

I'll Be Home For Christmas – Nazareth John 1:43-50

We have been imagining together what it might have been like to be home for Christmas in the towns/countries surrounding the birth of Jesus!

Just north of the place where Jesus was born was Jerusalem... To the East was Babylon/Persia/Arabia... To the South-West was Egypt... And to the far north was Nazareth (the actual hometown of Mary, Joseph, & Jesus).

While we've been looking at all these places, this sermon series is not really about geography (where these towns/countries are)... It is about what these places are known for... their reputations... based on Biblical accounts.

- "Jerusalem" – was known as "God's holy city" & yet it was this city that rejected God's own Son! Can that be said of us/our families/our gatherings? It is possible to be religious & yet also reject God's greatest gift of all to us!

We lit the "love" candle that 1st week to remind us of God's great love in sending His Son to this world to save us! What has been our response to that?

- "The East" – A place that most of us would call secular/pagan/far from God... & yet it was the Magi from the East, true "wisemen", who came & bowed before Jesus! It took time but they finally made it to the party!

We lit the "faith/hope" candle that 2nd week to remind us that no one is beyond hope, because faith is a gift of God that anyone can receive!

- "Egypt" – the place of mixed reputation... Sometimes they were safe, a sanctuary of refuge... & other times they were the source of great bondage & burden... Families & Christmas gatherings can be a lot like that!

Last Sunday we lit the "peace" candle to remind us that no matter where we are, when we are, & what is going on, there is a peace that can be found and experienced in Jesus... Emmanuel... God with us!

Today we light the "joy" candle & that means we're all happy & filled with great joy on this last Sunday before Christmas (the darkest day of the year)... Right?

If joy is based on circumstances, what's going on around us, or even where we are from, then our joy will be short-lived! It doesn't take long, or much, to steal away happiness and replace it with anger, fear, anxiety, hate... Does it?

Our joy needs to be found, rooted, and established in something far greater! Something that transcends our situations, our changing seasons of life, & our emotional responses... Today we look at Jesus' hometown of Nazareth!

What do we remember about this town that Mary & Joseph lived in & that Jesus called home? What has been said in Scripture about it? John 1:43-50

Can you imagine having this reputation as a town, as a people living within it? "Oh, I am just from that place that nothing ever good comes out of... Nazareth!" How much joy can be found in having this as your backstory?

But... what Nathanael, & others, would come to find out is that something good would come out of this town... the ultimate good... God's own Son, Jesus!

No one would have guessed it, but what came out of this seemingly insignificant, waste of time & space, town would change the world!

Nathanael's first response was given out of what he did not know... But then he met Jesus, & the knowledge of Him changed everything for Nathanael! nazareth

In his first encounter with Jesus, Jesus said to him, **"Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."** What does this mean to him?

- Jesus was present... aware... working... even when we couldn't see Him!

No one knows what Nathanael was doing under that fig tree that day, but the fact that Jesus saw him, and knew he was there, was enough for Nathanael to respond by saying **"Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"**

Why does this encounter w/Jesus matter for the Nazareth's & Nathanael's today?

- Have you ever thought that because of where you were from that you were somehow disqualified, disadvantaged, incapable of doing or being something?
- Have you ever believed in the false narratives that other people, and even yourself, proclaim about you?
- Have you ever found yourself seemingly alone under a metaphoric fig tree, asking the questions of "Why... How... When... What... Where?"

"Could anything good ever come from all of this?" This is the Nazareth experience!

There have been times in my life where I have had words with God like this... In the midst of those times, if someone would've come up to me & said **"I see you... I hear you..."** I too would've been overwhelmed by the presence of God!

This is the Christmas experience! God is saying, **"I see you... I hear you... I am with you... & I am at work even in the places where it seems I am most distant!"**

Whatever may seem like a lost cause... a mistake... meaningless... God can use for good, to change your life, & also the world! Remember what came from Nazareth!