

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

"And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn" (Luke 2:4-7).

When we think of Christmas, it's easy to think of miracles. Angels make special appearances to Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, and to shepherds in a field.

Then there are miracles that don't appear to be miracles. From what seems to be a typical government ordeal turns out to be arranged by God Himself. Remember, Mary and Joseph did not live in Bethlehem; they lived some 80 miles away in Nazareth. But they had to return to their ancestral hometown to be registered for the census. And it was the Prophet Micah who prophesied that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).

Of course, the greatest miracle of miracles is how God became man: Emmanuel, God with us! This Child was born of a virgin. This Child born is none other than the eternal God.

And no event in human history has been so celebrated in word and song than that of the birth of Jesus Christ! As the world celebrates "Happy Holidays," we know what holiday is being celebrated. Yes, Hanukkah and Kwanza are among these days, but Hanukkah is a minor Jewish holiday and Kwanza is a made-up American day. The real holiday is Christmas, for which we remember the birth of the Savior from our sins.

But as it was then on this night in Bethlehem some 2,000 years ago, there was no fanfare. The Savior had been born and there was no parade. There was no festival. There was no room. A census was being taken, so there was a great influx of people into Bethlehem, and Bethlehem was not exactly a large town. It was a small town with no surplus of lodging available to visitors.

So, it would not be surprising that Mary and Joseph had difficulty in getting a room for they were not alone in losing out in supply and demand.

What is truly astonishing is that the Almighty God would choose such circumstances for the birth of the Messiah. The Savior of the world is to be born, the One who came to take upon Himself the guilt and sin of the entire world, the One who came to conquer death and open the gates of heaven to all who would cling to Him. How could there be no room?

This Child is the Creator of heaven and earth. He created all things. He is the One who gives breath to all, food to all who eat. How can this Child be born in a manger, a feeding trough, as His crib? This is just wrong that God would be received by His own creation in such a way. How can there be no room for Him?

There is no room in Bethlehem for the Creator of the world and true King of Israel. But what happened in Bethlehem on the night of His birth would become the theme for His earthly life. When the Magi would later arrive with their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh and worshipped Him, Mary and Joseph found a place for their small family in a house in Bethlehem. But shortly after the Magi left, the wrath of Herod the Great made it clear again that there was no room in Bethlehem for this holy Child. So, Mary and Joseph fled to Egypt to protect their Son from Herod's murdering soldiers. Again, there was no room for Jesus in Bethlehem.

After some time in Egypt, the Holy Family returned to Nazareth, where Jesus would grow up. Now that Jesus is in Nazareth, there must be room for Him there! One Sabbath at the Nazareth synagogue, Jesus was given the scroll of Isaiah. But when He proclaimed to the people of Nazareth the precious news of the Gospel, when He said that the promised Savior had come *“to bring good news to the poor”* (Isaiah 61:1), what did they do? They rejected Him. They rose up and drove Him out of Nazareth and tried to throw Him off a cliff. So, there was no room for Jesus in Nazareth.

From here, Jesus went north to Capernaum. While living there, He crossed to the other side of the Sea of Galilee to the country of the Gadarenes. There, Jesus cast out demons from two possessed men and sent them into a herd of pigs. When the demons were cast into the herd of pigs, they all rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the waters. When the people heard about this, they came to Jesus and begged Him to leave (Matthew 8:28-34). So, there was no room for Jesus among the Gadarenes.

Later, on His way to Jerusalem, Jesus passed through Samaria. He sent messengers ahead to find a place to stay, but the people of Samaria made it clear that they didn't want Jesus there. Jesus said, ***"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head"*** (Luke 9:58). So, there was no room for Jesus in Samaria.

Next, we come to Palm Sunday. The crowds came out to meet Jesus. Men, women, and children sang the praises of ***"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"*** (Matthew 21:9). They were welcoming Jesus as their King! But by the end of the week, the crowds were shouting something quite different, ***"Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"*** (John 19:6). Now they were crying out to Pontius Pilate against Jesus. And rather than see Jesus let go, they demanded the freedom of Barabbas, who was a murderer, a robber, and an insurrectionist. There was no room for Jesus in Jerusalem.

Now, Pilate wanted to let Jesus go as he insisted that he had found no guilt in Jesus. But to show the sheer strength of the Roman Empire, Pilate, despite finding no guilt, would still whip Jesus. And in order to keep his position safe, Pilate released Barabbas and Jesus would be crucified. No room for Jesus on earth.

As Jesus is nailed to a cross, He is wracked by pain, thirst, and insults. Then it goes from horrible to worse. Jesus cries out, ***"My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me"*** (Matthew 27:46). God the Father pours out His righteous anger on Jesus, the One who has come to bear the sin and the guilt of the world. Jesus would face the punishment for all the sins of every man, woman, and child who would ever live. God the Father punishes Jesus, who knew no sin, for the sins of all the world. Jesus dies for you and me on that cross. He is abandoned by God the Father.

There is no room for Jesus. It all began in Bethlehem, and it continued all the way through His earthly life until He died on the cross. Why? Why did it have to be this way?

This was the only way. This was the only way that you and me could be saved from the power of sin, death, hell, and Satan. Christ took our place in what should have been our death, because of our sin. Christ was obedient, even to the point of death. Christ was obedient, honest, and truthful where we are not. He took upon Himself our sin and suffered for it. He was rejected and despised so that our Father in heaven could look at you and say, ***"You are my beloved child, with whom I am well pleased."***

Because there was no room for Jesus in Bethlehem, in Nazareth, in Samaria, in Jerusalem, there is now room for you. There is always room in the Church for you. No matter your past, no matter how you have failed, there is room here for you. No matter how long you have strayed from Jesus, no matter how greatly you have sinned against God, there is room for you here. And there will always be room here. For this place is the hospital for sinners that is doctored by the Great Physician Jesus, who not only died, but rose from the dead, and lives and reigns to this day. It is He who gives us His medicine of immortality in His Means of Grace: His Word and Sacrament.

So, how sad it is when not all humanity is open to Jesus. How tragic it is that so many say that they have no room for Jesus in their lives.

Even in the celebration of His birth, Jesus is crowded out to make room for reindeer, snowmen, and Christmas songs that have nothing to do with Jesus, whose birth we celebrate this evening. More and more there is no room for Jesus in our lives.

May it never be so with us! May we be willing to lose every secular and cultural attachment to this holiday if only we keep the baby Jesus. Let them take our trees, let them take our presents, let them take our snowmen as long as we can keep Christ, the Lord, born to the virgin Mary in Bethlehem to be the Savior of the world.

So, may there always be room in our hearts for this Christ Child who brings salvation and life to all who cling to Him. May the Holy Spirit so work in us that we always belong to Christ. Let us join the angelic choirs to praise Him not just this evening, but at every Divine Service and every day of our life, for He freely gives us forgiveness, life, and salvation and all by grace through faith in Him! Merry Christmas! Amen!

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +