

Rejoice! God Made You a Home for Christmas

Isaiah 52:7-10 (NIV)

⁷ How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" ⁸ Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. ⁹ Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. ¹⁰ The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

"I'll be home for Christmas, you can plan on me." Wait a minute, Pastor. You did that intro last Christmas! First of all, if you remember that I did that Christmas Eve last year, I'm impressed and I thank God that you remember things that were preached to you a year ago. Yes, I am using that Christmas song again, not just because it's a classic and not just because Bing Crosby's sweet bass-baritone voice warms the heart. I decided to use it again this year because I learned something about that song that I didn't know last year.

"I'll be home for Christmas" was recorded in 1943. Whether or not the song was intentionally written for soldiers, soldiers and families of soldiers identified with it. The lyrics summed up the reality of all the young men who were overseas and unable to come home for Christmas. To think of a soldier penning a letter like that to his Mom and Pop back in the States, wishing so desperately to come home and away from the horrors of war, and ending his letter with, "I'll be home for Christmas, if only in my dreams," gave this song completely new context for me. Before reading about the history of it, I just thought it was a song relating to people working late on Christmas Eve for some Scrooge or people delayed on their flights back home. Made me think even of my own family whom I've said I would be home for Christmas, just as soon as service was over and we jumped in the car and drove from Michigan to Wisconsin on Christmas Day.

Thinking not just of the soldier who was overseas, what about his parents spending their first Christmas without their now grown up boy, blue star in the window. Presents are wrapped under the tree for him, in the off chance he does get leave and by some miracle makes it home in time for Christmas. Those parents sit around the tree on Christmas Day in silence, hopefully waiting to see if he will come home. Does he ever? Is the only way he makes it home for Christmas is a letter from Uncle Sam and a gold star?

Waiting for someone to make it home tugs at your heart strings with every passing minute. I think back on my teenage years, before the age of cell phones, about how many times my poor planning and my irresponsibility made me late getting home, pulling into the driveway past curfew. I think of my Mom or Dad, whoever was waiting up for me that night, who were upset with me. Even then I understood that they weren't so much upset about me breaking curfew as they were scared of what might possibly have happened to me. If I didn't make it home when I said I would be, then, in their mind, I most likely was lying in a ditch somewhere on some icy back road. When I missed curfew, I'm sure they would start a mantra that I was okay, that I was just running late, maybe lost track of time, maybe goofing off...and we'll punish him for that, but after he gets home safely. The longer I was out past curfew the more the fear grew in them that they would get a phone call from the police giving them horrible news about what happened to me. In my sinful youth, I made them needlessly worry that I wasn't coming home.

Are you waiting for someone to come home for Christmas? What happens if they don't come home today? Is your chastisement prepared or are you on the verge of crying with this thought, this waiting, because you miss this person and you were really looking forward to them being home? Do you really expect them to be home for Christmas? What if you already know that they will never come home? Do you secretly hope against all hope that they will miraculously show up on your doorstep yet today even though you know that it would be impossible? Does looking for this person to come home for Christmas ruin you?

Maybe it's not a person that you are waiting for. Maybe you are waiting for something else to happen. Maybe you are looking to God's promises and asking, "When?" "You said you work all things for my good. Okay. When? I'm waiting, and I don't know how much longer I can wait because my heart is breaking the longer I have to go without you coming through on your promises. I keep teetering on the edge of ruin. When does this get good, God?"

The Jews knew the despair of waiting when it looked like that special person would never come home. They had pinned their hopes and dreams on this Messiah, this Christ, who would come to their home, to Jerusalem, and save them. They had seen plenty of foreshadowing of him with mighty rulers who delivered them from their troubles. They had the great King David who led the Jewish

armies into many victories and set up the golden age of their kingdom. They had had Moses who was instrumental in releasing them from captivity and led them through forty years of wandering the desert with powerful miracles of seas parting, food coming down from heaven, and water from rocks. They had had a number of judges rise up to rescue the people out of miserable oppression by foreigner attackers, judges, leaders, who kept them from ruin. These military leaders saved them, but they weren't the Messiah. These weren't the Christ. The Jews still wanted the offspring of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent, the one who would free them from the captivity of sin so that they would have a permanent home with God.

