

“Welcome Home”
John 1:1-3,14 and John 14:1-3

Series: Welcome the Child

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The Woodside Church

Christmas Eve, December 24, 2021

I recently received this email:

My four year old grandson, Atlas attends Woodside Christian Pre-school. A few weeks ago he came home and told us Mr. Doug came to talk to the classes and sing some songs. My daughter tried to correct your title to Pastor Doug but Atlas insisted that it is Mr. Doug, so we let that go. Atlas then told us that Mr. Doug is special. When asked why, he said Mr. Doug is special because he made the trees, the flowers, the rivers, the mountains, the animals and even people! Mr. Doug is very special! When we tried to tell him that God, not Mr. Doug, made all of that he disagreed and said that he was sure it was Mr. Doug. After some discussion and reading some books, he now agrees that it might be God, not you - sorry to knock you off the pedestal! P.S. What are you teaching at that school?

I'm glad they knocked me off my pedestal. With the state the world is in, I would not want God's job description. But in one sense Atlas is right: on Christmas - God, the Creator of the mountains, trees, animals, and humans became a human. The Gospel of John opens:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1-3, 14)

The first message of Christmas is **God Came to Be With Us in Our Home**. Before creation, the Son was at the Father's side. Together, with the Holy Spirit, they created all things. Then, at Bethlehem, the Son, the Word, became flesh and made his dwelling among us. This verse literally says God the Son “pitched his tent” among us. He camped out with us. We couldn't see God until the Son came to live with us. He shows us what God is like.

Some years ago my daughter Kristin and her husband Bryan shared a picture with us. We were thrilled to hear they were going to have a baby! Though my daughter started feeling wiggles and kicks for several months, for my wife and me, the baby was still just a picture, an idea, almost invisible. Now, we can see, snuggle and kiss our little Evelyn.

Because of Christmas, God's not invisible any more. He has skin, hair, a face, a voice and a shadow. God suddenly becomes personal, approachable and vulnerable. Why? Because the only way God can strike up a personal relationship with us is to show up in person. And like all relationships, that is a huge risk on God's part. Tim Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City writes,

There is no way to have a real relationship without becoming vulnerable to hurt. Christmas tells us that God became breakable and fragile. God became someone we could hurt. Why? To get us back. No other religion—whether secularism, Greco-

Roman paganism, Eastern religion, Judaism, or Islam—believes God became breakable or suffered or had a body.

What do we discover about God when He shows us Himself? He is not a distant God, a distracted God, a disconnected God. He is not a warrior God, a wrathful God, a weak God. God wants to know you and be known by you, love you and be loved by you, live with you and give life to you. That's why they call Jesus Emmanuel. It means: God with us.

On Christmas, God came to be with you in your home. Like "love," "home" is one of the most beautiful words in the English language. Nothing can match Mom's home cooking, the comfort of your family room, your own soft bed. That's because home is more than four walls, a roof, and an address on the mailbox. Home is the voices and faces and embraces of your loved ones. Without them, a house is not a home.

Maybe your house doesn't quite feel like home this Christmas. Maybe you can't get together and celebrate with some loved ones because of Covid. Maybe tension and disagreements keep you apart from family and friends. Maybe a dear one present at Christmas past is not with us anymore. Home has changed. It doesn't feel quite the same.

And possibly, within the privacy of your four walls, there are forces loosening the fabric of your family. Just the everyday duties of going to school, holding down a job, paying bills, raising children, and keeping love alive in your marriage are much more difficult these days. Covid may be giving you cabin fever, fear and frustration. It's putting pressure on your relationships. There may be harsh words, long silences, forms of abuse, family secrets. Alcohol or other addictions poison relationships. Caring for a loved one with a physical or mental illness is frustrating and exhausting. Affairs devastate marriages. They used to call it "a broken home" when someone walks out the door.

It's in times like these that God walks in. He comes to be with you in your home – in the celebrations and struggles. **God Came to Give You a Better Home.** Jesus says,

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10

There are a lot of thieves trying to steal from you. Far worse than the telemarketing and email scams are the ransomware attacks.

SonicWall, an online security firm, expects 714 million attempted ransomware attacks by the close of 2021, a 134 percent skyrocket over last year's totals. They logged the equivalent to 9.7 ransomware attempts per customer each business day.¹

They want to hold your company or your household hostage until you pay the ransom. Yet there are also thieves who steal your joy, kill your plans and destroy your dreams. It could be a pandemic, a problem, or a person in your life. The main weapon they use to hold you hostage is fear. Underneath nearly all our stress and struggles, anxieties and worries is fear.

This is why the constant refrain you hear in the Christmas stories is: Fear Not!

¹ <https://www.msspalert.com/cybersecurity-research/500-million-attempted-ransomware-attacks-so-far-in-2021/>

- Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son. Luke 1:13
- Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son. Luke 1:30
- Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. Matthew 1:20
- But the angel said to the shepherds, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.” Luke 2:10-11

Jesus came to set you free from fear, to give you a better, fuller, abundant life. He gives His life as the ransom to set you free from the world’s ransomware.

The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. Matthew 20:28

Jesus came to serve. That’s why we serve: to give everyone a better home life. At Woodside we work to help people in need find a home. This month and in January, this building becomes a shelter and a refuge for our homeless neighbors on bitter cold nights. You can volunteer to help Code Blue by signing up on the Connection Card.

