

St. Augustine reflected upon the incarnation saying, He so loved us that, for our sake, he was made man in time, although through him all times were made. He was made man, who made man. He was created of a mother whom he created. He was carried by hands that he formed. He cried in the manger in wordless infancy, he the Word, without whom all human eloquence is mute.

+I was out running with my dog last night, in shorts and a tee shirt, no less! Anyway, I was approaching a woman carrying several bags, but maneuvering them with crutches – I slowed down and she asked, “Could you help me and bring these packages up the steps to my door?” I said, “No, I need to finish my run.”

Just kidding! I asked her what had happened and then I relayed to her that because of a car accident, I was once in crutches for several months, telling her, “Yep, I have been there and done that, so I am glad to help.” That is what Jesus could claim in the incarnation, “I know what you are going through, as I have been there and done that.”

Jesus--a simple name with so much power and meaning, but on that night so long ago, the tiny baby, wrapped by Mary in swaddling clothes, waving little arms, hungrily sucking a fist, was like any other newborn baby.

He was helpless and dependent, and Mary was his hope of survival, his nourishment, his very lifeline. God entrusted His most priceless gift to a very human, very young, earthly mother. Why? Because God so loved--that He gave. He relinquished His hold on His Son and placed Him in fragile human arms. She would be his home.

The traditional Christmas song, “I’ll be home for Christmas,” strikes a responsive chord in all of us. Christmas is memories, memories of home. This is more than just nostalgia for an innocent youth. For many, it is an appreciation of the stability and the security and the values of our home.

The first Christmas was a coming home. “And so Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to David’s town of Bethlehem because he was of the house and lineage of David.” Bethlehem was the ancestral home of Joseph, the home of his religious heritage.

Joseph came home for Christmas, with Mary, his espoused wife who was with child. In that Christmas is a story of the faith of a family. In that Christmas story faith and family are inseparable.

Coming home for Christmas can also be coming back to the home of our faith. When we gather in our homes this season we return to the roots of our family and, perhaps unwittingly, to the roots of our faith.

When I come home for Christmas, I leave the title of Monsignor and become just Patrick or Patch. But I know that my priesthood was born in that home.

Perhaps for some of you, your journey home, has not been a life of faith. For some that may be but a minor lapse: the neglect of daily prayers, a favorite devotion, or parish service. For others it may be more serious: missing Mass, years since a good confession, loss of the sacraments.

And yet, the farther one has wandered, the sweeter the return when one resolves, "I'll be home for Christmas."

\*But Thomas Wolfe wrote "You can never go home again." His message is that when you return to the home of your youth, you realize that the past is gone and you must now look to a new life, a new life that is guided by the values of your roots. If you have ever gone back to your old home town, your old school, even to Grandma's house, you know well what that means.

\*You can never go home again. The same is true of our faith. You can visit Bethlehem, but you can't stay there. The simple faith of childhood cannot sustain an adult life. The faith of decades past must adapt to a new culture and a new Church.

At the opening of the Second Vatican Council Pope John XXIII said, "The substance of our ancient and unchanging faith is one thing; the manner in which it is to be presented and lived in each age is another."

+In the book, "Fr. Joe, The Man Who Saved My Soul", the Author describes leaving the Catholic Faith, when all was in Latin, but returning in the 70's. He said none of the music was familiar to him, but there was one he recognized, "Rain drops keep falling on my head."

If you have wandered from your faith, come home for Christmas, and you will find that home is still home, but there is a new life in the old family.

+When I was a seminarian, I had to do an internship in a parish for 15 months. It was during Christmas that confirmed my calling to the priesthood. Unlike today's seminarians, we all stayed in our home parish for Christmas, except for those in the 15-month placement.

It was during Christmas that I realized I wanted to be in the parish for Christmas more than anything, even though I loved celebrating it with my family. The parish became my new or other home. Here is my home and I love my family here. Here you can find a family, a home, in the incarnate love of those around you.

Maybe you do not have found memories growing up and that it was not a home, but a place you lived or survived. But Christmas tells us that you are loved by God and that He surrounds you with love in this Body.

You can stay. You can return here to the full practice of your faith. Unlike the song, you cannot come back "only in your dreams." Faith is more than nostalgia. It is your response to God's gracious gift of His son.

“This day a Savior has been born to you, the Messiah and Lord.” Those words of the angel invite a response. Faith involves a commitment. On that night in Bethlehem, Mary wrapped the first Christmas present and the world has never been the same.

Every day of our lives, each one of us is like the innkeeper at Bethlehem. We decide if there is enough room - in our inn, our heart - for Jesus, to make his *home*.