

Welcome Home  
Shepherd's Grace Church  
December 14, 2014

**Donnie Open with Refrain from Welcome Home**

Narrator: It was December 15, 1927. The wind was biting cold and snow was starting to fall. Father knew bad weather was coming but he didn't want to worry ma. Father was kinda funny that way. He never wanted to worry her but he always knew she knew. It's like he never wanted to give her bad news so she would never be disappointed in him.

Anyway, the weather was bitter. Kansas winters could be long and cold and harsh and this was probably only the beginning. The snow started as sleet and you could hear it pelleting against the windows. The sound made the room seem even colder and father got up to throw another log on the fire.

George: (reminiscing) Yep, it's gonna be a cold 'un. I 'member the winter of '08. Coldest winter ever 'round these parts! It 'as so cold the eggs 'd freeze an' you'd have ta peel 'em just ta git 'em in the pan so's they'd start ta cook. Dern near froze right out o the chicken!

That 'as one cold winter! Only water we had 'round these parts 'as ice an ya could only warsh yerself when spring came. 'at wasn't till pert near May! Wonder if'n its gonna be anywhere nears that cold this year?

Me and yer ma had just been married that year. We'd met in the spring and was wed in the summer. She 'as in such a dang hurry and...well, I didn' wanna wait none neither! I'd jus' been back from the war fer a bit an' she 'as the first woman I'd seen. I knew right soon as I saw her that she 'as the one fer me! She said after we'd been seein' each other fer awhile that she felt the same way. We didn't wait! We 'as married in June and 'tween us we barely had a pot ta cook in.

We got by though! We both worked hard an' I had a good crop that first fall. Had ta give most of it to the farmer what owned the land though! But we 'as able ta save a little an' I bought that first piece a ground.

Elsie:(Angrily) Aw Pa! Yer not gonna start with all them tall tales again are ya! I mean...I know I 'as born the next spring an' all but still, it's been near 20 years an' now ma's fixin ta have another kid. Seems like all ya ever did 'as have kids! It 'as like you was jus' tryin' ta replace Marion. Ya know he's never comin' back home!

Lola: That's enough Elsie! It's almost Christmas. We are about to be blessed with another brother or sister! Can't you just leave it alone for once? Grandpa gave Marion his share of the farm years ago and Marion sold it! We know he took the money and ran away! Pa has tried to go find him many times. He's been to Florida and to Georgia and all up and down the east coast. Each time, he has come home without his brother! Each time it hurts us all..a little more ...and a little more...and a little more!

Elsie: (more angrily now!) Lola! He's been a fool! When Marion asked his Pa to give 'em both their share of the land they got from the civil war, Pa kept his an' Marion done sold what Grandpa give him an' left ta go squander it all chasin' after God knows what!

George: Ya can call me what ya want but I knowed this place 'd be worth somethin' someday! I jes knowed it! I stait an' I worked fer yer grandpa an' I got nothin'! I jes worked and worked. Ever' year there 'as somethin' that kept the crops from a comin' in an ever' year my pa 'd say , "It'll be better nex' year...but it never 'as! Then that dang fool brother o' mine up and asked pa ta give 'im half the land...the half he 'd get as 'is inheritance! Inheritance! I couldn't believe my pa done what he done!

## **Donnie Sing first verse of Christmas is Coming**

Narrator: Travel back with me now. The year is 1880. We are still on the same homestead. The land was given to grandpa for fighting in the civil war. Grandpa was the father of three sons. Each of them were working side by side with him on what seemed like a worthless piece of ground just south of Arkansas City. It is another cold December night and tragedy has struck the family. Steven, grandpa's middle son has been gravely injured and is near death. Father, grandpa's oldest is guilt ridden. He was supposed to be working the field where the accident occurred. He tricked Steven into working for him. Steven had worked the land this way a thousand times. This time, the horse got away from him. He was thrown and then stepped on. The injuries were so severe he couldn't be helped. Steven lay dying. Father and Marion were sitting with him in his final moments.

George: (sobbing) Of course I'll stay Steve! I'll never leave pa! We'll work this land till pa can't work it no more. We'll do it jes' like you 'n me sait 'e 'd do! It'uz always pa's dream 'e'd work this land with 'is sons.

Marion: Hang on Steve! Yer gonna be here ta help! We're gonna do this together! You're gonna make it!

Narrator: But Steve and Father and Marion all knew Steve was not going to make it. They knew he had minutes...maybe an hour. They tried to find grandpa but he had gone into town that day. He was nowhere to be found. When he returned, he was devastated. To lose a son...that is a burden no parent should ever have to bear. Grandpa didn't bear it well. The days came and went...Christmas...New Years. One day, Marion approached grandpa.