Last week, I was honored to offer a prayer at the dedication of a new house in Bristol built by Habitat for Humanity. Elaine and her children were ecstatic to receive the keys and finally have a place to call their own. That house was built with your generous support to the Home for Christmas offering we gathered last year. You are literally built into the walls: the names of your loved ones are written on its studs.

This year, our special Christmas Offering “Welcome the Child” makes it possible for children in the country of Zambia to have a forever home. Many children lose parents to diseases such as AIDS. Others are simply abandoned. The Bill and Bette Bryant Crisis Nursery and the Namumu Orphanage offer these little ones the faith, hope and love of Jesus. They are educated, cared for and ultimately placed with families.

Children such as Precious and Blessing. Years ago these sisters were abandoned by their mother who was terminally sick with AIDs and could no longer care for them. The girls were HIV positive and malnourished. The Crisis Nursery welcomed and treated their illness. Their health improved. Yet no family claimed Precious and Blessing.

Then a pastor named Bishop Frank and his wife felt moved by God to adopt the girls. Bishop Frank himself was abandoned behind a hospital soon after his birth. By the grace of God nurses rescued him and found his grandmother who raised him. Now Bishop Frank wants to do the same for these sisters. Instead of a lifetime of rejection as HIV-positive orphans, Precious and Blessing are now the beloved daughters of an esteemed Bishop. “God rescued me,” Bishop Frank says, “and now God is calling me to do the same.” Please give generously to the Welcome the Child offering. For Jesus says,

Whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. Matt. 18:5

Let’s help more precious, blessed children find a forever home.

Like Bishop Frank and his wife, Jesus came to rescue you and me. He wants to adopt you into His family and give you a better life. There's a lot of fears, rubble and trouble now and in 2022. God wants to help you clear away the wreckage. That's why I invite you to join us for our next message series: Rising from the Ruins. Starting January 2nd the Lord will show us how to remove the rubble and reunite as a community founded on the Solid Rock of Jesus. It won't be the same as the past. With God, it can be wonderful!

That's because **God Came to Give Us a Forever Home with Him**. On the night of His crucifixion Jesus said Fear Not one more time.

Do not let your hearts be troubled. 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

I have read these words at numerous funerals this year: Sylvia, Jeffrey, Carol, Rachel, Catherine, Dave, Pat, Barry, Janet, Louise, Ed, Rob and two ladies named Ruth. I've shared them with more families who've lost a loved one this year. Why do we hold on to this promise so tightly? If all God did was come to be with us and give us a better life here it would not be enough. The reason we fear not in this life is because we know Jesus came to give us a forever home with Him in the next. God came down, immersed Himself in our sin and sorrow, and then went a step further. God sacrificed Himself. Jesus laid down His life to save us and set us free, so we can one day go home with Him.

Tonight I invite you welcome Jesus into the home of your heart. Here are some steps you can take to open the door and let Him in:

1. Commit or recommit your life to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior
2. Join us for the Rising from the Ruins series in the New Year
3. Join a Growth Group
4. Serve in one of our missions like Code Blue

These steps will open the door of your heart to Jesus and give you the certainty that Jesus will open the door to His home one day for you.

Ruth believed that with every bone in her body. Bucks County was Ruth Wright's home for ninety-six years and for all those years she was a farmer. When a reporter asked the secret of her long life, she said, "Good farm living and a good farm life." Ruth met her husband John at a farmer's dance in the white building outside this church. In 1952 they built the house which would be Ruth's home for the rest of her life. Their farm, Broadmeadows, sits on the Newtown bypass across from Shady Brook Farm. On the silo they hang a star to shine the light of Christ and share a message of hope with all who pass by at Christmas. Over the years they lit the star for sick friends. She was a member of this church for sixty-five years. She always sat in the last pew with her daughter Sharon.

Ruth loved the simple life of a farmer. But her life was not easy. John and Ruth adopted their son Thomas in 1957. He brought joy to their lives. Yet there were many heartbreaking times for John and Ruth culminating in the day in 1987 when Tom passed away at the age of 30. Just six months later, John suffered a stroke and died suddenly. Ruth

was stricken to the core. For four decades she and John were one in heart, mind and spirit. Now her beloved was gone and she would live the next 32 years without him. In time she found a way to turn her grief into a gift of praise. Many of you know this beautiful stained glass window of the Risen Jesus watching over the world. What you may not know is Ruth Wright gave this window in memory of her husband John and son Tom.

For a lady who so loved her friends and faith, the isolation caused by Covid was very painful. When she seemed to be failing, Sharon arranged with me to have Ruth come sit in her familiar pew, gaze on this beautiful window and receive communion. That moment restored her soul. Yet as Christmas drew near last year, so did the end of Ruth's long life. On the day before Christmas Eve I visited the farm. Ruth didn't get up, open her eyes or speak the whole time I was there. It had been that way for days. Sharon and I held Ruth's hands, we prayed with her and sang Silent Night. Ruth celebrated Jesus' birthday one more time here on earth. The day after Christmas, she surprised Sharon by asking for help to sit up. Then Ruth looked up to the ceiling and said, "John has come to take me home." With that she leaned back and went home with him. That night the Christmas star on her silo blazed brightly for Ruth.

On Christmas, the one who made the stars came to our home so, like Ruth, you can one day go home with Him.