

Rev. Mike Cole
Providence Presbyterian Church
First Sunday after Christmas
December 28,2025
Isaiah 63:7-9; Matthew 2:13-23

"Come All Ye Faithful"

How was everyone's Christmas? Who had the most people for Christmas Dinner? My friend, Katie, who is in Louisiana get the prize for the most people for dinner at Christmas – 39 of her birth family from across the country gathered for a Christmas reunion in Mississippi.

Most of us like to make a big deal out of celebrating Christmas. But not everyone does. My grandson-in-law, Michael told me that after he turned seven, his family stopped celebrating Christmas. It was only after he joined our family that he discovered the meaning of Christmas and the value of celebrating.

Amidst all the "fal-de-ra" we make over Christmas, (and we should make a major celebration of Jesus' birthday) we need to remember that in reality, God just sort of slipped into the world, with hardly anyone noticing. As William Sloane Coffin put it, "Could anything be more frustrating? We want God to be God, but God wants to be one of us, a still small voice, a babe in a manger. We want God to be all-powerful, so that we can be weak and dependent; but God wants us to be all-loving so that we can be strong.... so the word of the Lord has to hit the world with the force of a hint."

That first Christmas, long ago, was only a hint, a small voice in a tiny corner of the Roman Empire. The poet G.K. Chesterton was right in proclaiming that event as an invitation to all people everywhere, "to an open house in the evening.....to an older place than Eden, and a taller town than Rome. To the end of the way of the wandering star, to the things that cannot be and that are, to the place where God was homeless, and you and I are at home."

We are invited, you and I, to an open house in the evening, to the manger behind the Inn, or to the church, or to the heart of God. That is the essence of Christmas - that we are invited. We are drawn to God as iron filings are to a magnet. Every year, it's the same story that is told, and yet we never tire of hearing it, because the child within us wants to be a child again. We're drawn by the mystery of all that we cannot understand, and believe me, there is much that we don't understand about how God could really be that child in Bethlehem.

But while something attracts us to the newborn Christ, there is something within us that doesn't want all this to happen this way. We are attracted, but at the same time we kneel uneasily at the manger, not sure of what to do and not sure of what this really means for us. The poet may say that this is our ultimate home, but in the meantime, we have other homes which demand our presence. We're not always sure about this God who comes as a little child who grows up to be a man who makes demands on us.

In spite of our hesitancy to follow Christ from the cradle to the cross, God continues to send us the invitation to the open house in the evening. We are invited to come home, to the manger, to the God-child, to the heart of God. We know the invitation is there - we sense it and feel it. We don't need any angel choirs telling us that. We know it deep within ourselves.

As St. Augustine put it long ago, "Thou hast made us for thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee." Blaise Pascal put it this way, "There is a God-sized hole in each of our hearts." Deep within us we know the truth of those words. Like the persistent parent that He is, God keeps sending us hints, clues and invitations to come home.

That's what Christmas is all about. The powerful pull of Christmas, the attraction of the child in a manger, the interpretations of poets, and the melodies of carols are but invitations, hints, or clues to return to our true home.

We need to be alert to these invitations. The invitation to our true home may come during a time of worship here in church. Or it might come through a visit to someone in a convalescent hospital. Or it might be offered through words of encouragement we can give to someone who is hurting. Or perhaps the invitation will come through times when we are on the receiving end of ministry. Wherever and whenever the invitation comes, we need to be prepared for it to come unexpectedly, just as Jesus came.

For some people, on this first Sunday after Christmas, Christmas is over. But Christmas is not a matter of the calendar; it is a matter of the heart. This end of the year is a great time to respond to that eternal invitation to come to our true home. The challenge after Christmas is to get the rest of ourselves to go along with our hearts.

So, "Come all ye faithful," and those who are struggling to be faithful. Come to the open house in the evening or in the morning, to the place where God is still homeless and you and I are at home - and not just for the holidays.

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

The Charge: Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God will equip you. God will accomplish a purpose in your being there. Christ who dwells within you has

something He wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in God's grace, love and power. Amen