

A Christmas Story
 Luke 2:1-20
 December 24, 2009 – 11:00 PM
 Holy Communion – Candle-Lighting
 James T. Richardson
 Oakland Avenue PCUSA

LUKE 2:1-20 (NRSV)

- 1 *In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered.*
- 2 *This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.*
- 3 *All went to their own towns to be registered.*
- 4 *Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David.*
- 5 *He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.*
- 6 *While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child.*
- 7 *And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn.*
- 8 *In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.*
- 9 *Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.*
- 10 *But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see---I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people:*
- 11 *to you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.*
- 12 *This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”*
- 13 *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,*
- 14 *“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”*
- 15 *When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.”*
- 16 *So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.*
- 17 *When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child;*
- 18 *and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.*
- 19 *But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.*
- 20 *The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*

In addition to the White House in Washington, DC, perhaps one of the most famous Christmas Trees in the United States is the giant Christmas Tree in Rockefeller Center in New York City. One morning on NBC’s “Today Show,” the television camera followed the huge truck as it made its way down the streets of New York City on the way to Rockefeller Center. The tree for that year had a different and interesting tale behind it.

It seems a Roman Catholic convent in New England had had this beautiful 50 year-old fir tree that was perfectly shaped as a Christmas Tree. For a number of years various people had approached the convent with the offer to buy the tree so that it could be cut down and used as a Christmas Tree somewhere. Because it was such a beautiful tree and so much a part of the convent, the Sisters had always said “No” to the many offers.

One spring an arborist (or tree surgeon) had told the Sisters of the convent that their beloved fir tree had developed a disease and that within a year or so it would die. With that information, the Sisters began their discussion concerning where they wished their fir tree to spend its final Christmas, and Rockefeller Center was chosen.

Jon Tyler stood beneath the beautiful Christmas Tree in Rockefeller Center, unaware of the tale of its background. It was beautifully decorated and sparkled with its fine colored lights. **Jon Tyler** was surrounded by throngs of happy people; he watched the skaters on the ring below; he took in the decorations in the surrounding stores-----and he felt more lonely and miserable than ever. No one gave him a glance or a smile.

When **Jon Tyler** had run away from home, he had vowed that he would never think of South Carolina or his family again. He and his step-father had never gotten along too well, but when his step-father had taken away Jon’s driving privileges for staying out too late one night and letting his school grades slip, Jon emptied his savings account and headed for New York City and independence. He had sent a postcard home as soon as he found a job, telling his mother not to worry.

Jon Tyler had been in New York City for two months and he was still a stranger. People were cold and distant. The only ones he talked to were the other busboys in the fast food restaurant where he worked. He had a room at the YMCA, but even there, he had not found any friends.

When **Jon Tyler** had heard someone talking while he was bussing tables, the big Christmas Tree in Rockefeller Center sounded like something he ought to see. And that was how he found himself standing out in the cold on his next day off from work.

Looking up at the beautiful fir tree, **Jon Tyler** shivered from the cold and headed for the warmth of a Fifth Avenue department store. It was a large store, and it was impersonal and distant despite the holiday decorations and Christmas music coming from overhead speakers.

People rushed past him, and irritable clerks rang up sale after sale. Back home in Rock Hill, a customer would be greeted warmly by the owner of the store or certainly by one of the salesclerks. **Jon Tyler** walked down the aisles of the store, amazed at the array of jewelry, scarves, purses, and other gift items on display.

But he could not shake his desire to go back home to South Carolina. It wasn't only the lack of bus fare money which gnawed at him. Maybe his mother and step-father did not care if he ever came home! Maybe they were happier without him!

It was just at this moment, with sudden tears clouding his eyes, that he bumped into a table piled high with leather wallets. Table, wallets, and **Jon** all crashed to the floor.

Stunned but not hurt, **Jon** lay outstretched on the floor until a security guard pulled him to his feet. He was half-carried to an office where a grim-faced man sat behind a massive desk.

Questions came one after the other:

-----had he been alone?
 -----why had he knocked over the table?
 -----would he voluntarily empty his pockets
 or should they call the police?
 -----where were his friends?

Jon protested: "I just didn't look where I was going. I'm sorry!

I don't have any friends.

I am no thief!"

Jon voluntarily emptied his pockets. The man behind the desk glared at **Jon**.

"During the Christmas rush we have all sorts of people pulling tricks to steal things. Crashing a table is one way to get attention away from a friend staging a robbery in another part of the store."

"No!" replied **Jon**. "I just came in to get warm. I was cold!"

And then, although he did not know why, **Jon** confided in the stern man behind the desk:

"I bumped into the table because I was dreaming about going home to South Carolina for Christmas. I ran away two months ago and I don't know if they want me back or not. Anyway, I don't have any money for a ticket home, even if they would have me."

The stern-faced man behind the desk fidgeted in his chair and his face noticeably softened. He reached for the telephone on his desk.

"What's your home telephone number, son?"

And a stranger in cold, impersonal New York City made arrangements for **Jon Tyler** to go home to Rock Hill, South Carolina, for Christmas, where, incidentally, he was very much wanted.

Perhaps some of you will remember that a number of years ago the Roman Catholic Diocese of Charleston had an advertisement on television throughout the state of South Carolina for the weeks of Advent before Christmas. In the ad, **Bishop Ernest Untekoeffler** was trying to get lapsed or inactive Roman Catholics to renew their participation in the Roman Catholic Church.

In a very appealing way, the end of the ad had the Bishop looking straight into the television camera and saying in a very inviting way:

“Come home for Christmas.”

“Coming Home” has a variety of emotional attachments and meanings, but tonight as we gather about this Holy Table, it becomes for us the invitation of Jesus Christ to renew our faith in God.

“Come Home!”

Will YOU accept the invitation?