

“No Room in the Inn,” Luke 2:1-7, Christmas Eve, December 24, 2014

“Roses are red, violets are blue! Jesus was born for me and for you!”

Okay, I’ll admit it—I am not much of a poet. That’s why I surprised myself several weeks ago when I picked up a pen and a piece of paper and found myself writing a little **parody** on one of my favorite Christmas carols: **“O Little Town of Bethlehem,”** except that I entitled it: **“O Little Inn in Bethlehem!”** And in it I was hoping to capture the way that the **unbelieving world** most often **reacts to the good news of our Savior’s birth** that we are celebrating with **millions and millions of other Christians** all around the globe this night. **Because we are sinners, whose lives are far from perfect, we can sometimes respond in this same negative way too! -- Well, it goes like this:**

O little inn in Bethlehem, how much we are just like you!

Our lives are filled up to the brim with this and that to do!

We’re not unfriendly people, nor wish the Christ Child harm!

We’re just so focused on ourselves, we’ll put him in the barn!

Now truthfully, I wasn’t sure what your reaction would be to what I just shared with you! I tried to prepare myself for anything! Yes, some of you might laugh, some of you might smile, or grow sad and even be offended. Some of you might even say: **“Pastor, what you just said actually borders on the very edge of being sacrilegious!”** But is it any **sadder, more offensive,** or border any more on the edge of **being sacrilegious** than what St. John is going to share with us in our Gospel lesson tomorrow morning on Christmas Day?

“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. All things were made through him and without him was not anything made that has been made! In him was life and his life was the light of all men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. He was in the world and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not! He came unto his own and his own received him not” (John 1:1-13; Selected verses)!

No doubt it had been a long 80-mile trek southward from Nazareth to Bethlehem! Can you imagine **mothers** in the last few weeks of your pregnancy riding on the **back of a donkey all the way down from Greenville to Chapin, South Carolina?** **Fatigued** beyond our wildest imaginations, **the Holy Family** was hoping to **find a light left on for them at the MOTEL 6,** or at the **Ramada Inn,** or the **Comfort Inn,** or the **Red Roof Inn** or at the **Days Inn!** but the only thing they saw **through their tired and blurry eyes** that evening were **NO VACANCY** signs **flashing everywhere!**

What many people never realize is that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who later reveals his name to Moses at a mysterious burning bush is “Yahweh;” the “One who causes things to be!” **And often our God is directing the events of world history through the lives of powerful men who DON’T EVEN BELIEVE IN HIM AND WHO HAVE NO TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF HIM WHATSOEVER.** The decree of Caesar Augustus, that all-the world should be taxed and that a census would be taken, was in complete alignment with the will of **God,** all in order than the **MARY THE BLESSED MOTHER OF OUR LORD** would be brought to Bethlehem in time for our Messiah’s birth. It all happened to fulfil an ancient prophecy written by the **Prophet Micah 700** years earlier in **Micah 5:2** we read: **“And you, O Bethlehem Ephrata, though you are least among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth one for me to be ruler of Israel, whose origins are from ancient days!”**

I know that from the time we are **small children in Sunday school** we all have a **tendency to caricature the various participants** in the Nativity Story into two different **categories** of the **good guys** and the **bad guys**. **Herod** turns out to be a **villain** and the **Wise Men** are **heroes**. The shepherds, who each could have said with that great comic of yesteryear **Rodney Dangerfield**, **"I get no respect!"** turn out to be **highly esteemed by us as well!** But the innkeeper—well—the poor **innkeeper has gone down as one of the "heavies"** in this story of our Savior's birth.

In many peoples' minds' eye, they envision him as a **crotchety old man wearing a night cap, sticking his head out of a second story window and tersely shouting: "Take the stable and leave me alone!"** So in the midst of all of our **no-holds-barred celebration this evening**, let's take a few moments to also own up to the **fact that the world often shuts Christ out! It did so in his day and it still does so in ours.**

I. The World Often Shut Christ Out in His Day!

You know this phrase that Luke uses: "There was no room for them in the inn," actually becomes indicative of the world's response to Jesus all throughout our Lord's life and ministry.

