

The Nativity of our Lord; Christmas Eve, 2023

Titus 3:4-7

“Christmas Home”

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior toward mankind appeared, he saved us – not by righteous works that we did ourselves, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs in keeping with the hope of eternal life.

This Christmas, what does your home look like? Do you decorate heavily or lightly? Do you light up the neighborhood, or just your own little fireplace? Do you go all out on cookies and pies or try to hold off that extra layer of winter weight? Big or small, the appearance of just about every home at Christmas time changes.

But what about the people in that home? What does life look like in your Christmas home? Christian families always strive for Godly harmony and peace, but we know it doesn't always go that way. And we might think that in the days leading up to Christmas, the harmony in our homes would hit a high, peace would peak among brothers and sisters and spouses. But often the stress and bustle of these leads to homes touched by tension and bashed by bickering.

And what about the home of your heart? What does that look like in the days leading up to Jesus' birth? He comes as the Prince of Peace to bring us eternal peace, but financial worries rob us of peace. He comes to bring us the hope of heaven, but we miss those who have gone ahead of us to that home, even more than usual during these holy days.

It is because of all the imperfections both in the homes we live and in the homes of our hearts that Jesus Christ left his home. All our sin – the bickering among families, our worried and unsettled hearts – left us without a spiritual home. Because we could not save ourselves from our sin, Jesus left his home in heaven. The Father sent him on a mission, and Jesus left a home where angels praised him through eternity, a home without fatigue or hunger or pain or death, a perfect home. He came down to save us for a simple reason: **because of his mercy.** Our God is full of mercy. He wants to spare us the punishment we deserve for our sins. So he sent his Son down from the heavenly home to us.

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior toward mankind appeared, he saved us... Jesus left his home to save us because God is merciful, not wanting to punish us. God is also kind and he is love, and when he sent his Son, it was the most profound expression of love ever performed. The Son of God, our Savior Jesus, came down from his heavenly home and made his home in the womb of a virgin mother. The Spirit conceived him there, and Mary carried God inside her, wrapped in human flesh.

On Christmas night she laid him in his next home, a manger. Almighty God lay there because God is merciful, kind, and love. He made his home in a little barn because he was not a mission to get glory for himself, but for us, by saving us from our sins. He came to save us because we sinners can never save ourselves, no matter how hard we try or how good we try to be. We need to be perfect. We need the holiness that only the Son of God can give us.

So Jesus grew into a little boy, and then an adolescent, and then man. All the way, he was the perfect son to Mary and Joseph, the perfect brother, the perfect neighbor and teacher and friend. Through all these

years he had different homes – in Nazareth with his parents, in the homes of friends and followers. During his ministry he had no fixed address. He once said, **“Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”** But everywhere he went, every place he made his home in this world, he went in perfection, proclaiming the good news that God’s salvation from sin had arrived in him.

He not only lived the perfect life we need, but he also laid it down, suffering and dying on the cross. This is a powerful message about how much God hates our sin and refuses to tolerate it: only the brutal sacrifice of his own Son was enough to pay for it. And after Jesus died for our sins, he made his home in the grave. He was laid in the earth that he created, and rested there. But it was not his home for long! He only stayed for three days, and then rose again. It was also God’s merciful, kind, and loving work to raise his Son on Easter, giving the promise of a resurrection to all who trust in him.

Now Jesus is at home again in heaven. He is still a flesh and blood human, who lives there to plead for our forgiveness when we sin. And every time he does, the Father’s answer is “Yes, I forgive. I forgive because I am merciful, kind, and love. I forgive because you, my Son, left this home and made your home with them to save them.”

Jesus has now returned to the perfect home of glory and peace in heaven. But that is not his only home. He also lives in the heart of everyone who believes in him. **He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior...** This verse is wonderful! It shows all three Persons of the Triune God working in harmony to make our hearts Jesus’ homes. In baptism, the Father saves each personally as the Holy Spirit washes us clean by giving us faith in Jesus. Our hearts are his home, and he loves to live. The picture of water and washing are no accident, because the New Testament universally teaches this saving power of baptism. If you are here or watching at home tonight and have a child who needs baptism, please move on it. If you trust in Jesus already but have not been baptized, please move on it. If Jesus already lives in your heart, baptism will secure your faith.

By faith, Jesus makes his home in our hearts, and he loves to live there, too. It is safe to say he loves the homes in our hearts even more than his heavenly home, because he once gave up that home to make his home in this world to save us, and then in our hearts. It is the home he loves most.

Because Jesus left the home of heaven and made his home in this world, because he lives in our hearts by faith, heaven is our home, too. It is the home of all we love who have gone before us in faith. And we will go there to live forever, too. The Bible says that because of God’s saving love, your true home is not here in this world; it’s not the one listed on your license; it’s not Lake Ridge or Manassas or wherever. Those are tents, temporary dwellings. Heaven is your home. That is why Jesus left it once: so that you will go there forever to praise and serve in him perfect joy.

And how will knowing that heaven is your forever home affect your temporary home during these holy days? You could look at your annoying brother or sister as a soul for whom Jesus left home to make heaven their home, and increase the joy in your for-now home! You could look at your forgetful husband or impatient wife the same way, and increase the Christian love in your for-now home! How much better our temporary homes will be, when we remember the kindness and love of God who sent his Son for all of us to make heaven our home!

And what about the home of your heart? What would happen to the worry, the stress, the spiritual fatigue if you lifted up your eyes to heaven, and remembered your true home? What would happen to your heart if you remembered your baptism, and how Jesus has made his home in you? How joyful will you be, with your Savior's love filling the home of your heart?

He left home and dwelled among us to save us; he lived just a little while in the earth and then rose for us; he made our hearts his home through faith. Heaven is now our home; may his mercy and love fill your house, your apartment, your heart – on this holy day, and every day. Amen.