Marion: Pa, I'd like ta have my share o' the land we got here. I'm gonna git it when ya die. I'd like ta have it now. Pa...I'd like ta git this done right fast if'n it's ok. I jes' wanna git on with my life an' I can't do that with George. Ever'time I look at 'im, all I kin see is Steve...throwed from that there horse 'an dyin and all!

Narrator: Grandpa never said a thing. He walked away from Marion and went back to his room. Several days later, he brought home papers from town. He told Marion and George to sign the papers and that each of them now owned half of the land that had been his. Each of them had 20 acres and an option to buy up to 1280 additional acres, 2 sections just to the north of their property going all the way to the river. Marion and George signed. They now owned the land and George

thought they would both honor the promise they had made to Steven. Just before Christmas however, Marion announced he had sold his share of the land.

Marion: Yep! Right after Christmas I'm a movin' on! Cain't abide bein' here no more! What with Steve gone and havin' ta look at George's face ever' mornin' an' rememberin' how much I hate what he did ta our brother! I jes' gotta get outta here!

Narrator: That was the last time George ever knew that he saw Marion. Over the next nearly 50 years, he heard rumors of Marion being in this place or that place but he was never able to confirm Marion's whereabouts.

George's father died about 10 years later, a broken and disappointed man. He never recovered from the loss of his middle son, Steven and from the failure of his beloved homestead ever to produce crops beyond what the family needed.

Return with me now to December 15, 1927. Father is still lamenting his father's decision to Marion his share of the inheritance. Suddenly, a call comes down the stairs!

Lola: It's a boy! It's a boy!

Elsie: (bitterly!) Of course it's a boy. We only have 4 other brothers! That's just what we need. Another brother! And born on Lola's birthday! Humf! Now he'll be her favorite. She will never help with the others. I'll get stuck with all that work! I wish I could run away too! I wish I'd be able to run away like Uncle Marion! I'd take what was mine and I'd go in a minute...but in this place I'd get nothin'! We got nothin' for me ta get! I'd get nothin'!

Narrator: On that same night in San Antonio, Texas there was another birth. The temperatures were not as cold as those in Kansas but there was a Christmas chill in the air. In his tattered long sleeve t-shirt, Marion paced outside the hospital room where the doctor and nurses anxiously worked with his wife to complete the delivery of his first son. It had been a difficult pregnancy and it was proving to be a difficult delivery as well. Marion had never experienced such intense concern in his entire life! This was his first child. He and his wife had been married for 19 years and they had given up hope of ever having a child.

His wife Maria continued to pray but Marion was convinced God was punishing him for not keeping his promise to Steven, for not staying with his pa, for not

forgiving his brother. Marion continued to pace! He continued to worry. Meanwhile back in Arkansas City...

Lola: Pa! Pa! Come on up here and meet your new son! He's a big, beautiful baby and he's waitin' ta meet his pa!

George: He's a dern fine boy alright! Elsie, ya got me thinkin' bout my pa and my brother earlier tonight. I 'as thinkin' I'd name this 'un Jack but now I've done changed my mind. I'm gonna call 'im Steve after my brother.

Maybe Steve can see somethin' good come from this God forsaken land my pa left me! I'm pert near done an' someone else is gonna need ta see this thing through.

Lord knows I've done all I can ta keep my promise ta my brother. Maybe this new Steve kin bring some peace ta this family!

Narrator: Meanwhile in San Antonio, Maria finally, thankfully gives birth to Marion's first child...to his son. At the moment of his birth, Marion heard the bells begin to ring in the church near the Alamo.

Marion: He's a dern fine boy alright! His bein' born got me thinkin' bout my pa and my brother a little earlier tonight. I 'as thinkin' I'd name this 'un Jack but now I've done changed my mind. I'm gonna call 'im Steve after my brother. Maybe Steve can see sometnin good come



from this God forsaken town and the life I've lived since I runned away from my promise ta his namesake! Maybe this new Steve kin bring some peace ta this family!

### **Donnie Sing First verse of Message of the Bells**

Narrator: Now we move forward 18 years. It is the Summer of 1945. World War II is winding down.

George's 7 sons...yes, he's had two more since Steve was born...George's 7 sons were all serving in the pacific theater. Elsie and Lois are left at home to care for George and his wife Ethel.

