

# Home by Another Way: Because Love Came Down

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Vigil for the Feast of the Nativity of the Lord, Year A  
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*"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.' Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices; together they shout for joy, for in plain sight they see the return of the Lord to Zion. Break forth; shout together for joy, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people; he has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God." Isaiah 52:7-10*

*O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things. His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory. The Lord has made known his victory; he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations. He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God. Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises. Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody. With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord. Let the sea roar and all that fills it, the world and those who live in it. Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy at the presence of the Lord, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with equity. Psalm 98*

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. John 1:1-14*

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

There's something about Christmas Eve that makes everything feel...better. The lights glow a little warmer. The music hits a little deeper. Even the quiet has a different kind of weight to it. And let's be honest, we all behave just a little better when we have the little candle things. It's hard to get too cynical when "Silent Night" is playing.

We gather tonight with all kinds of stories behind us. Some of us have had a year full of joy. Others are crawling across the finish line, just hoping the baby sleeps through the night or the flight tomorrow isn't delayed. Some of us come every Sunday. Some of us show up because it's tradition or because someone promised there would be cookies. But whatever the reason, we come...and that's enough. Because deep down, we are all looking for something steady and good. Something that reminds us love is still possible, and that it still has the power to change things.

This Advent at Grace, we've been exploring that kind of change. Our series, *Home by Another Way*, borrowed its name from a James Taylor song that retells the story of the Magi, the wise guys who meet the newborn Christ and, afterward, choose to take a different road home. In the song, Taylor sings, "They go home by another way, maybe me and you can be wise guys too." Now, after this series, being called a "wise guy" by James Taylor is a kind of spiritual affirmation I didn't know I needed. Still, there's a quiet truth buried in that lyric. When we really encounter grace, the road behind us doesn't always lead us forward anymore. We have to choose a different way.

Each week, we've followed a story of someone whose path was interrupted. Jesus told us to stay awake. Isaiah cast a vision of peace. The Prophet John cried out in the wilderness. Joseph made a quiet, costly decision to love. And week after week, we've asked the same question: what if Christmas doesn't lead us back to the same ole same ole? What if the whole point is to change direction?

And tonight, here we are. The child has arrived. The candles are lit. The story has been told. But it does not end here. This is not the final destination. It's the place we pivot. Like the shepherds, like the Magi, like anyone who's had their heart cracked open by wonder, we leave differently than we came. We carry something home that wasn't with us before.

The story of this night is more than lovely. It's transformative. And if we're willing, we too can go home by another way.

If you ever want a reminder that God does things differently than you or I would, Christmas delivers it. God could have stepped into the world with spectacle, with thunder and fire, with something that would make the headlines. But instead, God arrives in the middle of the night, in a borrowed stable, through the body of an unwed teenage girl and into the arms of a carpenter who had only just begun to make peace with what was happening. It is small and strange and, somehow, more powerful because of that.

This is not the kind of birth that makes the front page. There is no parade. No royal guards. No prepared nursery. The only announcement comes to a group of shepherds who were working the night shift. And yet, heaven sings. Angels burst into the sky to say what no one else would think to say, that glory and peace have come to earth in the most unexpected way. That God is not waiting at a distance. God is already here, crying and breathing and wrapped in swaddling clothes.

The beauty of St. Luke's telling I think is in its quietness. It does not try to explain everything. It simply invites us to notice. Joseph stays. Mary treasures. The shepherds hurry. No one really speaks except the angels, but you get the sense that every heart in that stable is awake and listening. It is not a story that shouts. It whispers. And sometimes that is the only way to hear what matters.

We need this story more than we realize. The world is still tired. Hearts are still heavy. Peace feels more out of reach now than it has in a long time. I look around and wonder how a story like this can still speak. And yet it does. Because it is not about that everything is fine. It is about trusting that God is still coming close. That grace does not require perfection. That holiness has always preferred real life experiences to pristine palace settings.

