

2 Samuel 7:1-11

Dec. 26, 2021

2 Cor. 5:1-5

Luke 2:8-14

## The House of the Savior

***Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain, Ps. 127:1a***

### **O Little Town**

In 1865 a Boston pastor named Phillips Brooks visited the Holy Land at Christmastime. Upon his return he wrote a Christmas carol, which his choir director set to music for their Christmas concert in 1867. We still sing it today. “O little of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie! Above thy deep and dreamless sleep, the silent stars go by.” He wrote it that way because 155 years ago Bethlehem was still a tiny village—a quiet and peaceful place.

Bethlehem is called the “city of David” because David, Israel’s **greatest king**, grew up there with his father Jesse and his seven brothers. David tended sheep in the fields outside the village just as the shepherds were doing the night the angel appeared to them to announce the birth of Christ.

Some seven hundred years before the first Christmas, the Lord had spoken through the prophet Micah and declared that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. ***But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times, Micah 5:2.***

King David’s hometown was the place from which a savior was expected to come. The Bible says, ***So Joseph also went up ... to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary ... While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born... Luke 2:4-6.*** So Jesus’ lineage is connected to David and Bethlehem.

### **House of the Savior**

“**Savior**” is an Old Testament word that means “**One who delivers his people.**” At least nine months before, when the angel announced the birth of Jesus to Joseph, he said, ***Give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins, Matthew 1:21.***

The home where Jesus was born in Bethlehem could of have been the home of Joseph’s relatives. Since Mary was about to give birth, and her birthing would mean uncleanness for her, her husband, and anyone else who came in contact, they may have been given a stable room. There they’d also have some privacy. Some traditions say He was born in a cave near Bethlehem.

In any case, it wasn’t the type of house and home most would expect for the Savior of Israel. The people of Israel expected a savior like their great king David or Solomon, who once led Israel. The prophet Isaiah predicted: ***He will***

*reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever, Isaiah 9:7. Many expected a savior who would restore the fortunes of the nation.*

Do people expect a savior to arrive today? Given the vast majority of prayers lifted up to God, heavily tilted toward personal needs, one wonders if many people today want a savior who is more accountable to them than they are to Him. Do people want a savior who relieves them of responsibility for life's outcome?

Yet, given the mission of our Savior, a humble stable in lowly Bethlehem seems a fitting birthplace after all. *Our Savior's mission is not to take away our pain, our troubles, or our enemies, but to take away our sins.* As the prophet said: *He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities ... and by his wounds we are healed, Isaiah 53:5.*

What the people of Israel needed ... *what people the world over need is a Savior who can forgive our sins* ... all the sin that perpetuates our lostness and alienation from our Creator. Think about that. If the Savior came simply to take away our pain, right every wrong, and impose His peace, we would remain sinners, continuing to inflict pain, doing wrong, and incapable of living in peace. The problems of this world would continue to arise. The true power of the gospel is to create a miracle of conversion inside the human heart. *...it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer ... For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors, Isaiah 53:10, 12.* God gave the very best He had, in order that He might put to death the very worst in us. In Christ your past life of sordid and selfish sin can be replaced with a new life that brings honor to God.

## **Orphans**

It's always a tragedy when children lose a parent, especially when both parents are taken. We commend and pray for all foster and adoptive parents who come to the rescue of orphaned children.

Whether we realize it or not, *we are all orphans wandering through a sin-corrupted world*, a jungle of human passions, ambitions, and ideas gone astray. Humans have been orphaned from God's grace-filled home because humanity didn't want to live as God designed us, wanting instead to take God's place ... we call this sin.

Now *... the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost, Luke 19:10.* The Savior Jesus came to restore the life-giving connection (See John 15:1, 5) to God (our true Father) that we might no longer be lost. The glory of Christmas is that since *...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...* (Romans 3:23) God sent a Savior for all people ... including you and me.

