you discover when you listen to all Christmas music all the time is this recurring theme that comes up in much Christmas holiday music—the theme of home: "Home for the Holidays," "I'll Be Home for Christmas," "Home," "Home for Christmas." It's in the advertising that surrounds the season as well: idyllic homes, pictures of the family reunited round the dinner table, gathered in front of roaring fires.

The irony is that when you read the Christmas story, as we are hearing tonight, you realize that in the first Christmas story nobody's home.

Travel-weary Joseph and heavily pregnant Mary journey away from their home in Nazareth to Bethlehem, the ancestral town of Joseph. Indeed, not only are they not at home, but they don't even find proper shelter for the birth of the child.

The angels aren't home either. They're on the move from heaven to earth to say and sing of the great good news, to share it with the shepherds.

Shepherds—they're not at home. Of course they're not even in their usual place in the fields, ultimately. They, too, have to make the journey from the fields where they are keeping their sheep to find the baby in the stable after being scared out of their wits by this encounter with the heavenly messengers; they take their own journey.

And, of course, in Matthew's Gospel, those mysterious magi, the wise men—they're on the road away from home, being led by the star to find the new promised king.

One of my favorite poets, T.S. Eliot imagines these magi as "grumbling in just the worst time of year for a journey and such a long journey, the ways deep, the weather sharp, the very dead of winter." Indeed, it seems as though the only ones who aren't "going somewhere else" is Herod and his advisors. They were very much at home.

And I believe that all this activity and movement and journeying is because not even God is at home on Christmas. God, maker of heaven and earth, creator of all that is, God whose nature and name is love is also on a journey at Christmas.

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God is journeying on Christmas to where you and I are. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. In the original language of the New Testament that phrase “dwelt among us” means that God pitched God’s own tent with ours. God came into our community at Christmas. God crept in beside us.

You see love, love came down at Christmas. That at its heart is what we are celebrating amidst the color and the candles and the gifts and all these joyous things of this season; that is what we are giving thanks for, that love came down at Christmas. And God took on what it is to be human, to be like you or me, in the form of a little baby born in, of all places, an animal shed, laid in the feeding trough for his bed in a far-flung part of the known world, far away from the centers of power. And now nothing can ever be the same.

Thanks be to God. Amen.