Elsie: I got a letter from Steve today. Says he's serving aboard a battleship! They are steaming toward Japan. He's hopin' they get to see some action before the war is over. I know Steve. He just wants to be like his older brother Wilson. He wants a medal to wear when he comes home! He's so competitive.

Lola: I know. Of all the boys, I worry about him more than any of the others. Remember what it was like just a few years ago...remember how hard it was for all of us when we went through the dust bowl. This piece of land never has produced good crops...but back in the '30's it was even worse! I remember Steve stealin' a watermelon and bringin it home cause he wanted ta

share some food just like his brother Raymond! Pa found out he'd stolen that melon and made him take it right back to the owner of that farm!

Elsie: Yea! I remember that all right! Steve couldn't walk for about a week and I never have seen Pa with such a sore hand!

Lola: (laughing) Steve was a sight! Still, I didn't think we would all make it through that time. So many mouths to feed and so little food! I don't know how Ma and Pa did it! They scratched and scraped and struggled just to put some food on the table. Some nights I know neither of them had a bite to eat just so the rest of us could have a little!

Elsie: I remember that too! Sometimes I'd think back to how hard I was on Pa that night Steve was born. I remember being so mean to him and I remember him just taking it...like he had it coming! He must have been carrying so much guilt over his brother being killed that he thought he had it coming! Who could have imagined how prophetic he was when he decided to name that boy Steve...when he hoped the name would bring some peace to the family.

Lola: Elsie, do you ever wonder what happened ta Pa's other brother? Sometimes I am amazed at all that happened to us in those hard times. I know how many people starved to death...how many didn't make ends meet...how many people gave up and moved on leavin' their land and all their belongings behind them. I wonder what happened to Marion and whether he would ever be able to come home.

Elsie: Oh Lola! That was so long ago! If Marion's not dead, I'm sure he's long forgotten about this old place and all the trouble he had with Pa! Who'da thought Pa would be able to buy his land and even the options for all that acreage all the way to the river.

Lola: I sure wouldn't have thought so! This land never produced a nickel's worth of crops ta sell! If Steve hadn't stumbled into that sandy soil when he was takin' the melon back ta that farmer...if he hadn't gotten all messy with that black tar we'd of never known there was oil on this place!

Elsie: Lola, ya know that Pa always believed in this land. He believed it was a gift from God and that it was given to his pa for a reason. He always thought it would be worth something...So he stayed. He stayed because of

that stupid promise to his brother but also because he believed. When they found the oil, Pa was able ta help the farmer who bought the land from Marion.

Lola: Yeah, I know. Pa bought that land back when that old man died! Now the old homestead is in place again just like in the days of Grandpa!

Elsie: Not quite! No body's believe all the oil wells on this place today. All those years we tried ta raise crops of wheat and beans on this place with no luck at all and now look at it...There are cattle on every hill and oil wells as far as anyone can see. Who'da thought we would find all this wealth after all those years of nearly starvin' ta death!

Narrator: Down in San Antonio Marion eagerly opens a letter he received from his son today. Steve is in the Navy serving in the pacific theater. He is on a warship steaming toward Japan.

Marion: Steve says here he hopes his ship will get to see some action before the war is over. Dern fool kid! I seen enough o' that kind a action in World War I. He just needs ta stay on that ship and far from any fightin'! It's too dern easy ta git yerself kilt over there. I jes' hope he remembers ta keep 'is head low!

He does say that he met a new friend on the ship though. Says the kid has the same first name as 'im. Dodn't say what 'is las' name is but 'is first name is Steve. Says they both laughed 'bout that! Thought it 'as quite a coincidence! Said the kid's from Arkansas City! Whadda ya know 'bout that. Some kid named Steve from round the parts where I growed up! Takes me back a bit doncha know.

I barely got a pot ta...well ya know what I mean. All these years since I left that place...that brother o' mine who tricked my other brother ta work fer him jes' so he could go off an' meet some girl named Ethel! All those years since Steve got kilt fer no good reason...an now my Steve's done met some Steve from my old hometown. Talk about yer coincidence!...wonder where I'll git somethin' fer dinner...sure do miss my Maria! Still can't believe I lost her when Steve 'as born!

### **Donnie sing first verse of Sing Me A Christmas Memory**

Narrator: The year is now 1951. George and Ethyl are getting old and the war is over. Steve and all his brothers returned from the war. Not one was hurt. Not one was injured. Most of their neighbors were not nearly so fortunate. The land Grandpa got for fighting in the Civil

War never did produce much for crops. It did grow some alfalfa grass that generated a little cash but that patch of land had turned into a little over four thousand acres where there were now nearly three thousand head of cattle and more oil wells than anyone could count. George's ranch had become the family business and all the boys worked there. They were at peace with one another and they genuinely liked working together. After the war, Steve invited his friend Steve to come and work for him on the land.