(A) When the Wise Men arrive in Bethlehem (according to Matthew 2) and inquire of King Herod where the Messiah was to be born; HE DOESN'T KNOW AND SO HE DIRECTS THEM TO THE SCRIBES AT THE TEMPLE; AND they quoted that passage I just gave to you from **Micah 5**. Their distinct answer was in Bethlehem. But we have **no indication whatsoever that the Biblical scholars made a trip to Bethlehem themselves to search for the Christ. Perhaps, they were just too busy; too preoccupied with other things!**

(B) And when you read about the beginnings of Jesus' public ministry in Luke 4, it isn't long before people in the **hometown of Nazareth** hear of what Jesus is doing; how Luke tells us in Acts: **"He went around preaching the good news of the kingdom, and casting demons out of all who were oppressed by the devil!"**

Our Lord's home synagogue invited him back one day to be their guest preacher. They handed him the scroll of the **Prophet Isaiah** and he read from the **61st** chapter, **"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, recovery of sight to the blind, release to the captives and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord!"**

Jesus sat down, as preachers did to preach their sermons in those days, saying: **"Today this saying is fulfilled in your hearing!"** **And they were all pleased; pleased with the first part of Jesus' sermon that is**—but when he went on to challenge the **genuineness of their faith**, reminding them that there **were indeed many widows in Israel**, though **Elijah had been sent to none of them but to a poor, unfortunate widow** (a Gentile) in **Zaraphath** to help her; and there **were plenty of lepers in Israel**, when **Elisha was sent to Syria to help Naaman** (another Gentile), they were then deeply offended and **grabbed a strong hold on Jesus and drug him out to a hillside** upon which the **whole town of Nazareth** was built. Their intention was to throw him to his certain death below. **Yet, he escaped from the crowd almost invisibly because his time had not yet come!**

(C) The same is true in Luke 8 when Jesus arrives in the country of the Gerasenes. A man who is possessed with a whole legion of demons meets our Lord when he steps out of the boat! ***“I know who you are, they said in unison together! You are Jesus Son of the Most High God!”*** And when Jesus, to make a longer story short, ended up casting them out of that man into a herd of swine who then threw themselves over a cliff into the Sea of Galilee below—well every one soon discovered that **Jesus was bad for their local economy**, for the **stock in the Hormel Meat Packing plant there in Nazareth that day fell to an all-time low on the New York Stock Exchange, and they asked Jesus to leave their town and to never, ever return there again!**

Yes, the world repeatedly finds its way to shut Jesus out!

II. THE WORLD SHUTS JESUS OUT IN OUR OWN DAY TOO!

Multitudes still don't make room for Jesus. Our nation has become so **secularized** and so **materialistic** that wherever you look there doesn't seem to be room for Jesus. Most stores no longer even use the word **“Christmas”** in their advertisements during this time of the year; **because they don't want to offend people who are atheists but this was always a Christian celebration of our faith before it was anything else!** But in this **anti-God and anti-Christ atmosphere** which seems to be so widespread, there are still some exceptions; companies like **“Hobby Lobby”** which run a full-page ad each year telling the Christmas story, and honoring the Son of God!

No longer are any Nativity Scenes allowed to be displayed on public properties, and organizations like the ACLU protest any mention of “Christmas” or “Christ” in the public square.

No room in the inn? There is an old story about **a man who came to a hotel years ago and the clerk behind the desk said, “Sorry, sir, we just don't have any rooms!” And the man replied, “Well, I want to ask you a question, young man! If the President of the United States showed up here in the next 30 minutes would you have a room for him?”**

“Yes sir,” the young clerk replied. **“We'd have to find a room for him somewhere, somehow!”**

“Well, he's not here,” the older gentleman replied, “so how's about you give me his room!”

A little girl who was first learning how to say the LORD'S PRAYER made a mistake when she said one day, “Forgive us our Christmases!” instead of “Forgive us our trespasses!” But maybe we should sometimes pray to God to forgive us our Christmases when for many people the Christmas bells are the jingle bells of the cash register and the spirit of King Midas has taken over the spirit of the King of kings and the Lord of lords?

Even though the Bible **doesn't mention an innkeeper** to us specifically, if there was one there, we presume that he must have been pretty cold-hearted; at least callous!

Martin Luther said that we can all severely admonish the nasty old innkeeper for making no room for Joseph, Mary and the Baby Jesus! But we can be guilty of the same thing when we refuse to help those who are legitimately poor; those who have fallen onto hard times, not because of their irresponsibility, when through no merit of their own, they have become unemployed or stricken with a grave illness!

II. Sometimes People Did Welcome him Gladly into their Lives.

(A). The shepherds did. The night of that first Christmas must have seemed like any other night to the shepherds outside of Bethlehem. All the sheep had been gathered in and there was nothing left to do except to keep watch, visit with one another, and stay warm. That **quiet routine, however, was shattered** when an angel of the Lord burst onto the scene with the **bright light of God's glory. Unasked for and unexpected, that's how the angel arrived just as God continues to enter into hearts today.**

How did the shepherds react to this heavenly invasion? They were terrified! That's not surprising is it? What's your first reaction when the phone rings in the middle of the night? You fear the worst don't you? It could be a friend calling to tell you that your son or daughter was in an **accident, or Grandma** to say that **Grandpa isn't doing so well.** In the same way, the shepherds must have feared the worst when they saw God's messenger standing before them. Had he come to announce that it was Judgment Day? If so, were they ready to be judged by the righteous God?

