

No Room

by Rev. Durrell Watkins, M.A., M.Div.
Christmas Eve 2008, Sunshine Cathedral
Luke 2.1-14

One Christmas, my great-aunt Gladys cooked way too much food, and then of course she ate way too much food. She decided she would join a gym and take an exercise class for seniors. A week after she joined, I asked her how the class was going. She said, "I've only been once... It totally wore me out. I bent, I twisted, I jumped up and down, and breathed heavy and sweated for almost an hour. By the time I got the leotard on, the class was over."

"She gave birth to her first born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

*No room — only a manger of hay.
No room — he is a stranger today.
No room — here in the world turned away.
No room.*

No room for them in the inn! Luke barely bothers to mention that little tidbit at all! But I believe it is central to our story tonight. To fully embrace the miracle of Christmas, we mustn't overlook this understated but significant detail: There was no room for them.

Immediately following that line, we hear, "In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, watching their flocks by night. Then an angel stood before them and divine glory shone around them, and they were afraid. But the angel said, 'Fear not, I bring YOU good tidings of great joy for ALL people.'"

Mary and Joseph and their newborn find themselves in a world that has no room for them. A temporarily homeless, unwed mother with her companion and her infant are not highly valued by polite society. The religious, the dignified, the proper, the mainstream had no room for such an unseemly, untraditional, unorthodox family.

She gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in warm rags and laid him in a feeding trough for animals, because there was no room for them in the hotel where "decent" people were privileged to stay. That's our story tonight.

We are so tempted to focus on the beautiful baby, the mother relieved to have delivered successfully, the promise and the hope that the child will exhibit throughout time and eternity. But let us not forget that this beautiful baby and this relieved mother are shunned and that our infant hero is born in a barn, wrapped in rags, and laid in the hay used to feed livestock.

In the margins, beyond respectability, beyond social norms, beyond acceptance, a poor, unwed mother gives birth in a barn because room could not be made for such people in the inn.

"In that region there were shepherds..." the story continues. Shepherds. People who work and live outside. Shepherds are people who, like an unwed, temporarily

homeless teenage mother, are not part of society's most prized citizenry. In the region of No Room, in the kind of world where those who are different are marginalized, excluded, or forgotten, there were these shepherds. But these who are different, who are beyond the affirmation of the holders of power, are the very ones who receive an angelic visitation. The angel comes to those who are in the margins, who are in the fields with sheep, who are in the region of No Room, and to these shepherds the angel says, "Do not be afraid. I have good news for YOU; it's good news of great joy for ALL people."

And what's the good news? That an unwed mother has had a baby in a nearby barn because there was no room for them in the inn.

No room — here in the hearts of humankind.

No room — no cheery welcome to find.

No room — Surely their hearts must be blind.

No room.

The story makes it clear that Luke believes God has a preferential option for the least, the lowly, the poor, the outcast, the forgotten, the marginalized, the disenfranchised, the odd, those beyond the mainstream. The good news seems to be that God's love leaves no one out. Where babies can be born homeless, where outsiders can be ignored or forgotten, where laborers work in a field without notice or acclaim or reward... these are the very places where God shows up as angel choirs and as a messianic infant full of hope and promise. When the world says there is no room, God seems to make room. God is right where religion, government, family, or society said there is no room for the Other... God says, "In MY heart, there is always room for you. In fact, you're who I'm embracing FIRST."

That's the message and the miracle of Christmas.

Christmas is the reminder that NO ONE is beyond the reach of God's love; no one is left out of God's love for any reason.

Amendment 2 may have no room for some of us — but Amendment 2 is not God!

The anemic economy may have no room for some of us — but the economy is not God!

Some churches may have no room for some of us — but even religion is not God!

AIDS or Diabetes or Depression may have us believing there is no room for us in Life — but our dis-ease is not God!

A friend or lover may have betrayed us suggesting there was no room for us in their lives — but that failed relationship is not God!

The message of Christmas is that in the region of No Room, God shows up as new and promising life. God is in the midst of the pain, the disappointment, the fear, the regret... God is in the field with the shepherds, in the barn with the displaced family laying their baby in a feeding trough, in the margins with those who have been vilified or forgotten. Whenever we find there is no room, we can remember the story of Christmas and realize that No Room is exactly where God shows up, and wherever God is, there is actually room enough for all.

This is the Good News! Amen.

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Divine Love is born in my life tonight.
Divine Light shines on my path tonight.
Angels of grace sing to my heart tonight.
Right where I am, God is...
And miracles are possible now!
Amen.

"This is the message of Christmas: We are never alone." — English novelist, Taylor Caldwell