

## *Christmas Mass*

When we tell and retell the most important stories of our life, we often find that every time we tell it, there are a few details that we cannot leave out of the story. Whether it is the name of the hotel where you stayed on a honeymoon, or the hospital where your children were born, or what the course looked like on the day you got that hole in one. There is some detail about every important story of your life that may seem insignificant, but that you cannot leave out.

The story of the nativity, the birth of Christ, is no different. We all know this story: Mary, Joseph, Bethlehem, the three wise men. We know about how there was no room at the inn. And we know about how there was a manger.

It would be an important story without any of those things, because this is the heart of it: “God loved us so much that God became one of us, so that we all might love God and one another.”

But that is not the way the Gospel tells it. The Gospel tells us about a baby, born to a couple, under extraordinary conditions. And they tell us where it happened. And where it did not. It wasn’t enough for the Gospels to just say “he was born” or even “he was born in Bethlehem.” They tell us he was born in a manger, because there was no room in the inn.

A manger isn't much. It was a sort of container for the hay that the animals ate. It wasn't a crib, or a bed, or anything like that. It was perhaps the most unexpected resting place for a newly born Messiah. For God, on His first night as one of us.

But as much as we remember that manger, we also remember why Jesus was there. We remember that when Mary and Joseph got to the inn, they were told there was no room for them there.

Have you ever wondered whether that was really true? Have you ever wondered if maybe there was room at the inn? Maybe the innkeeper had a couple rooms left, but he saw this couple with this woman who was obviously pregnant, and decided maybe he didn't want to rent them a room? Or maybe, even if there were not any rooms left, they could have found some place for a woman who was nine months pregnant and about to give birth? But they didn't. And so Jesus was not born in the inn.

There is a Christian tradition about the place where Jesus was born. There is a church in Bethlehem that was built over the very spot where Jesus was said to have laid in a manger. It is considered so holy, that three different Christian traditions, have laid claim to it for centuries, and now they all have monks that live there, and there is sort of an uneasy situation.

Now, I don't think that is what Jesus wants for the place he was born. I am not even sure if that is the exact place he was born or not, or if it even matters. But what I am sure of is that we remember that place where Christ was first born. We remember it enough to want to know exactly where it was, and to keep that place holy.

You know what we don't remember? We don't remember the name of the inn. Was it the Bethlehem Hotel? The Road to Nazareth Convention Center? The Holiday Inn?

We will never know. But, I often wonder if the inn ever realized who they turned away. I wonder if a few decades down the line, they realized that when Jesus' mom had come to the door, they had not given her a room. They would give her some hay.

Now, if this was just a story about an innkeeper who missed a chance to open the doors to Christ, I would not be telling it tonight. But this is not about what an innkeeper did. It is about what God did, and what God still does. And it is about what we do next.

Christ still comes into this world. Christmas still happens. It did not just happen once, it happens all the time.

Sometimes God knocks at our doors, and we are asked if there is room in the inn. And sometimes we look out, and we don't really like what we see, or we don't like what it would mean to let Christ in, and we close the door and say: "There is no place for you here."

But sometimes, even when we don't really want to, even when we are not sure we want to open that door, we do anyway. And that matters. Because Christmas may be about the story that we all know. It may be about Mary and Joseph, and the baby and the manger, and no room at the inn. But that story teaches us about more than just an event that happened centuries ago. It teaches us about opening ourselves up to what God is trying to do in us in this world. And it is about telling God that, even if we don't know what it means yet, there is room for God in our lives, and we want to be part of what God is doing.

There is a good chance that if you are here tonight, some part of you wants to be a part of that. Some part of you wants to be a part of love made real, of God being active in our world, of a world that can change. Some part of you wants to be a part of the Christmas story. Maybe not the one that is written in the Gospel with the shepherds and the manger and the wise men, but a part of the Christmas story, anyway.

The question is; do you want to be the inn that closed its doors. Or do you want to be something else.

Scripture tells us that out in the fields, the shepherds heard the baby had been born. And they got up and they came to the manger and saw the new thing that God had just done in the world.

That is who I want to be on Christmas, and every day. I want to be the one who doesn't close the doors to my heart when God is about to do something new, but the one who hears about it, and comes running. When God works in this world, I want to be a part of that story. Like that piece of ground in Bethlehem, I want to be the everyday thing, that becomes holy, not because of who I am, but because of who Christ is. I want to be a part of the story. I can be. And so can you. And so can all of us.

It is sometimes easy to forget that that baby born that night grew up to become an adult. And when he did, and he was asked what God wants us to do, he answered this: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself." In other words, open the door, open your heart, and let it all in.

If Christmas is about the incarnation of God, and this is what God incarnate wants to tell us, then this is the ultimate Christmas message. When the Christmas tree is put away, when Christmas dinner has been eaten, when the nativity sets go back into their boxes, these things remain. And the ultimate test of how well we have celebrated Christmas this year will not be in what was under the tree or anything like that. It will be in how well we opened our hearts, and let that Christmas message in. May it be so this Christmas, and always. **Amen.**