

## Room for Jesus

Luke 2:1-20

The Christmas story is full of twists and turns, ups and downs. The fear that comes from an angel appearing, to Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds. The sadness when Joseph resolves to divorce Mary quietly and the joy when he is told and believes the miraculous nature of her pregnancy. One of the saddest lines in the Christmas story comes about a third of the way through the passage from Luke 2 we hear every year. At the end of verse 7, it reads “And she brought forth her firstborn Son and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” There was no room for Mary, Joseph, and Jesus.

If you’ve ever been caught in bad weather while traveling you may know that frustration firsthand. When the interstate shuts down, the hotels and motels near the exit get filled immediately. If you’re flying, maybe the airline will offer you money or other incentives to give up your spot on an overbooked flight. No matter how you travel, it’s frustrating when there’s no room for you.

This one line has led to a great number of Christmas traditions and stories. Christmas stories often include someone playing the innkeeper who sends Mary and Joseph on their way. Hispanic cultures follow a tradition of Los Posadas, where a group walks from house to house, getting turned away at every turn. Las Posadas began in 1587 in Mexico and continues today in many countries. Posada means “inn” or “place of lodging.” At each home, someone dressed in ancient garb acted as the homeowner and chased them away. Chased away, the pilgrims prayed and journeyed on, finally finding a place to stay. Las Posadas reminds us

there was room in the inn, just no room in the heart.

It also reminds us of how hard it is to make room for Jesus at Christmas. I’m not just talking about the way that our culture is continuing to get more secular, with winter breaks and holiday parties replacing Christmas at every turn. It’s more the same way Jesus gets crowded out of our everyday lives. About 3 in 10 American adults now self-identify as religiously unaffiliated, a new study from the Pew Research Center found, reinforcing the notion that Americans are becoming more secular in the 21st century. More and more activities crowd into Sundays, making it harder to get to church. More and more busyness keeps us from our prayers and devotions and Bible reading.

This year, my family tried to do a new tradition. Since there are 24 chapters in the Gospel of Luke, and there are 24 days in December before Christmas, we started to try and read a chapter a night together as a family. The first night went ok, despite Luke chapter 1 having 80 verses and taking a bit to go through. The next few nights went ok, as well. But then busyness and tiredness came up, and we stopped about halfway through. It can be hard to make time for Jesus.

It’s not restricted to Christmastime, but it’s more obvious now. Americans would rather have Christmas be about Santa and presents and family get-togethers rather than the birth of our Savior. Even though Jesus’ title, Christ, is in the word Christmas, it’s very hard to find any mention of Jesus’ name on the TV or radio during the Christmas season. At Christmas,

presents and gifts are great—but don't forget Jesus is the greatest gift of all. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Family gatherings are fun too—but God's family gathers every Sunday morning for worship. Christmas carols are delightful—but songs and hymns of praise to God can inspire you all year long! Is there still room for him in the holiday named in his honor?

Modern Bible scholarship tells us that the innkeeper is something of a myth. There were no Marriott's or Holiday Inns in ancient Israel. "Inns," as we imagine them, did not exist in Bethlehem. Inns were not common until Medieval Europe. The Greek word (*kataluma*) has more of the idea of a spare room in someone's house—a guest room. It's the word used when Jesus and his disciples gather together for the last supper in a guest room. This fact actually makes matters worse. Not only was there no room for Joseph and Mary in our imaginary "inn," but neither was there a "place for them" in anyone's house. Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem because of family roots, yet no family took them in. There's debate over whether they would have been turned away because of Mary's seemingly scandalous pregnancy, or because there really was no room, or because they wanted to give Mary somewhere private to give birth. But there was no room for them with everyone else.

The Good News tonight is that, even though there was no room for Jesus that first Christmas Eve, Jesus is making room for you. On his way to the cross, Jesus told his disciples: "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you

that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (John 14:1-3).

Jesus goes to "prepare a place" for you. There was no place for him in Bethlehem, and there's seemingly little room for him in our world today, but he has prepared a place for you! He's getting your room ready in heaven so that someday you can live with him. Jesus wants you to be where he is: in the manger, at the cross, and in his heavenly home. He isn't just like a disinterested hotel clerk, preparing a room for whoever will come. He has prepared it for you, with the love of a new groom preparing to bring his bride home.

Jesus wants to give you the greatest Christmas gift of all: himself! Jesus wants to be home for the holidays—at home in your heart. When Joseph and Mary looked for a place to stay in Bethlehem, the people turned them away "because there was no place for them" and their infant Son (Luke 2:7).

An old Reader's Digest story tells of a Christmas pageant that goes awry when the kid playing the innkeeper goes off-script and says, "You can have my room!" Are you willing to go off script from what it seems we're expected to do? Are you willing to make room for Jesus at Christmas? You have already, by being here and listening to the readings and singing the hymns we're about to sing. Are you willing to make room for Jesus the rest of the year, in your everyday life? That's the more important question.

Because of all that Jesus did, he prepared a place for us with him forever. And that gives us hope. The hope comes not just from the place

prepared by Jesus. The hope comes that Jesus has prepared it for you. It's a reminder that no matter how alone we are in this world, there is always room for you with Jesus.

Jesus is the one who goes to prepare a place for you in his Father's house. And if he goes and prepares a place for you, he will come again and take you to himself, that where he is, there you may be also. Through all the moves and changes, crosses and betrayals of life, we have a place prepared for us. Jesus will always have a place for you. What a wonderful promise.

Pastor David Beagley  
Memorial Lutheran Church, Ames, Iowa  
December 24, 2021