## **Children of God**

Christmas time often brings families together. The arrival of our Savior opens the door for us to join our true family. ***... to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God, John 1:12-13.*** Many people use that phrase to mean all humans... “we’re all children of God.” But I don’t think that is what Scripture is saying here. It’s not about the birth every human goes through. As it says: ***... children not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*** We have no choice in the matter of our biological birth, but we sure do in our spiritual birth. ***We are given a chance for life that depends on faith, not on the constraints of nature.*** Becoming a child of God is about joining His family, the Christmas family (if you will); and that’s what shapes what kind of persons we become when we attach ourselves to Jesus. ***But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons and daughters. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’ So, you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir, Galatians 4:4.***

### **Your True Home**

Very often at funerals you will hear these words from the Gospel of John: ***Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am, John 14:1-3***

As God has revealed, the House of the Savior isn’t made up of the descendants of King David or the people of Israel, after all. ***The Savior's house is not a church building, or church activities.*** It’s His family: vitally connected to Jesus and one another... the family of God. ***As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ, 1 Pet. 2:4-5.***

I ache for all the adults and children who do not know their true Savior who brings them into their true Father’s home ... their true home. I lament all the children who have been baptized, been to Sunday School, maybe attended Christian schools, maybe even became church members, yet still have not a real and abiding faith in this Savior from Bethlehem. ***Without a genuine connection with their Savior children grow up as orphans in this sin-filled world.*** Without a guide to their true home, they will have unwittingly surrendered to the ruler of this world. But when given proper guidance, they may surrender to Jesus. And when you surrender to Him you will not surrender to anyone or anything else.

The whole purpose of our Savior leaving His heavenly abode to enter into human life was to bring us back to our true home, which is with God. ***For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands, 2 Cor. 5:1.***

Years ago, Dr. Bill Hinson, who at the time was pastor of First UMC, Houston, told a story about building a dog house for his daughter Cathy's new beagle puppy.<sup>1</sup> Cathy was just five or six years old when she got the puppy as a Christmas gift. On December 26, Bill went to work on the dog house. Bill got a bit carried away. He built a house large enough for a German Shepherd, with an excellent roof and even a rug on the floor.

Quite proud of his workmanship he placed the little puppy inside the house. But the puppy whimpered and cried and ran out of the over-sized dog house. Twice more Bill placed the puppy inside, with the same results.

By that time Bill was disgusted and went inside to have a glass of tea. A little while later he glanced out the window and was amazed to see that Cathy (his little girl) had picked up the tiny puppy and the two of them crawled inside the dog house. The two of them stayed inside that huge dog house for almost an hour. From that moment onward, the puppy was right at home in his oversized house.

Before Jesus Christ entered our history God was known to be awesome but people wondered about God's character. Was He a fearsome judge always ready to punish evil-doers? Was He a jealous tyrant that needed to be appeased? Maybe God seemed like that oversized dog house that scared a tiny puppy.

Then Jesus came alongside us, as a fragile baby born in humble circumstances. Though He was the awesome Son of God, Creator of the world, He was a gentle man who liked to hold children on His lap. He cared about all people, even prostitutes, foreigners, thieves, and people like you and me, sinners all. He taught about a God who loves sinners even more than He hates sin. Jesus taught people to pray to God as "Abba" or "Dad." This Jesus came first and foremost to pay the penalty for the sins of all when He died on the cross. In the process He demonstrated the character of God, dominated by love, and invited us into our true home.

## **Come Home**

Recently I received a brochure in the mail from the Montana Dept. of Commerce: "It's where you belong. And it's time to come home." Way back in the last century, when I was still in college (in Missoula, MT), my summer job was giving tennis lessons. One of the parks where I instructed children had an activities center where children could play ping-pong, or check out kick balls, jump ropes, and other sports equipment. An older, kindly gentleman opened the building every morning, gave out play things, and kept watch over all. I remember very clearly how he admonished a boy who he found sitting on the

ping-pong table – a definite “no no.” He simply asked the boy, “Do you sit on the tables at your home?” When the boy sheepishly responded, “No,” the man said, “Then make yourself at home.”

**The songs of Christmas speak of the most momentous event in human history. They're about our Savior entering into history to bring us into our true home with God. This Savior, born in Bethlehem, ushers us into our true family and way of living. What sinners most need, Jesus came to provide.**

**O little town of Bethlehem ... the hopes and dreams of all the years are met in thee ...**

***...to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, John 1:12***

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<sup>1</sup> “Thinking About Advent” by Dr. Bill Bouknight.