

**“Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.” Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. ...So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” They said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’””**

Merry Christmas! Year after year we gather from far away places to go home for Christmas. Christmas and home go hand in hand, and we associate family memories with opening presents, going sledding, and hearing the Christmas account from Luke 2.

It is fitting for us to consider again the homecoming story of Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem. After all, Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem because it was Joseph’s ancestral home. Likewise, the New Living Translation of the Bible translates John 1:14 as follows: **“So the Word became human and made his home among us.”** Jesus’ birth was a one of a kind of coming home for Christmas.

We all want to get to the true nature of Christmas. We want to sit at the side of the manger. We want to be at home in the Christmas story. We want to be there. How do we get there? Where is the House of Bread?

We started our sermon with an extended reading from John 6 wherein Jesus declares that He is the bread that comes down from heaven. Jesus is the bread of life. In fact, Bethlehem means house of bread. In one sense, we can relive the Christmas story by going to Bethlehem where the bread of life was born. You can go to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem which is one of the oldest churches in the history of the church and reports to be the very place where Jesus was born. You can literally stand at the side of the manger.

However, pilgrimages may be on hiatus for the time being given all that’s going on in Palestine at the moment. Since that’s the case, we comfort ourselves knowing that the Bread of Life is present in the Word. Christmas is not about the right kind of decorations, but in recounting and reliving the once upon a time story of Jesus Christ, the Word become flesh dwelling among us. We give thanks on Christmas that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. **“For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”** Jesus Christ gave us life through coming down to heaven to live a perfect life on our behalf. Where is the House of Bread? 3. The House of Bread is Bethlehem.

The true Christmas story is not about Santa and his elves, but the true Christmas story is “In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered....” In the same way, the true Christmas feast is not

ham and potatoes, but it is the Lord's Supper. In fact, the name Christmas means Christ's mass, and it intrinsically refers to a celebration of Christ's birth by having the Lord's Supper.

Bethlehem means house of bread, and as nice as it would be to teleport to modern day Bethlehem, even then we would not be any closer to Christ simply standing before the place where He was born two thousand years ago. The true pilgrimage is made as we go to the house of bread right in front of you to Holy Communion.

Although there can be no Lord's Supper apart from Jesus' first incarnation on Christmas, in some ways, we can say that this meal is the greater Bethlehem as many Christians throughout time and space eat and drink the very body and blood of Jesus who was once held in Mary's arms. It takes the once upon a time of the town of Bethlehem and turns it into "we should at all times and in all places give thanks unto you, O Lord, holy Father, almighty, everlasting God." The wonder of the Holy Communion that many of us are about to take part in is not a series of one-off miracles, but it's the same word became flesh miracle that God started at Bethlehem and continues among us today. The Lord who became flesh by the power of the Holy Spirit in Mary continues to be flesh for us in this meal.

In this meal we receive the blessed exchange. We go to the altar, the house of bread, to receive from Christ that which is His: His holiness, His righteousness, and His perfection. We are able to do this because Jesus took on what is ours: our humanity, our misery, our flesh, and ultimately, the sins of the world were placed on His shoulders. We come to the altar as miserable sinners and we leave forgiven—partakers in the Divine Nature as we have eaten and drank Jesus Christ Himself.

There has been confusion about John 6 throughout the church's history. "**I am the bread that came down from heaven.**" There is confusion as to whether this refers to the child who came down from heaven in the manger, or if it is the bread that the pastor holds in his hand? As we gather for the Lord's Supper, we're caught between Bethlehem and the altar, the bread of life in a manger and the bread of life on a silver tray. What a wondrous mystery to be caught in!

More important than watching the Charlie Brown Christmas special, more important than having a creche on your lawn or a perfectly decorated Christmas tree. More important than having all the family home for Christmas, Jesus is inviting us to the House of Bread located at a church near you as we gather, not only on Christmas day, but many times throughout the year, to take place in the same miracle that we hear of every Christmas Eve, namely, in the incarnation. 2. The House of Bread is the Altar.

**"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the**

**world is my flesh.”**” As we gather around this altar at Christmas, we look back to the bread of life that was placed in the manger in Bethlehem, but we also look forward to what the Lord’s Supper anticipates. It looks forward to eternal life.

Paul writes of the Lord’s Supper, **“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”** We eat and drink looking forward to the coming kingdom. We hear in prophecies of the Messiah such as, **“Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.”** The Lord’s Supper celebrates the reign of the king that started in Jesus’ incarnation, and continues with His resurrection, ascension, and session at the Father’s right hand. Indeed, as we sing, this is the feast of victory for our God!

And so we gather waiting for the day when the bread and wine will give way to the marriage feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom on the mountain of the Lord wherein there will be fattened meats and fine wines and the Lord will swallow up death forever. Later in the service, we will sing *Away in a Manger*, and we tie the manger to the second coming, “Be near me Lord Jesus; I ask Thee to stay close by me forever and love me, I pray. Bless all the dear children in Thy tender care and take us to heaven to live with thee there.”

The Lord’s Supper is a mini-judgment day wherein we come into the presence of Christ. This is why we practice closed communion. You experience Christ’s body and blood in the bread and wine whether you believe it or not. Those who come forward with an unbelieving heart or doubting that Christ is truly present receive Christ to their judgment rather than their benefit.

But for those of us who believe, the Lord’s Supper is a vindication. It is an encounter with Christ wherein we receive forgiveness, life, and salvation. It is a dress rehearsal for the real thing, for when we stand before the throne of the lamb and He tells us, **“His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’** 1. The House of Bread is Paradise.

The past, present, and future all blend together in this wonderful meal. We feast on the one who first came at Christmas. We commune with the one whose incarnation continues through His church, and we look forward to the one who will drink of the fruit of the vine with us in His Father’s kingdom. Here is Christmas. Here is Holy Communion. Here is the Day of your Redemption. **THE HOUSE OF BREAD IS CHRISTMAS, COMMUNION, AND CONSUMATION.**