

ARM Prison Outreach International

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HOME FOR CHRISTMAS!

Christ 'left home' the first Christmas so we could 'come home' to God!

Editor's Note: This "MM" is the 12th email of 2003 in a series that ARM is sending as an encouragement to preachers and Christian workers around the world. The Christmas season is coming soon! This sermon develops the idea of Christ LEAVING home so we could have Christmases about COMING HOME! It is my prayer that this message will encourage you and those you teach. If you like it, reply and let me know. Use it as a devotional, edit it, share it, use it or components of it! May God bless your labors! -- Rod Farthing, Development Director

• I'll be Home for Christmas, You can count on me, Please have snow and Mistletoe and presents under the tree. Christmas Eve will find me, where the love light gleams, I'll be home for Christmas, if only in my dreams...

It's one of the best loved Christmas songs of all, mixing the wonderful traditions of the American family: CHRISTMAS, MOM'S COOKING, AND THE SCATTERED FAMILY BACK TOGETHER. Here is more about its history:

On October 4, 1943, Bing Crosby recorded "I'll Be Home for Christmas" with the John Scott Trotter Orchestra for Decca Records. Within about a month of its being copyrighted the song hit the music charts and remained there for eleven weeks, peaking at number three. The following year, the song reached number nineteen on the charts. It touched a tender place in the hearts of Americans, both soldiers and civilians, who were then in the depths of World War II, and it earned Crosby his fifth gold record. "I'll Be Home for Christmas" became the most requested song at Christmas U.S.O. shows in both Europe and the Pacific and Yank, the GI magazine, said Crosby accomplished more for military morale than anyone else of that era.

In December 1965, having completed the first U.S. space rendezvous and set a record for the longest flight in the U.S. space program, the astronauts Frank Borman and James Lovell hurtled back to earth aboard their Gemini 7 spacecraft. Asked by NASA communication personnel if they wanted any particular music piped up to them, the crew requested Bing Crosby's recording of "I'll Be Home for Christmas."

"I'll be home for Christmas--You can plan on me--Please have snow and mistletoe--And

presents on the tree--Christmas Eve will find me,-- Where the love light gleams-- I'll be home for Christmas--If only in my dreams."

"Home for the holidays" seems to capture our emotions. People go to great expense and hassle to get "home" for Christmas. (Airline tickets are about twice as high as normal.) What is it about home and Christmas?

Have family coming in? Going home when home is somewhere else ...to be with family? How about Jim Nabors' great song.. CHRISTMAS EVE IN MY HOME TOWN. Home, the place of our childhood. Folks will be leaving {St. Louis} and other great cities to travel to little farm houses in {Dent Co. and other such} rural areas... going home for Christmas. College kids will be eager to come home. ... and some will pine and fight depression because they can't afford to come home, or, worse still, have no home to...

Now with that idea in your mind.. hear this FROM JESUS AS HE PREPARES TO LEAVE HEAVEN FOR BETHLEHEM:

Father, I'll not be home for a while so that there can be a Christmas.

THINK ABOUT IT. IF JESUS HADN'T LEFT HIS HOME IN HEAVEN, THERE WOULD BE NO CHRISTMAS... NO SALVATION.. NO HOPE .. NO HEAVEN .. AT LEAST FOR US.

Two of my favorite Christmas scriptures:

Heb 10:5 Therefore, **when Christ came into the world -- THAT'S CHRISTMAS.. OR AT LEAST THE SCENE JUST BEFORE THE 'FIRST CHRISTMAS.'** He said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; 6 with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. 7 Then I said, 'Here I am-- it is written about me in the scroll-- I have come to do your will, O God.'" 8 First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law

required them to be made). 9 Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. (NIV)

Phil 2:5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in very nature God, **did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,**

7 but made himself nothing, **taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.** THAT IS THE INCARNATION, GOD'S SON TAKING ON FLESH!

8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

No shepherds, no wise men, no bright shining star, no angels singing ... not in those texts.. but don't you see Christmas... REAL CHRISTMAS.. IN THOSE VERSES??

WE WANT TO GO HOME FOR CHRISTMAS, LEAVING HOME IS THE PRICE JESUS PAID TO BRING ABOUT THE FIRST CHRISTMAS... BUT FARMORE THAN THAT, LEAVING HOME BROUGHT ABOUT HOPE AND PEACE AND SALVATION AND JOY AND LOVE AND ALL THOSE WONDERFUL ETERNAL BLESSINGS THAT WE SO OFTEN TAKE FOR GRANTED.

