

Luke 2:1-7 (1984 NIV)
Do You Have Room For Jesus?

¹ In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to their own town to register.

⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Introduction

What would you see if you walk in the shopping malls during the Christmas season?

- Christmas tree?
- Santa Claus and the reindeers?
- Nativity scene?

A nativity scene takes its inspiration from the accounts of the birth of Jesus in the Bible. Nativity scenes usually bring together Joseph, Mary, Baby Jesus, the shepherds, and the Magi (wise men). Some even have the ox and the donkey present at the manger as well as other animals such as sheep, goats, and camels.

One time, the pastor and people of St. George's Church in Austin, Texas, agreed to host a live nativity scene (using actual persons) on the church grounds. It would be from 17 - 24 Dec. 1989.

But the presentation was to be a little different from the usual ones in that it would depict a homeless couple with nothing but their backpacks, a few blankets, and their baby.

But at 4 p.m. on 17 Dec., the pastor heard the forecast for that night and every night until Christmas—snow and chilly wind would bring temperatures down to a shivering cold level.

The pastor and a church leader agreed that they just could not ask the good people of St. George's Church to expose themselves to the cold (as if anyone would come to see them anyway). Then they decided that if they could not ask people who live in houses to be outdoors on a horribly cold night, they could not leave homeless people outside either. They then agreed to round up

anyone they could find who was outdoors that night and bring them to be sheltered in church.

They found three people who were desperate to come in from the cold—a young woman, her husband and their 3-month-old daughter—refugees from the civil war in Guatemala.

Church members responded by bringing their dinners to share, their extra blankets, and clothing for these needy ones. This began a shelter ministry in the church that lasted through Dec. 26. The word had gotten around town—anyone could get a hot meal and a warm space in the church.

As a result of this, many churches in Austin, Texas, are now participating in such shelter ministry during the Christmas season to share and spread God's love to strangers who are homeless, needy, and hungry.

(<https://www.statesman.com/story/news/2012/09/01/an-austin-nativity-scene-turns-into-a-different-kind-of-shelter/9891348007>)

The nativity scene tells us that God brings His love down to us in the Person of Jesus Christ. And it reminds the church to touch people who are needy in mind, body, and spirit with God's grace and love in a personal way.

The nativity scene has become so familiar that it has become unmistakable. Usually the setting is quite pastoral, with Mary and Joseph watching as Jesus sleeps. Sometimes there is a glowing light emanating from Baby Jesus. Nearby the cattle and the sheep rest contentedly and the donkey watches the happy parents. And very often the shepherds and the Wise Men bow before the Babe in the manger. It is a sweet and beautiful scene.

It is also quite misleading—this peaceful scene bears little connection to what really happened that night in Bethlehem. It wasn't as beautiful as we make it appear. And there is no reason to believe that the shepherds and the Wise Men ever saw Jesus at the same time.

But the major problem rests in one fact—The Son of God from heaven came to earth and was born in a stable because there was no room in the inn. We hear this so often that we take it for granted, but it does not sound right at all.

I. What's wrong with this picture?

The answer is simple—Jesus doesn't belong there. He's the Son of God from heaven. He doesn't deserve to be treated like a vagrant. He deserves the best the world has to offer. He comes from heaven to earth ... but ends up in a stable! How can that be? God could have done better. Suppose you have all power and can choose the time and place and manner of your son's birth, will you choose to have him born outside in a stable? If you have all the power and means, will you have your child born in Mt. Elizabeth Private Hospital or Lee Ah Moi Home for the

Underprivileged? What's going on here? Why is there no room in the inn for Baby Jesus, the Son of God? That doesn't make sense.

Perhaps the place to begin with is Bethlehem. In Jesus' day, Bethlehem was a small out-of-the-way village town. A few shepherds lived there, some farmers, a few merchants, and that was about it. It was a small Jewish village town made famous only because it was King David's hometown.

One part of the story involved the Roman Emperor named Caesar Augustus who decreed that a census be taken so that taxes could be collected throughout the empire. The census required that all Jewish males go back to their ancestral hometowns to register. Since Joseph was descended from David, he had to return to Bethlehem. It "happened" that Mary was in her advanced stage of pregnancy when they arrived in Bethlehem. I put "happened" in quotes because God arranged everything so that the emperor issued the decree at just the right moment and in just the right way so that at just the right time, Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem so that the ancient prophecy concerning the birth of Jesus Christ would come to pass (Micah 5:2). It all seemed to just "happen", but what seemed to be by chance was actually the hand of God moving through history to accomplish His purposes. "If God ordains it, it will come to pass."