This night reminds us that the holy often arrives quietly. It slips in while the world is busy and preoccupied and makes its home in the ordinary. It meets us where we are, not where we think we ought to be. And somehow, it changes things. Not with pressure, but with presence. Not with noise, but with love.

This story is not just the heart of Christmas. It is the heart of our hope. That in a world that still aches, God has not stopped being among us. That light continues to shine, not in far-off places, but here, among us still now. And that tonight, if we are willing to pay attention, we may just catch a glimpse of what has always been true: that God is with us, and we are not alone.

As precious as tonight is for us, we don't stay at the manger forever. That may be one of the hardest truths of Christmas. The candles will burn down. The music will fade. We will gather our coats and walk out into the cold. And yet, that is exactly what this story is meant to do. It invites us in so that it can send us out. The real question is not how beautiful this night is. It is what we carry with us when it's over.

In St. Matthew's gospel, the Magi do not arrive on Christmas Eve. They are still somewhere on the road, watching the stars and reading dreams. But we know what is coming. We know that when they do find Jesus, everything changes. Their journey takes a turn. They return home by a different way. Not just geographically, but spiritually. The encounter alters them, and they choose a path that is riskier, and more faithful.

That image has been with us through this whole series. And it lingers now. Christmas Eve is not just the destination. It is the turning point. It is the moment we sit still long enough to see the light, and then choose how we will respond to it. That's what James Taylor was singing about. The wise ones saw something that mattered, and they let it shape their next steps. They did not explain it away or rush back to business as usual. They let wonder reroute them.

So maybe the same could be true for us. Maybe we do not need all the answers tonight. Maybe we just need to trust that something sacred has found us, and that it is already shaping the way ahead. Maybe being wise this year looks like gentleness. Or honesty. Or slowing down enough to listen. Maybe it looks like letting joy make our hearts softer, not harder. Maybe it means refusing to go back the same way we came.

Whatever road lies ahead, we do not journey it alone. The light of this night goes with us. It shines in every act of courage, every quiet decision to love, every time we rise for our rights or the rights of others, every moment that we dare believe that grace still works. And if we do go home by another way, it will not be because the stars told us. It will be because love did.

The Apostle John tells the Christmas story in a slightly different way. There is no stable, no shepherds, no baby in a manger. There are no angels singing or stars guiding travelers across deserts. Instead, John speaks in poetry. He brings us back to the very beginning, to a time before time, and says that Christ, the Word, has always been. The light has always been shining, even before we had eyes to see it. And now, in the fullness of time, that light has come close. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

That is the heart of Christmas. Not just that Jesus was born, but that God chose to become one of us. Not in theory or in metaphor, but in actual flesh. In skin that bruised, in lungs that gasped for air, in a heart that beat for his people. God chose to know the ache of being human. To walk roads that feel too long. To weep at graves. To laugh at dinners. To feel the sting of betrayal and yet the sweetness of friendship and connection. And to love, with a love so complete it would carry him through death and into resurrection.

That is not a story meant to stay in stained glass. It is meant to live in us. If God has made a home in this world, then our calling is not just to visit that home on Christmas Eve. It is to carry it with us. It is to go into our neighborhoods, our workplaces, our families, and our weary world with a tenderness that looks like Jesus. It is to remember that holiness is not reserved for the sacred few but is woven into the fabric of our daily lives in compassion, in justice, in presence, and in joy.

All Advent, we've been asking what it means to go home by another way. And now we know. It means we return to our lives having seen something we cannot unsee. It means we do not take the same path we took to get here. It means we listen to the dreams, we notice the stars, and we move forward differently because we believe that the light has come, and that it is already changing the world.

So please, take in the beauty of this night. Sing the carols. Light your candle. And then, when it is time to leave, go home by another way. Let love reroute you. Let grace rewrite your plans. Let the Word who became flesh travel beside you. Because Christ has come. And everything, even the path, is made anew. Thanks be to God. Amen.