

Christmas Sermon 2019 for 11:00 PM – HE Journeyed Then, HE Journeys Tonight

Introduction: Journeying to Bethlehem

Merry Christmas! Thank you.

It's been a long journey back to the manger tonight, hasn't it?

It always seems longer than a year, before we can say Merry Christmas;
And feel the power and the grace and the gift and the love;
That comes to us more at Christmas than at any other time of the year.

And if you are a child under the age of twelve or simply young at heart;

I imagine it has seemed like forever since Christmas was here before;
And the 365, oops, the 366 days between tomorrow morning and next Christmas
May feel like an eternity – be of good cheer, Christmas comes.

It's been a long journey back for so many of us, but not because the manger

Or Christmas is in a different place and we don't know where it is;
It's that our lives have changed or are changing;
And finding our way back to Bethlehem and Christmas is not always as an easy road.

Some of us have had years that have been so amazing, so filled with good things and activities;

That we really haven't put all that much thought into whether
We should be looking for Bethlehem and Christmas much before tonight;
Our work and our school or our retirement has gone well;
Children have been born or have hit major milestones;
We've been busy with other, important parts of living and Christmas
And the Christ Child are not the focus of our journey.

Others of us have had years that have been so hard;

So close to the valley of the shadow of death or early endings or disappointments;
That the way to Bethlehem is not much more than a distant hope;
And we're not sure we have the energy
Or the inclination to even start down the road.

And most of us are somewhere in between, or have never been to Bethlehem before tonight;
We feel connected in some way to the meaning of Christmas in our lives;
But we're still not quite sure we're heading down the right road.

Well, whatever road you've been traveling over the year just past or all your life, here we are;
And, unexpectedly or finally, Christmas has come once again;
And the great promise of the season opens before us;
As we gather together at the manger to worship God;
And to open our lives again or for the first time
To the presence of Christ, to the presence of God and God's unconditional, unending love;
Coming into our lives.

Christ Among Us

All over the world tonight, Christians and people seeking to know the presence and love of God
In their lives have journeyed to the manger with Mary and Joseph;
Hoping that Christ has come for us; and He has. He has come;
Because we're not the only ones journeying to Bethlehem and Christmas tonight.

Another person has been traveling to Bethlehem to meet us where we are tonight;
To meet us so we can know God's love and peace and salvation for us and for all;
And that someone is God Himself.

Christ the Lord has journeyed from His heavenly throne and comes among us tonight;
He's lingering at the door of your heart and mine and at the door of our community;
Calmly, quietly, gently waiting to enter in;
Ready to come into our lives as individuals and as a community;
Not in the form of His power and glory;
But clothed in the form of a baby child, wrapped in swaddling clothes.

The Lord of all creation, the Lord of all love comes to us in humble, human form;
Reaching out His little hands to you and me and all people in love this Christmas;
Offering us the gift that is above all gifts – God's love, God's presence in our lives.

And the question that's before all of us who have journeyed to the manger tonight;
Or who have gathered at the manger for the first time;
Is will we accept the gift.

Will we find room for Him this Christmas in the fullness and goodness of our lives;
Will we make room for Him in the midst of our struggles and sorrows;
Will we make a place for Him to enter in and touch our hearts
So that we may know God's great love for us, just as we are;
So that we may experience God's peace in all circumstances;
And have the light of His love light our way in life's joys and sorrows;
So that the journey to Bethlehem will never be as long again;
And we will never again make that journey alone.

You see, there is nothing for us to do to earn God's love, God's favor;
God loves like a parent loves a child whether the child is misbehaving or struggling
Or even rejecting the parent's love;
God loves us; God favors us and wants us
To be drawn into a relationship of love and grace just because we are.

For whatever you may have heard or thought about God
And having to earn God's love in your life;
Or that you have to live a certain way or come to church every Sunday
To receive God's love (well you'd like coming by the way);
Or that you have to have some learning or make a contribution
Before God will love you and walk with you in your life;
That's just not how it is.

We don't have to come to God;
Christmas is the sign that God comes to us;
Christmas is the sign that God has come to us and will continue to come to us as gift;
Regardless of the quality of the journey we're on or the lives we're living.

I think that's part of the reason why the angels burst into spontaneous song;
Knocking the shepherds to their knees.

They sing because they realize that God is so filled up with love for sinful, distracted,
Uninterested human beings like us;
And are so utterly amazed at the depth of God's love and God's desire for us;
That they can only sing of this God who loves and favors everyone;
Just because they are.

And because God loves in this way, unconditionally, completely;
Without regard to our condition;
You and I need do nothing more, but nothing less than invite this God to come in;
You and I need only offer the barest, rudest of mangers in our lives;
And He will be born in us and make a home in our hearts;
And walk with us and share His love with us;
And Bethlehem, Christmas will no longer be a journey we take;
But our heart's home every day.

Finding Room for God in our Lives

My oldest sister Anna, is one of the few people I've known in my life
Who always seemed ready for Christmas – both physically and spiritually.

Anna was the shy one of the six of us, brilliant in school and medicine;
But not always one to enter into the noise of eight people living in one house;
And the different opinions and approaches to life that energized the house;
She kept her own counsel, pondering life in her own heart.

But there was something about Christmas that brought out a part of her
That was surprising and humbling to those of us too busy or too distracted
To think about Christmas and the gift of God in our lives because of Christmas

Anna spent the entire year, preparing and living for Christmas in some way;
She worked with determination to be ready each year for Christmas Day;
Knitting, purchasing, wrapping, baking, composing, writing
All in an effort to share her love with family and friends;
Mere acquaintances and even strangers on this most special of days

I don't think she would have called it prayer, working on these presents with her own hands;
But looking back now at the way she would keep Christmas all year;
It had to be something like that; had to be something like prayer;
And the peace and the love she shared all year felt like Christmas;
For her and for me and for all the people in her life.

And please understand, it's not like she was some deeply committed Christian evangelist;
Going to church every day and talking about God to anyone and everyone;
I'm not even sure she went to church that often once she moved away from home;
And her mouth was not always the source of great purity or good language.

But she believed and had somehow found a way in her own life and commitments;
To stay closer to the manger in Bethlehem more than most people;
And the connection to God she knew;
And the wonderful presents at Christmas and her love every day (or most days)
Became an expression of her daily journey to the manger in Bethlehem;
And her response to God's personal presence in her heart and God's saving, unconditional love.

Anna found a way to make room for God and Bethlehem a little every day
And our lives were touched and changed because her life had been touched and changed;
By God and by God's presence in her life all through the year.

And this night, you and I can begin or begin again to keep Christmas closer to our hearts
In our own way as individuals and as this community of St. David's Church.

We can begin again or begin for the first time

By allowing that love that was revealed in the child at Bethlehem

And all through His life and death and resurrection

To draw us closer to this God who loves us so;

And wants us to know His love and peace and power in our lives;

So that we and all the world may sing to the glory of God's love, like the angels.

And Christmas will not be so much of a journey as our home address

Tonight and all through the year.

Merry Christmas!

Amen.