

Daily Devotional, December 16, 2021 Being the Best Host We Can Be

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. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 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. Luke 2:4-7 (NIV)

One of the high points of my elementary school experience was the Christmas Nativity Play each year. Parents jockeyed positions in anticipation of getting a good view of their child in whatever part they were depicting or reading they were assigned. Some parents I'm sure, must have anguished over whether or not their child ended up with one of the main roles instead of being just one of the "angel choir," those who didn't have a named part but just sang along with to the music while wearing haloes in the background. Being one of the better readers, I was most often assigned a reading part which was commonly a Bible passage depicting a segment of the nativity story. Over and over, I rehearsed my part to bring dramatic emphasis so I could truly convey the importance of Mary and Joseph and the Christ child about to be born. I simply took it on faith that my reading was an integral part of the story of the birth of Jesus.

As so often happens, though, I grew up and discovered that some of the things I thought to be true in life (and especially in the Bible) were not the way I thought they were. I learned that Joseph and Mary faced a much different perspective of lodging than I had ever imagined. At the time of the birth of Jesus, most travelers would not have looked for an "inn" as a place to stay. Instead, they would have sought out a relative or a friend's relatives who would allow them to stay in their house in a room specifically planned for a visitor. A wonderful example of this idea can be seen in Mark and Luke's Gospels when Jesus sent two of his disciples to prepare a place for them to celebrate the Passover.

Jesus' birth in a stable, that we now believe actually was a cave used for this purpose rather than a building like a modern barn, did not occur due to an unwilling innkeeper who refused to make room in a crowded building. Instead, it happened this way because people who knew Joseph or his family were not willing to make room in their own homes or were unable because others had taken the rooms or were promised them. The humbleness of the nativity occurred through a lack of hospitality, either through a desire to turn away from the deeply-rooted cultural expectations of what it meant to care for a traveler, or the inconvenience to do so. In this light, I have always wondered what caused those families in Bethlehem to turn away this young couple in need. I wonder if any of us could have or would have done any better.

How can we prepare our own homes and hearts for the coming of Christ in new ways this year?
Prayer: Lord Jesus, all too often we find that we have filled our guestrooms with the things of this world, thus pushing You aside to be born in the "caves of our lives." Help us to open our lives to You that You might dwell in our hearts and be at the center of all that we do. Open the eyes of our souls to see You and to see each other as You do. In Your most holy name, we pray, Amen.