AND YET, WE SEE THE WORLD FORGETTING THE SAVIOR WHOSE COMING IS CHRISTMAS.

Allow me to illustrate with a parable .. the parable of the great king.

If the following story were not true, it would surely be unbelievable. It is true, however, as

you yourself will agree when you have read it.

There was once a great king. His love for his people knew no limits. Although the kingdom was very large, the king knew every person by name. Everything the people of the kingdom had was a gift freely given by the loving king.

So, to show their love and appreciation to the king for all he had done for them, the people decided to have a great celebration to honor his birthday. Everyone agreed it was a marvelous idea. Preparations for the celebration were very elaborate. No expense was spared by the people. They adorned their homes with lights, decorations, and expensive ornaments. There were parties, dinners, and celebrations throughout the kingdom.

All the people brought gifts for their friends and family. Many of the gifts which the people gave each other were quite expensive, involving considerable indebtedness. In fact, the people spent more on the birthday celebration than they spent at any other time of the year.

Many who were not citizens of the kingdom, and who did not even know the king, joined in the celebration. Their celebration of the king's birth was marked by excessive drinking. Since they did not know the king, they invented a good-natured, fat fellow in a red suit. He laughed a lot, but never said anything. But that didn't matter because they were too busy celebrating to listen anyhow.

The great day of celebrating his birth finally arrived, and some of his people did come bringing gifts and thanking him for his goodness to them. But to his dismay, most of the citizens never came to his house at all on the day of celebration. And the gifts brought to the king by those few who came were very meager when compared with the gifts they had given themselves.

For the most part the people said they had been so busy with all the celebrations and personal plans that they had forgotten about the king. Several said they had thought of him, but really could not work it into their schedules or budgets to come see him or bring a gift. A few were known to be quite put out when it was suggested that going to the king's house or remembering him with a gift was important.

Those people who did come to his house and who brought their loving gifts were welcomed and blessed by the king. But when they had gone and he was alone again, the king fell to thinking of the vast numbers of his people who had forgotten and forsaken him. How could they have forgotten? Had he not loved them all? How could so many of his beloved people who had found the time and money for shopping and feasting and partying and decorating and all sorts of celebrations--how could they possibly be so thoughtless, so ungrateful or selfish? Did they not know that he, too, had feelings? Was not the purpose of the birthday celebration originally planned to honor him?

When the king was alone, pondering these questions, he felt the tears well up in his eyes. And

in his loneliness, he wept.

One thought brought some hope and consolation. Even though they had forgotten him, he had not forgotten them.

Think of the celebrations of Christmas.. in how many is Jesus present? How many family gatherings invite HIM this time of year? How many business parties include the King? How many church gatherings, even, make their focus the CHRIST??

No, I'm not worried about Santa Claus pushing Jesus aside. Have you seen the CARTOON..WITH A LONG FLOWING WHITE BEARD STREAMING FROM A MANGER...caption: "CHRISTMAS, IT IS **NOT** SANTA CLAUS' BIRTHDAY!!!"

No, Santa isn't the problem. It's you and me. Putting self above Jesus, putting our selfish interests and lusts above the Christ. We must look within we must evaluate. Not ourselves, nor our loved ones, nor our favorite organization .. NOTHING MUST WIN OUT OVER THE CHRIST!

Give yourself to Jesus. Make Him and His will the first priority. I'll illustrate the point of PUTTING JESUS FIRST with the poem about the stealing of "Baby Jesus."

BABY JESUS

By Wayne Edwards, Dec 1998

**Someone stole Baby Jesus from the manger on the lawn.
When the preacher came to church, he found the baby gone.
He said with anger in his sermon that the baby had been taken.
His faith in human kind had certainly been shaken.**

**After church, still breathing flames, like a literary dragon,
He met Tommy on the sidewalk playing with a new red wagon.
Tommy was so happy it thawed the preacher's heart.
But what he saw inside the wagon gave him quite a start.**

**"It was you stole Baby Jesus, what an evil thing to do!"
Tommy said, "But Preacher, I thought everybody knew.
I asked Jesus for this wagon," as he patted it with pride.
I told him if I got it I'd let him have first ride!**

Will you put him first in "your wagon?"

Prayer