

# I'll Be Home for Christmas

Message #2 in the series "I'll Be Home for Christmas"

St. Paul's United Methodist Church of Elizabethtown  
December 12, 2021

As we prepare for God's word, would you join with me in prayer?

*Lord God, open us up to Your word and open Your word up to us. Teach us what You would have us learn as You can form our lives into the disciples that You have called us to be. All of this Lord, we pray in Jesus name. All God's people said. Amen.*

In 2019, which is the last year that the statistics were actually accurate due to COVID, the next two years, statistically, 122,260 children in the United States were waiting to be adopted. Also, 135,000 children are adopted in the United States each year. And of the non-stepparent adoptions, about 59 percent are from the child welfare or foster system. 26 percent are adoptions from other countries and 15 percent are from voluntarily relinquished American babies. Back in 2005, one of my preaching professors from seminary, Tom Long, wrote a book, and in that book, he shared the following story about adoption. Certainly, he talked a little bit in setting up the story, shared some of the frustrations about adoption in America, especially the huge number of couples wanting to adopt, the number of "desirable" children that were available for adoption, and the extremely long waiting lists in order to adopt and the incredible red tape related to the adoption process.



And then he shared the story about Mr. and Mrs. Williams. Mr. and Mrs. Williams, who were a Christian couple. They held very tightly to their faith, and they adopted four children. And they wanted to adopt yet another. Interestingly, the Williamses did not have any delays and there were no waiting lists or red tape. The reason is that all of the children that the Williamses adopted were children with special needs. They were all disabled. One child, a son, had Down Syndrome and the other three, two daughters and a son, had all major birth defects. They were to use the euphemism of the adoption agencies at the time, "difficult to place." In a world where virtually every prospective parent, Tom Long, says "dreams of a bright, beautiful and perfect child" here, Mr. and Mrs. Williams have chosen to offer a home and a love to children almost no one else wanted. Mrs. Williams said, "Our children are our greatest joy. Caring for them is what we're on earth for."

So, we're in this Advent season, and as part of the Advent season, we have begun a sermon series that's entitled "I'll Be Home for Christmas." Home is one of those weird terms. It doesn't always, for everybody, ring of that nostalgic place where there's always a Christmas tree or food on the tables. Sometimes home is a challenge. Sometimes going back home is a challenge. So, when you look at the story, which is what we have been doing, the story that is the Christmas story, but in specific from Joseph's perspective, we have been asking last week and again a little bit more today, "Why Joseph?" Why Joseph? Why when we put it together, did we learn last week that you can measure a person's capacity for love by how they are willing to sacrifice? Why is it that Joseph fit into that story? Why Joseph? You know

when you look at Joseph's story, we realize he was not a king, but there was royalty in his bloodline. According to the genealogy of Matthew Chapter One, there was a lot of royalty in Joseph's bloodline. In fact, as we read that same genealogy, we realized he was not a political or religious reformer, but he was a descendant of one, specifically King Josiah. An amazing story. You should look it up.

We also know about Joseph that he was not rich, nor was he entitled. In fact, he came from a poor, small village called Nazareth, and most likely, the evidence indicates that he was probably of the working class, a craftsman. From Matthew Chapter 13, we read that Jesus was a carpenter's son. So, we reference Joseph as the carpenter. Back in that day, the carpenter, and the Greek word as "tecton," and that meant so many different things. Probably, Joseph wasn't really someone who worked with wood. He probably worked with stone. He was probably more like a mason. And if you push it just a little bit further, what we realize about Joseph is that he was probably a handyman. And when things broke, you called the handyman. So, they called Joseph. Joseph was of the working class. So why Joseph? Why did God choose Joseph? Why does God choose anybody? Who does God choose to adopt to carry out his mission? Oh, here's the answer, took me a long time to figure this out, right? Who does God adopt? Anyone God chooses. That's the bottom line.

God can choose anyone and what we know from reading the scriptures as we know the heart of God. See God, according to the Bible, God is the champion of the weak, of the lost, of the broken, of the oppressed. Any time God wants to do something huge, He chooses the person or persons that we least expect. Even the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul was clearly a Pharisee. He was well-schooled. If you talk to anybody of his day, Paul was the entitled one. But God saw something in Paul that maybe Paul didn't see in himself. God interrupted his life. God interrupted his journey. Paul was persecuting Christians. He was seeking ways to undermine what God was birthing in this movement called the church. And so God interrupted Paul on the journey. Radically changed his life and set his trajectory on a different path. And on that path, Paul writes about a thorn in the flesh, a metaphor saying that Paul had to struggle with something a weakness, something that really bothered him and that he prayed about this multiple times. And in Second Corinthians Chapter 12, this is what we read, Paul says,

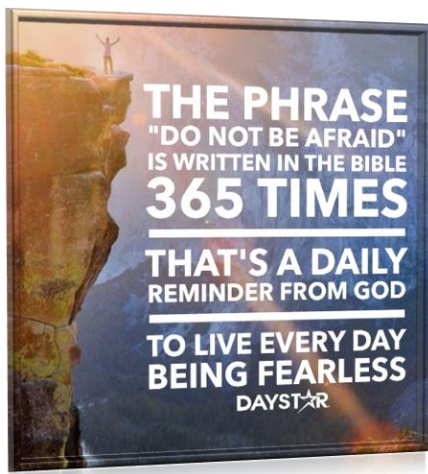
***But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." [2 Corinthians 12: 9-10 NIV]***