Isaiah the prophet had just told them that their kingdom will be destroyed. In the ruins of Jerusalem after the foreign armies have invaded, attacked, and won, what can you do? How can you rebuild? Is it even worth rebuilding? You are ruined. Your home is destroyed. You have no home. The Messiah, your God, cannot then come to your home. You want to sit there and bury your head in your hands and cry.

Then enter our verses today from Isaiah, verses designated specifically for Christmas Day. Isaiah tells the watchmen to look on the horizon where they saw the enemy disappear. A messenger is coming. They lean in closer. Does the messenger look like he is coming from battle? Does he look like he just barely escaped with his life? Listen, watchmen. His voice is trying to carry his message. There's no terror in what he is saying. There's a broad smile on his face as they hear, "Your God reigns!" (verse 7)

You mean, our God hasn't been defeated even though we have? He didn't lose power? He is still in control? Our God reigns, and he is coming! Our God, our King, is returning! "The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God!" (verse 10) The LORD has not abandoned us to defeat. We are not sitting here waiting for something that will never happen, waiting for a God who will never show up. He's coming! He's coming with power! In his power, the LORD is coming home for Christmas.

The LORD's holy arm is laid bare in the mighty things that he does. His promise, a promise Isaiah gave earlier in his book, that the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a Son, God kept that impossible promise. The virgin's son is Immanuel, God with us, that God, of all people, left his home in heaven to make a home with us, a home of flesh and blood, a home where now he could live under the law that he created for us humans so that he could keep it for us in our place. This Immanuel is born in Bethlehem, the town of David, just as the prophet Micah said would happen, coming from the house and line of David just as God had promised to him and to us. This Immanuel will buy us back from our lives ruined by our sins, by our failure to keep promises and be home when we should be, when we want to be. This Immanuel will redeem us in the way that Isaiah is about to prophesy, that he will be our salvation when he takes the role of the suffering servant of Isaiah chapter 53. Our God ordered all of these things because our God reigns! He reigns over all things with power! That power is shown here on Christmas Day, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...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." (John 1:1, 14)

Because God came down and took on human flesh, because he came down from his heavenly home and made a home among us sinners, he makes a home for us, a home where he longs for us to come on Christmas, a home that we long to come to as we gather around his Word and hear what he has done for us. Even though we have not gone to heaven yet, we now have a home with him because our God has made a home with us and for us. With his perfect life lived out by taking on human flesh, we are saved. Salvation is provided for all the ends of the earth by the powerful God who kept his impossible promises and came and made a home with his people. This is not a dream; this is reality for us by the gift of the child born of the virgin Mary in Bethlehem some 2000 years ago.

I understand that even on this most joyous Christmas Day, some of you may have a heavy heart thinking of those who are not coming home for Christmas. In fact, we all have to admit that one day we ourselves will not be home for Christmas in the way Bing Crosby sings about. It is a sad thought. But God says, "Look to the horizon like those watchmen of Zion. The message has come in. 'Your God reigns!'" Even in sadness and heartache, our God is in control. Even at Christmas when some people don't come home, our God is in control. He has come to us, made a home with us, and made a home for us in heaven with him. Our God has come home for Christmas.

So, shout for joy today! God has made a home with us! Sing those Christmas songs a little louder. Lift up your voices to sing his praise, no matter what tune you are in. With Christmas, the LORD has laid bare his holy arm. Salvation has been revealed to the ends of the earth. This Christ Child is our salvation. Rejoice! God has come home for Christmas, and he has made a forever home for you and me with him. Amen.