Part of our problem in understanding this story revolves around the word "inn". We are so immersed in our culture of comfort that we read the text this way—"There was no room for them at the Bethlehem Holiday Inn."

We need to clear our mind of such a notion. In those days travel was dirty, difficult, and dangerous. Travelers needed safety and security from the robbers that could be found on every highway. An "inn" was a simple guesthouse where you could rest safely for the night—no hot-water shower, no cable TV, just the barest minimum. It was an "inn" such as this that had no room for Mary, Joseph, and Jesus on that holy night in Bethlehem.

Why were they turned away? No doubt the inn was full that night. Perhaps other descendants of David had come to Bethlehem to register for the census. Perhaps because Joseph and Mary were poor, they could not pay. And perhaps the innkeeper, seeing that Mary was very pregnant, did not want to inconvenience himself in any way. So, there was no room for the couple.

Nothing in the picture described to us in the Bible looks right. Jesus deserved better; God could have done better. So why did it happen like this?

II. What is God telling us?

There was no room in the inn because God wanted it that way. If God had wanted it some other way, then it would have happened that "other way".

Joseph and Mary were compelled (by the census) to return to Bethlehem when Mary was in her advanced pregnancy. It seems clear that they arrived in Bethlehem just a

few days before she gave birth to Jesus. The journey itself would have been difficult and dangerous.

Today, all the airlines will allow pregnant women to travel through their 35th week. After that, they must bring a letter from their doctor (written within 72 hours of the trip) saying they are in good enough health to make the flight. A woman in the last stages of pregnancy would very likely be turned away at the gate. Nothing has really changed in 2,000 years—no room in the inn for Mary in her advanced pregnancy in her time; no seat on the plane for any woman in her advanced pregnancy in our time.

So Joseph and Mary arrived in Bethlehem, were turned away at the inn, and the baby was born in a stable—outdoors, in the cold, with the animals nearby. They had no privacy, no sanitation, and very little protection from the elements.

Why would God send His Son into the world like this? What is He trying to tell us?

- Firstly, Jesus was born like this to show that God can use bad circumstances to bring about something good. At first glance, the fact that there was no room at the inn seems like an insignificant detail. But it was no small detail to Joseph and Mary. Being turned away when the baby was about to come must have been devastating. Giving birth in a stable no doubt tested their faith to the limit. Life is like that—we don't know what is coming around the corner, and many things we endure make no sense at all. Sometimes they don't make sense for years to come. And sometimes they never will make sense to us. In moments like this, rather than try to explain the mysterious ways of God, or try to answer unanswerable questions, we do better to rest on what we know about God—that He is good, gracious, loving, just, and merciful; that His ways are not our ways; that He makes no mistakes and He does whatever He knows is right (Psalm 115:3).

I take great comfort in the fact that our God knows what He is doing, and He uses everything that happens to us to accomplish His purposes in us, through us, and for us. Nothing is wasted. That was true for Joseph and Mary. Nothing is wasted—not even being turned away because there was no room in the inn.

This baby lying in an exposed stable, resting in a feeding-trough, is God's appointed "sign" to us all. God has come to the world in a most unlikely way. This is what the Bible means when it says that Jesus Christ "made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness" (Phi. 2:7). Nothing about Baby Jesus appeared divine or majestic. If you had been there, and if you had no other information, you would have concluded that this was just a baby born to a poor couple. Nothing seemed to have pointed to God. Yet all of it—every part of it, every single, seemingly random detail—was planned by God. God's fingerprints were everywhere in the birth of Jesus Christ. Indeed, God is working in the most difficult and unlikely situations even today.

A man was walking in the orchard with his friend. He then paused and said, “If God is the Creator of all things, I am not sure if He knows what He is doing. Why does He allow a big tree to grow small nuts and a small plant to grow big watermelons? God should have done better.”

Almost immediately after saying that, a nut from a big tree fell onto his head. Suddenly, a great realization hit him and he exclaimed, “Thank God He didn’t make that a watermelon!”

Yes, we may complain that God should have done better. But know this—God knows what He is doing, and He knows what is best even in the most difficult and unlikely situations.