Meanwhile, times have been hard for Marion. He still lives in San Antonio with many others who are homeless and with no family. He tries to find some food..any food most days. His son Steve has tried for years to get him to come on up to Kansas where he can take care of him! Today, Marion has nothing to eat, no place to sleep...he has reached the end of his hope. Today, Marion heads home!

George: When do ya think yer pa'll git here Steve? That bus usually on time?

Steve: I just don't know George. I've never taken that bus before. Most of the busses I have taken were Navy busses and they didn't much care if they were on time or

not! They got us where we were going and shipped us out, ya know.

Steve: (George's son Steve) C'mon buddy. Let's just go on down ta town and wait there. We can find something ta do. I hear ol' Bill Poling's got a pool hall openin' up. Maybe we can hustle some o' the locals. That Jeff Hodges is a pretty soft touch!

Steve: Sure, let's give it a try.

Elsie: You boys be sure you come straight back here when Steve's pa gets here! We got a big meal planned and I'm sure he'll be hungry after that long bus ride! Sides, from what you boys tell me, it's been awhile since he's had a good hot cooked meal!

Lola: I've made a strawberry pie. Christmas is only a few days away and I saved some preserves just for this pie!

George: Ya all git on outta here! Go meet yer pa! I'm eager ta meet 'im. Kint believe 'e's from round these parts an' ain't never been back!

Narrator: The two steves head to town to wait for the bus. It is after 6 PM on the 15 th of December when the bus pulls in. Marion is one of the last to depart. He is old

and fragile now but when George's son sees him his jaw drops!

George's son: Steve! That man could be my father!

Steve: I never noticed it before but you are right! There is such a strong resemblance. It is almost uncanny! I wonder if your pa will pick up on it.

George's son: I doubt it. Pa can barely see past 'is own face these days. He doesn't notice much! Marion!...over here! We're over here.

Narrator: On hearing George's son Marion stops. He recognizes the voice. It is a voice he hasn't heard in nearly 70 years but it is unmistakable. It is the voice of his long left behind brother!

Marion: (trying not to give away what he has heard)  
Let's git my bags an' git outta here! It's been a long ride an' I'm not used ta it. How fer is yer place?

George's son: Not far. We'll be there in 10 minutes or so!

Narrator: The car ride out is very familiar to Marion. He remembers every turn and every bump in the road. There's pavement now but not in the road he is riding.



He knows what is coming and prepares himself for his brother's wrath.

Marion: That the place?

George's son: Sure is! I remember when this was all just a dust bowl! Who'da thought this land'd have oil on it? The land was given to my grandfather after the civil war. Lot's 'o folks round here got their land the same way. Most of 'em like the Bryants have done well with crops but we never were able to grow anything on this sandy old patch of dirt. Then we found oil and started raising cattle. We bought back all the land my uncle sold and now we own all the land and options that were given to my grandpa!

Marion: Guess yer pa's pretty proud!

George's son: Ya can ask him yourself. That's him standing there at the gate!

Narrator: Marion looks up and sees George standing. Tears of fear and joy fill his eyes! He knows he is home but he is still unsure what kind of homecoming he is about to have.

George: (With a look of recognition in his eyes) Marion?

Marion: George! I know'd it 'us you soon as I heart yer son's voice. What a coincidence that we'd git back together after all these years!

George: Not a coincidence at all! I been puttin' all the pieces o' this puzzle together fer a while now! I know'd it 'us you cuz there jes couldn't be any other explanation.

Elsie: Marion, Pa's started to build a new house on your share of the land we got from Grandpa. We haven't told either of the Steves about it but it will be ready in just a few days. You should be in it on Christmas.

Lola: In the meantime, we've prepared a place for you to stay with us here and we want to catch us. There is so much we want to tell you! God has brought you back to us after all these years. We can't believe our own good fortune.

Marion: I've been such a fool. I am not worthy to be part of your family! How can you welcome me so quickly?

George: We been talkin' bout you fer years! You've always been part of our lives. Pa always hoped you'd come back home. I hopt ya'd forgive me an' come back. Pa sure would be surprised! I spect this is just bout the best Christmas present he could ever git! This is yer

place Marion. It belongs ta you. It always has. God has given us more'n we could've ever expected. We're all home now! Welcome Home

**Donnie sing all of Welcome Home**