The Apostle Paul got it, he got it, he understood. And in the moment of the exchange with Joseph, Joseph was beginning to get it. What was he getting? This - you can trust the one who entrusts you with his son. You can trust the one who entrust you with his son. Joseph heard that, not in those specific terms, but he heard it. Let's look very quickly, Matthew Chapter One - the story continues. Just like last week, we're going to start in verse 18, but we're only going to look at a couple of verses. This is what it says,

***"Now, the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man***

***and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.'"* [Matthew 1:18-21 ESV]**

It's a very important phrase embedded in these verses. I highlighted them already, so you know what they are. Do not be afraid, do not be afraid. It's certainly easy to say, right? It's easy for an angel to say that to Joseph, but can you imagine how you would be feeling if you were Joseph? You had a lot to lose. You had a reputation; your family had a reputation. This pregnancy of his betrothed could ruin everything, could challenge everything, not to mention all of what he was feeling about his betrothed bride. All of the questions. Do not be afraid. It's an interesting phrase when you look at the Bible, Old and New Testaments alike, and you take that phrase or its equivalent like, fear not. Do not be afraid or fear not, and you count them all up individually, now I know that there are times like comparing



Matthew's gospel with Luke's gospel, they're talking about the same events, but from different perspectives, but when you count just the phrase, Biblical scholars have counted roughly 365 times that for those of you who are playful and words and phrases. That's the equivalent of one every day for a year just to remind us that God's got this God, whatever it is that you're facing, God's got it. Why does God got it? Because as a follower of Jesus, God's got you. He's got you in the palm of His hands. He's got you. And if God's got you, you need not fear. Fear not. And for the majority of those times that you see in the scriptures of the Old and New Testament, the phrase do not be afraid, there's usually a next phrase, "do not be afraid for I bring you good news," do not be afraid because and therein lies the challenge. How do we get beyond fear?

Franklin Delano Roosevelt. You remember the guy from history class FDR? He once said, "Courage is not the absence of fear, but the assessment that something else is more important than fear." Something else is more important. From a biblical standpoint and from our standpoint, when the angel tells Joseph, do not be afraid when God's word tells us to not be afraid, there's usually a because that's coming afterwards and the because is more important than the moment of our fear. Because the because tells the story of a mission that God has in mind. Never lose track of the because. Because it gives strength for the journey. And when you combine the fact that God always chooses the weak to confound the strong, the seemingly foolish to confound the seemingly wise, and you combine that with the fact that the mission that God has in mind, the mission to which he is inviting us to be a part of, that's bigger than the moment of our fear, then that phrase that the Angel told Joseph really rings true for us.

Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid. Why? Because even when we do not know the because. We do know this, that you can trust the one who entrusts you with His son. You can trust the one who entrust you with His son. And get this, we as the church, we as followers of Jesus, we have been entrusted with the Son. We've been entrusted. So, we can trust the one who entrusts us. So, what do we do with that? Right now, I know that there are people

within this church who have been adopted, and I know that there are people within this church who either have adopted, who are or who have tried to adopt. I know that for a fact, and I know in spite of all of that adoption of children, whether they have special needs or not is not in your cards, I get that. But adoption for followers of Jesus doesn't always mean a child. There are people or programs or ministries or businesses right in our neighborhoods that are needing to be adopted. Right now, today. For example, in our neighborhood, certainly there are children that are wanting or waiting to be fostered or adopted. We know that. And the COVID pandemic, just threw all adoptions into turmoil, that whole process has been arrested in many different ways. But there's also a recent widowed person who longs for companionship. There's also a teenager who needs to be mentored. There's also a small business owner who needs customers, and there's a single mom who needs just a break. And who knows, maybe if we ratchet this up one more degree, we can take this to a larger concept.

Right now, within the Elizabethtown area, 6.5 out of every 10 people are not connected to a church home. In spite of all of the churches that are on multiple corners within this area, 6.5 out of every 10 people statistically are not connected with a church home. I'll Be Home for Christmas on a spiritual level doesn't connect 6.5 out of every 10 people. There's 6.5 out of every 10 that are waiting to be adopted by a church. So, who does God want us to adopt? Who does God want us to adopt? Maybe it's an individual that connects with one of those lists with you. Maybe it's a business. You know, there's tons of small businesses that are hurting because of the pandemic. Maybe it's a matter of adopting them as a regular attendee, a regular customer. Maybe there's a teenager that's just burdening your heart. Who does God want you to adopt? And just when you think I don't know, what can I do? I'm just me. We need to remember, you can trust the one who entrusts you with his Son, you can trust the one who entrusts you with his Son. If you had all of your life together. God might not choose you. Think about that. You can trust the one who entrusts you with his Son.

Let's pray.

*God, thank You for Your trust. Your trust in us scares us. We have to be honest. But in spite of that fear, we know that You are the God who equips the weak. You are the God who gives beyond in abundance all of what we need to carry out the mission that You have called us to. You are the God who calls us to live beyond ourselves for the because is always bigger than our moment of fear. So, Lord, give us a picture of that because. Place on our hearts and on our minds, the name, or the place that You are leading us to be an ambassador of hope, ambassador of New Life. Connect us, Lord, to the ones who need to be connected to You. We trust You and we thank You for trusting us with Your son, it's in His name that we pray. Amen.*