But that's not why the angel had come. *"Do not be afraid,"* the angel said. *"Behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10, 11).*

Just by listening to this message the attitude of the shepherds changed. Their fear was replaced with joy. The Savior had been born in Bethlehem just as the Old Testament prophets said he would be. By listening and taking to heart this message the shepherds learned that the Bible could be trusted. They also learned that this child was not just human; he was God as he was called *"the Lord."* And all of these shepherds were overjoyed because this Savior had not just come to save a select group of people. The angel said that this news was for **"all people."** There was no Christmas tree, no treats, no turkey and dressing and cranberry sauce with mashed potatoes and gravy and green beans! But all those shepherds were immensely happy! What made that first Christmas so merry? It was listening to the angel's message!

We should not be all that surprised that the world so often crowds our Lord Jesus out! **Isaiah says in chapter 53,** *"He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and we esteemed him not and hid our faces from him. Yet surely he has borne our grief and carried out sorrows and the chastisement that was upon him has brought us peace and with his stripes we are healed!"*

Shortly after Jesus rode triumphantly into Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday, the religious authorities decided that the **only room they had for Jesus there was on a cross,** even as his brutalized body had to be buried in a borrowed grave too. He knew that this world had no room for him. He said, *"Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head!"*

But how about us, will we go public with our faith? Or will we be ashamed to let other people know that we are Christians?

Shortly after Grandma died, Grandpa decided that shopping for presents for the grandchildren in grandma's absence was just too difficult. After all the children were up in years and they all had everything they needed, so he decided that from now on he would just send them a nice card, accompanied by a check, and he would sign each card: **"I love you! Merry Christmas! Grandpa. P.S. "Buy your own present!"**

Now one year, when Grandpa was enjoying the family festivities at his daughter's house, he thought his grandchildren were being much more distant than usual. It really bothered him. Had he done something to offend them but couldn't remember for the life of him what it was? **Then one day he was sorting out some papers on his desk at home and under a pile of magazines, he found a little pile of checks for his grandchildren.** He had completely forgotten to put them inside of those Christmas cards that year!

We human beings are like that! But not our God! Paul asks in Romans 3, **"Does our faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?"** Then the apostle answers: ***By no means, let God be faithful though every man be false!***

Well speaking of postscripts, I thought I might add just a few of my own on the whole subject of gift-giving, and a few other Christmas matters too! So let me ask you, aside from Jesus of course: What is the best Christmas gift in the whole world? A broken drum, you just can't beat it!

Who delivers presents to baby sharks at Christmas? Santa Jaws.

What song do you sing at a snowman's birthday party?

Freeze – a jolly good fellow!

Why are Christmas trees so bad at sewing? They always drop their needles!

What did Santa say to the smoker? Don't smoke, it's bad for my elf!

What did the beaver say to the Christmas tree? Nice gnawing you!

What did the stamp say to the Christmas card? Stick with me and you'll go places!

How did Mary and Joseph know that Jesus was 7lb 6oz when he was born?

They had **"A Weight in the Manger!"**

Just one more: **What do you call a bunch of chess players bragging about the games they've just won in a hotel lobby?** Chess nuts boasting in an open foyer!

The first Christmas of those frightened shepherds turned out to be a very Merry Christmas for them indeed. Our Christmas, this Christmas, can be merry for us to if we do as the shepherds did – by listening and taking to heart the angel's message. Jesus has come to bring peace to all. He did that by dying on the cross and forgiving all of us our sins!

God's forgiveness plan is like no other. **Completely unasked for and unexpected, God intervened in history to forgive us and give us the promise of eternal life in heaven through faith in Jesus: God's forgiveness has divine power to change our whole lives!**

But the shepherds weren't just content to hear the message were they? They wanted to learn more about this Savior and so without delay they went to Bethlehem.

Friends, we too should not be content just to hear about the Savior but to hurry to Bethlehem and see the Christ-child. Don't be satisfied just to make note of Jesus once a year **in the Christmas carols or in the Christmas Eve service but come and learn about him often. God's plan of salvation is awesome and has many facets to it.** The more you listen to it and learn about it the **more joy it brings into your life and will prepare you to face any kind of difficulty you may have to face.**

While there is nothing wrong with looking forward to our Christmas customs of opening presents or sharing Christmas dinner with loved ones, those customs can never replace the **real reason for our joy at Christmas – the birth of Jesus Christ, the Savior from sin. By his dying on the cross he has destroyed death, and by his rising again he has restored to us everlasting life!** Don't let the customs crowd out the basics. Celebrate like the shepherd's by listening to the angel's message. Amen