What is God telling us? God is telling us this—“If you make room for Jesus in your life, there’s hope in your hopelessness and help in your helplessness because I AM in your situation.”

- Secondly, Jesus was born like this to show that God loves the humble but opposes the proud. The very manner of Jesus’ birth—turned away from the inn, born in a stable—was an invitation to the rejected, the abused, the mistreated, the forgotten, and the overlooked to come to Him. Since He was born in a stable, all the outsiders of the world would instinctively feel a kinship with Jesus. He does not serve only the rich and mighty. He’s born to identify with those treated like outcasts and outsiders by others in this world.

Jesus invites the humble and lowly of the earth to Himself. He tells them that He cares for them and knows their situation because He had been treated as an outcast and outsider even at His birth.

He was born outside because they wouldn’t let his earthly parents come inside. When He died, they buried Him in a borrowed tomb. He was born outside the inn, and He died outside the walls of Jerusalem with two thieves one on each side of Him (Heb. 13:11-13). He was born in the most humble way. He died in the most humiliating manner. At His birth and in His death, Jesus could identify with the humble and lowly, the outcasts and outsiders. After all, He was born in a manger like a deprived child, and died on a cross like a despised criminal.

As leader of Germany and the Nazi party, Adolf Hitler ordered the German Government to have his face imprinted on postage stamps as an iconic image during WW II. By printing these stamps and thus forcing the German people to use them in their everyday lives, Hitler successfully promoted himself, the war, and the Nazi party while many of the German people were suffering great hardships.

After the defeat of Nazi Germany, millions of these stamps were “liberated” from Germany by Allied soldiers as they overran towns, banks, and

postoffices. These stamps then became souvenirs of their pains and final victory.

Today, these stamps serve as collector's items. They remind us of a man who once brought a nation out of despair and depression, plunged the world into war, and attempted genocide in an effort to create a "master race". These stamps serve to remind us of the monstrosity of human pride.

There's even a joke about these stamps. It was said that when Hitler ordered the printing of these stamps with his face on them, he had demanded that the best materials be used to produce them. But when these were used in postages, he heard that they kept falling off the envelopes. So he hauled up the man in-charge and asked, "Why are the stamps falling off? Why are the best glue not used to hold them?" The man in-charge replied, "Sir, we did use the best glue for the stamps, and were puzzled why the stamps didn't stick. So we did a check and found out the reason." Hitler demanded, "What then is the reason?" The reply was, "We found out that when people wet their stamps to stick onto the envelopes, they kept spitting on the wrong side."

Human pride can tempt us to demand to be treated like a king on planet earth. Because we are by nature people who like to be treated like kings, we naturally use our human abilities to get a king's life, to satisfy our longing for earthly greatness and happiness. And this human pride can stray us to ruin the lives of others and that of our own.

What is God telling us? God is telling us this—"If you make room for Jesus in your life, there's strength even in your weakness because I AM with you; if not, there's no security even in your strength because I AM not with you."

III. What then are we to do?

God could have made a room available for Jesus at His birth. He could have created a mega hospital or a luxury hotel in Bethlehem if He had so desired. The sequence of events that unfolded—the census, the long journey, no room at the inn, "no crib for a bed"—all of it was planned by God even though it all appeared to happen by chance. God willed there would be no room in the inn not for the sake of Jesus, but for our sakes, that we might learn who Jesus is and why He came. He is the Son of God. He came to shed God's love upon a sinful world. He came to give us room for help, hope, and strength to life here on earth; to give us room for life forever with God in heaven.

Here is the Gospel message—the Good News from God to all during the Christmas season—in the account of Jesus' birth:

- God the Creator of heaven and earth also created man to be together with Him.
- But man disobeyed God and sin came into our world.

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- Man is separated from God because of sin.
- Sin becomes part of our human nature, we all die spiritually (i.e. separated from God), and we will face judgement to come.
- But God in His great love sent Jesus Christ as a bridge to help us reach Him.
- Jesus Christ died on the Cross to cleanse us of sin.
- The Bible (John 5:24) reassures us that if anyone hears and believes in Jesus Christ, he will have eternal life with God in heaven, there will be no condemnation for him, and he will pass from death to life.

So, will you make room for Jesus Christ in your heart?

The story is told of a little boy who was chosen to play the innkeeper in the annual children's Christmas play at his church. When the night came, all the children were in their places, nervously waiting for the play to begin. The little boy chosen to play the innkeeper had only one line—when Joseph knocked on the door, he was to open it and say, "There is no room left in the inn."

