

December 5, 2021- Ezra 2:1-2, 21
"To Bethlehem – Make Yourself at Home"

"Make yourself at home" – do we really mean this? God means it! John 14:2

There's a welcome in the heart of God – the Bethlehem story today

Ezra 2:21 / Nehemiah 7:26 – part of a record of those who returned to the Promised Land from Babylonian exile.

Some biblical history

- Israel enters the Promised Land after slavery in Egypt and 40 years in the wilderness
- Israel is called to display God's holiness by how they live – they fail
- Solomon's Kingdom is divided into the Kingdom of Israel in the north and the Kingdom of Judah in the south
- Kings and people in both kingdoms reject God – God judges them (Jeremiah 25:9)
- 721 BC – Assyria conquers the Kingdom of Israel
- Between 605 BC and 587 BC, Babylon defeats and exiles the Kingdom of Judah
 - ◊ Solomon's Temple is destroyed
 - ◊ The identity of God's people in the Promised Land is lost
 - ◊ Psalm 137
 - ◊ Ever felt you're in exile?
- But the promise of God is not lost
 - ◊ Jeremiah 29:10-11 – "make yourself at home"
- 536 BC, Cyrus, King of the Persians, defeats Babylon and allows Jews to return to Jerusalem
- 123 men (and their families) from Bethlehem return (Ezra 2:21)

So...

Don't remain stuck in your personal Psalm 137

- Our grief, frustration, loss, and anger keeps us in our personal "exile"
- How to escape
 - ◊ The clearest glimpse of Jesus in the Old Testament
 - ◊ When the darkness is blackest, the light is brightest – Jesus is with us

Bethlehem "lives" for another day...

- The town is repopulated; the town still had a purpose in God's plan
- 500 years after the exiles return to Bethlehem, the light in Bethlehem is the brightest – Luke 2:11
 - ◊ God gave more than he promised!

A family Christmas during the Great Depression (1930s)