

Pastor Chris Matthis  
Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado  
Advent Midweek 3  
Wednesday, December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2018

Sermon: In Those Days: No Place for Her Firstborn Son<sup>1</sup>

Text: Luke 2:6-7

Focus: Our world continually resists the coming of Christ.

Function: That they would make room for Jesus in their hearts.

Structure: Story-Applied

Locus: “That I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom...” (SC, 2<sup>nd</sup> Article of Apostles’ Creed).

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. One of the songs on regular holiday play is “I’ll be Home for Christmas.” You know the words: “*I’ll be home for Christmas/You can plan on me.../I’ll be home for Christmas/if only in my dreams.*” Bing Crosby sang the original recording of this song as a tribute to the soldiers, sailors, and marines fighting overseas during World War II. The song was first released at Christmas 1943, six months before D-Day. Italy had already surrendered, but Nazi Germany still controlled most of Europe. And in the Pacific theatre, the United States was fighting a bitter campaign against the Japanese, paying in heavy casualties for every island or atoll seized. Many a G.I. wished

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<sup>1</sup> This sermon is developed from the sermon series, “In Those Days” by Creative Communications for the Parish.

that he *were* home with his family instead of at the front. But that wouldn't happen for another 2 years. Until then? Only in his dreams...

Joseph and Mary had to journey to Bethlehem for that first Christmas so that they could pay their taxes in Joseph's hometown. But when Mary went into labor, she had to give birth in a stable and lay the baby Jesus in a feeding trough for animals, "because there was no place for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7, ESV).<sup>2</sup> This final phrase usually conjures up images of Super 8 motels with neon signs that read NO VACANCY. We picture overcrowded hotels and motels with front desk managers who can barely keep up.

But Bible scholars tell us that the Greek word (*katalumati*) has more of the idea of a guest room or spare room. The problem wasn't that Joseph couldn't find a booking on Hotels.com for his pregnant fiancée. Remember: Bethlehem was Joseph's hometown—full of his *relatives!* Yet none of them could spare even a little bit of floor space in a spare room. How true Jesus' saying was: "A prophet is not without honor *except* in his hometown and in his own household" (Matt. 13:57).

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<sup>2</sup> All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

*Especially not* when that prophet is born out of wedlock to a teenaged mother. The first century was not a time when they had daycare centers at the high school so that teen moms could finish their educations. No, when a young girl was “in the family way” (as they used to say), she would be whisked off to distant relatives and kept hidden out of sight. Sometimes she’d even be stoned to death—the lawful punishment for adultery.

Who could believe Mary’s story that Jesus was the Son of God? After all, whoever heard of a pregnant virgin?

And so the Savior of the world was born in a barn (or a cave, if we believe Justin Martyr). The Creator of the universe was wrapped in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger, because there was no room for him in Bethlehem.

Jesus would be out of place for most of his life. His brothers didn’t believe in him (John 7:5). His family thought he was crazy (Mark 3:21). And while many people welcomed Jesus into their homes, he himself was homeless during his earthly ministry. As Christ himself declared: “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son

of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Luke 9:58). Even in his death, there wasn’t a proper place for Jesus. He had to be buried in a borrowed tomb (Matt. 27:59-60).

But the grave was no proper place for Jesus. Three days after he died on the cross for our sins, he rose again to life! Death could not contain him, and so he broke out of the tomb on Easter morning, promising eternal life and salvation to all who receive him and believe in his name. He ascended into heaven, and now he goes to prepare a place for us—“a place *for you*” (John 14:2-3).

Tragically, many people do not have room in their hearts for Jesus, just as on that first Christmas there was no spare room or place at the inn. People have all kinds of reasons for rejecting Christ the Savior. In their pride, many refuse to admit their sin and confess their need for a Savior. Some people are offended by Christ’s insistence that he is the *only* Way, Truth, and Life, and that *no one* comes to the Father except through him (John 14:6). How, they wonder, could a good God turn away those who follow Muhammed or Buddha or their own inner light? Other people are too focused on the worries and riches of this world to

even notice there is a God-sized hole in their heart that can only be filled by Jesus.

I wonder: how many doors did Joseph knock on, imploring help and begging entry, before he finally gave up and turned to the stable? Jesus tells us that even now he stands knocking at the door of our hearts (Rev. 3:20). Today, if we hear his voice and open the door, he will come in and dine with us. And oh, what a feast that will be! But if we do not open our hearts, he will pass us by. We cannot stop Christ from coming. When Joseph's relatives and neighbors turned him out, Jesus was born in a barn. If we do not welcome his coming, not only at Christmas, but before the final Advent, he will still come. But he will be born in someone else's heart. May the Lord Jesus find room in our hearts today. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of ✠ the Holy Spirit. Amen.