The play began and at last, the big moment came for the boy who played the innkeeper. Joseph knocked on the door. The young boy opened it and saw Joseph and the pregnant Mary. Something about the sight of Mary touched his heart and he blurted out, "There is no room left in the inn ... but you can share my room."

Now, that's bad for the director of a live play—No NG! No Cut! The little boy told the frustrated director later, "I just couldn't send Jesus away. I had to find a place for Jesus."

There was no room for Jesus that night in Bethlehem. But will you make room for Him in your heart today? Though the whole world may turn away, you can open your heart and let Him in. And if He comes in, He will never leave you. May God grant to each of us faith to believe and an open heart to say, "Yes, Lord Jesus, there is room in my heart for you."

If you are a Christian, how do you make room for Jesus this festive season? We sing this line in the Christmas carol *Joy to the World*, "Let every heart prepare Him room." But how do we do that?

- First, we can slow down and prioritize what is important in our lives. How can you live more for Jesus with less of the things in this world? Remove that clutter in your life that is preventing you from growing in the Lord. Open that locked room where you know you are doing some things not right, and allow the Lord to come in and clean it up for you.
- Second, we can make room for Jesus by making room for the "strangers" in our midst. We have many guests and visitors today. Some are with us first time—the strangers in our midst. Make a point to welcome them warmly. We can make room for others (e.g. foreigners working, staying, or studying in our country) to eat at our table, sharing both food and conversation with them.

And when we make room for the hungry and the thirsty, we let the love of God be poured forth on them in that small act.

If you are not a Christian, what does it mean to you to make room for Jesus? It means you must choose to open your heart to allow Jesus to come in. It's not easy to make room for Jesus. There's a famous painting that shows Jesus standing at the door with His hand lifted to knock on it. If you look carefully, you will notice something interesting—there is no latch on the outside of the door. The person on the inside controls who will enter and who will not. That is God's way. Jesus never forces His way into our lives; He only enters our hearts when invited. There was no force displayed in Bethlehem. God in Jesus Christ came to the world as a little newborn baby crying in the night—inconspicuous, unsuspected. And room has to be made for Him even though it's not always easy to do. We have to make that choice.

If you are longing:

- To change your old life of meaningless wandering
- To live a purposeful life
- To fill your life with boldness to face the uncertain and unexpected
- To look beyond something more than the here and now

If that's the longing of your heart, Jesus is calling you to open your heart and make room for Him to come into your life. And if this is what you are longing, I want you to say a prayer with me silently in your heart—you say it to Jesus, and to Him only. While all heads are bowed and all eyes are closed, repeat these words after me, sincerely and honestly to Jesus for He is right here listening to you:

Jesus, I know I am a sinner before you. I ask you now to forgive and cleanse me of my sins.

You arose from the dead, so that I can die to my old life of sin, and live a new life in you. I now receive you into my life as my Master. Help me to live this new life always in obedience to you.

Amen.

If you have repeated the prayer after me, I like to ask you to talk with us after the service to rejoice with you in this very important step that you have taken, to share more with you, to encourage you, and to pray further for you as you start your new journey today with Jesus as your Master.

Let me now close our time with a Christmas prayer on behalf of all of us here today:

Our Father in Heaven, we come before you on this very special day. May the peace, joy and hope of this day fill our hearts, and be part of all that we say and do today. May we share the divine life of your Son Jesus Christ, even as He humbled Himself to share our humanity. Help us be thankful for the true Gift of Christmas who is your Son Jesus Christ.

And as we celebrate today the birth of Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, may we begin to see the world in the light of how Jesus was born. He was born in humble and lowly circumstances to remind us that in the beginning it was human discontent with our circumstances that had brought sin into our world. So in this season, fill us with gratitude and contentment for what we already have in our hands. Remind us this day that it is indeed more blessed to give than to receive.

Father, as you chose the lowly, the outcasts, and the poor to receive the greatest news the world had ever known—the birth of Jesus Christ—on that first Christmas night, so may we worship the Lord Jesus today in humble adoration and meekness of heart.

Send us forth to shine, share, and spread your blessings upon our lives so that others may also hear, see, feel, and experience the reality of your great love and grace for them in Jesus Christ.

We pray and ask all this in Jesus' name whose birth we remember and rejoice today. Amen!