



LAKWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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The Christmas Journey: Bethlehem, Egypt, Jerusalem and Home

NO PLACE LIKE HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS!

Matthew 2:19-23

We've been on a Christmas Journey.

Four weeks ago we went to Bethlehem where Jesus was born. Joseph and Mary traveled the 5-day, 90-mile journey because Caesar Augustus, the Roman Emperor at that time, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the nation. Bethlehem, the House of Bread, made room for Jesus, the Bread of Life so that we might be fed spiritually.

We then followed them to Egypt because King Herod was furious when he learned that the wise men had disobeyed him. Sending soldiers to Bethlehem, he ordered them to kill every baby boy two years old and under, both in the town and on the nearby farms. They had fled to Egypt to escape the anger of Herod ... a king ... who was threatened by a baby who would be King ... Jesus. But God allowed them to escape because this baby was already the King of Kings.

We then followed him to Jerusalem as a child. There in Jerusalem, we saw how he grew in his awareness of the special role that he would play one day in the plan of salvation. There in Jerusalem, he recognized God as his "Father"; he is not only the son of Mary but also God's Son. There in Jerusalem, the gradual realization that he is Emmanuel ... God with us ... emerges. There in Jerusalem, he knows that through his life and mission LOVE will become real. Then, 18 years later, just to the East of Jerusalem, at the Jordon River, we see an even greater confirmation of all of this at his baptism by John, when a voice came from heaven and said, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." (Luke 3:22)

And so, we followed Him to Bethlehem, we followed Him to Egypt, we followed Him to Jerusalem, and NOW we follow Jesus to what would become his home ... Nazareth.

★ Incidentally, when was the last time you made it a habit ... a practice ... to FOLLOW Jesus?

The Gospel writers record Jesus' words "Follow me" 18 different times! The calling of Peter and Andrew. Matthew. Philip and Nathanael. James and John. ALL of the disciples would eventually be asked to follow him. And then, to each of US in these words recorded by Luke: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." (Luke 9:23) And in John 8:12 he explains: "I am the Light of the world. So if you follow me, you won't be stumbling through the darkness, for living light will flood your path."

Have YOU decided to follow Jesus wherever He may lead you?



So, now we follow Him to Nazareth because "When Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and told him, 'Get up and take the baby and his mother back to Israel, for those who were trying to kill the child are dead.'"

But on the way he was frightened to learn that the new king was Herod's son. Then, in another dream, he was warned not to go to Judea, so they went to Galilee instead, and lived in Nazareth. Matthew tells us this fulfilled the prediction of the prophets concerning the Messiah, "He shall be called a Nazarene." And Luke is the one who informs us that this was the city from which both Joseph and Mary had come. (Luke 2:4)

So, Jesus is HOME...

But let me tell you just a bit about his HOME.

Nazareth wasn't even mentioned in the Old Testament. And at the time of Christ, Nazareth was a despised city of no great importance. A lot of Roman soldiers lived there, and because of that, Nazarenes were looked down upon ... thought to be in cahoots with the Romans. There was also a large Gentile population in Nazareth ... enemies of the Jews. Therefore, Nazareth was a conquered city, despised by Rome, despised by the Jewish nation, despised by all.

So, there, in this despised town Jesus grew to be a man ... and he himself would one day be despised.

Nazareth was a rough, crude town. To be called a Nazarene was often considered an insult. In John 1:45-46, Philip came to Nathaniel and said, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote; Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathaniel asked smugly, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said, "Come and see."

"Come and See." This is what God is saying to YOU and to ME through the birth of the Babe in the manger ... through the life of the One lived in love. "COME AND SEE."

Yes, Nazareth was the place where Emmanuel ... "God with us" ... was brought up as a child.

Nazareth was the place where the Son of Man was humble as the son of Mary ... until he was older ... 30 and became our brother.

Nazareth was the place where Jesus the man revealed humanity at its best in the flesh, while at the same time Jesus the God revealed a Deity by the Spirit ... a Deity who loves, who forgives, who accepts, who frees, who shows us the very nature of God.

Nazareth was the place where Jesus would go from being the one who sat high with God ... to the one who came down low to live with us.



Philip Schaff, church historian and lecturer, said this of Jesus:

"This Jesus of Nazareth, without money and arms, conquered more millions than Alexander, Caesar, Mohammed, and Napoleon.

"Without science and learning, He shed more light on matters human and divine than all philosophers and scholars combined.

"Without the eloquence of schools, He spoke such words of life as were never spoken before or since, and produced effects that lie beyond the reach of orator or poet.

"Without writing a single line, He set more pens in motion and furnished more themes for more sermons, oration, discussion, learned volumes, works of art and songs of praise in the whole army of great men of ancient or modern times."

WHY? Because at His birth in a manger 2000 years ago, God was with us ... EMMANUEL.



- ◆ He began His ministry by being hungry, yet He is the Bread of Life.
- ◆ Jesus ended His earthly ministry by being thirsty, yet He is the Living Water.
- ◆ Jesus was weary, yet He is our rest.
- ◆ Jesus paid tribute, yet He is the King.
- ◆ Jesus was accused of having a demon, yet He cast out demons.
- ◆ Jesus wept, yet He wipes away our tears.
- ◆ Jesus was sold for thirty pieces of silver, yet He redeemed the ENTIRE world.
- ◆ Jesus was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, yet He is the Good Shepherd.
- ◆ Jesus died, yet by His death He destroyed the power of death.



He is Jesus ... This is the Savior. Recognize His Salvation in your life. Receive Him into your life ...
Because Salvation is a person ... Jesus.

- ◆ Jesus Christ our Lord
- ◆ Jesus Christ our Savior
- ◆ Jesus of Nazareth
- ◆ Jesus (of Nazareth), King of the Jews
- ◆ Jesus, the Son of Joseph
- ◆ Jesus, the Root of Jesse.
- ◆ Jesus, the Son of God.



He is the "King" ... As your King, He is your Sovereign, He is your protection, He is your chosen
Leader, He is your King who we fall before in obedience.

- ◆ King of Israel
- ◆ King of the Jews
- ◆ King of Saints
- ◆ King of Kings
- ◆ King of Glory
- ◆ King of Zion
- ◆ King over ALL the earth



He is the Lamb ... Our Sacrifice ... Jesus the Shepherd became the lamb, the child became the
sacrifice for the Mother, He died so that WE may LIVE ... He is Jesus ...

- ◆ Lamb of God
- ◆ Lawgiver
- ◆ Leader
- ◆ Life
- ◆ Light
- ◆ Love
- ◆ Lord of Lords
- ◆ Lord ... our Righteousness



And so, that's the invitation to you today, "Come and see."

"Come and see" for yourself that Jesus is the King of kings who still lives today!

"Come and see" for yourself that He can give you peace, hope, joy and love.

"Come and see" that He can take your old life and give you a new one in its place.

"Come and see" that this Child born in a manger, adored by the magi, swept away to Egypt, the
object of a massacre, the One who grew to understand his mission in Jerusalem, and the One called
the Nazarene is **MORE IMPORTANT** than any other person, fact, or event in history.

He still changes lives today!



Yes, Jesus made his home in Nazareth ... but there is one more journey for YOU this Christmas.
"For there's no place like home for the holidays" ... Will you let him come HOME to you?

Amen and Amen.