



No Room At the Inn
 Christmas Eve Sermon, 2014
 Pastor Julie McCain

Please pray with me. Speak, O Lord, in words that we can hear. Open our hearts to your word, and plant the light of your grace deep in our hearts. Amen.

There was no room at the inn.

And Mary and Joseph weren't even asking for much. This inn was no Hilton—it wasn't even a Motel 6. It was an inn, probably with just a few private rooms, and a common room with a fire, where many of the guests would sleep the night away on a bedroll. There were no showers, so the lingering aroma was likely a combination of sweaty bodies and the evening meal.

They weren't asking for much, and *yet there was no room for them there.*

Now we might expect that someone in the inn or on the streets, even, would see Mary's condition and give up their own bed, or if that was not possible that they would bend over backwards to find a decent place for this expectant couple to stay.

We also might expect that someone from Joseph's family would be able to help. Bethlehem is, after all, the town that his family comes from. It would make complete sense for an aunt or uncle to make space for them, if not in a spare bed, then on the floor with some spare blankets and pillows. And yet no one has even a floor to offer them.

Instead Mary and Joseph are left to fend for themselves, and when they do, **they find no room at the inn.**

And perhaps news of Mary and Joseph's situation had travelled quickly. Perhaps the scandal of this child is too much for the relatives or the town to take, and so there is no one waiting for them, no one willing to even to offer a helping hand.

Bethlehem is utterly unprepared to receive its king, and the innkeeper who turns them away often comes to symbolize all who would turn away from Christ.

It follows that if asked who in this story we identify most with, few of us would choose the innkeeper.

- I find the shepherds easily relatable—they are regular people whom God speaks to while they are hard at work.
- And anyone who has ever experienced either the birth of a child or being left out in the cold can also identify with Mary and Joseph.

But the innkeeper.? The innkeeper is easily blamed. In cartoons and Christmas plays, he is often depicted as angry and mean, for who else would turn away a pregnant woman?

We might think that if only we had been there on that first Christmas, that the story would have played out differently, for we would have made room for the Savior of the world at *our* inn.

But being turned away is probably a bit more nuanced than sheer malice. After all, it's the middle of tax season, when fuses and resources run short, and the reality is that this innkeeper is probably a lot like most of us—caught up in the hustle and bustle, with too many demands on both his time and his attention.

One children's book called *The Nativity* depicts Mary and Joseph approaching the inn as people are practically swarming it—

- hanging out the windows,
- sprawled out across the lawn,
- and even climbing on the roof,

->and there literally is no room at the inn.

To bring in 2 more people would mean throwing someone else out, and that doesn't seem either fair or hospitable.

Perhaps, then, the innkeeper is simply unprepared for so many visitors on account of the census.

→In reality, we can't know the innkeeper's motives, only that he either could not or would not make space for Mary and Joseph and their baby on the way.

And so the Savior of the world is born into a town with no space for him.

And it would be wonderful to be able to claim that this was a completely isolated incident—that this was

the only time in history when God has found no room at a proverbial inn,
the only time in history when God has encountered someone who would not or could not make space for Him.

But the Savior of the world is born not only in a town with no space for him, but also into a world with no space for him.

The entire Bible is really the story of well-intentioned people trying but failing to make room for God, and you and I are no exception to that rule.

→We share a lot more in common with the inn keeper than we'd like to admit.

And that is precisely why this child is born to us tonight.

For this is the way that God is.

God doesn't wait until we're ready, doesn't wait until we've made the space for him.

Rather, God comes to us even and especially when we have no room for him at all.

God will be born in stable, with scratchy straw for a bed and the aroma of manure in the air, and he will even die on a cross,

because that is what it takes to break into our hearts and our world.

And this is the scandal of Christmas, this is the scandal of God being born to us as a baby—that we deserve none of what we receive this night.
That we could never deserve the light and life we receive from our king, but still we receive all of it.

So whoever you are, wherever you've been, and whatever you've done or left undone, Emmanuel is born for you.

God is with us, and there is nothing else to be done.

And so it is a silent night, and a holy night. All is calm, and all truly IS bright. Amen.