

**“Plenty of Room”**  
**Isaiah 9:2-7, Luke 2:1-20**  
**Christmas Eve**  
**December 24, 2010**  
**Collegiate Presbyterian Church**

Opening Words

This night is about friends and family...  
it is about beautiful music and warm candlelight.

This is also a night for suspending our need  
to analyze and understand and explain.

In other words, tonight is about *considering* the impossible...  
or maybe even *expecting* the impossible.  
And then, when it happens, to *welcome* the impossible.

In Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass*,  
Alice is skeptical about something the Queen says:  
I can’t believe THAT!” Alice says.

“Can’t you?” said the Queen in a pitying tone.  
“Try again: draw a long breath, and shut your eyes.”

Alice laughs: “There’s no use trying,” she says,  
“one cannot believe impossible things.”

“I daresay you haven’t had much practice,” says the Queen.  
“When I was your age,  
I always did it for half-an-hour a day.  
Why, sometimes I believed  
as many as six impossible things before breakfast!”

Tonight is a night for *considering* the impossible...  
*expecting* the impossible...  
and then, when it happens, *welcoming* the impossible.

Isaiah 9:2-7

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his

shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Luke 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

### Sermon

As you probably know,  
    there is a significant body of literature that has grown up around  
        what we have come to call...  
            the annual “Children’s Christmas Pageant.”  
Typically, these are funny and heartwarming stories...  
    almost always about kids...  
    reminding us how things

can go wonderfully wrong with the pageants  
and still be so wonderfully right.  
Barbara Robinson's *The Greatest Christmas Pageant Ever*  
is perhaps the best known example.  
Yet, for me, the wildest and most hilarious example  
is found in John Irving's Viet Nam era novel,  
*A Prayer for Owen Meany*.  
If you haven't read this one, I highly recommend it.

Well, tonight I'm thinking about a couple of stories  
which feature the innkeeper in Bethlehem.  
You may recall there's no innkeeper actually mentioned in the Bible,  
but when did that ever keep us from a good story?

There's the one about the little girl who plays the innkeeper...  
She is *extremely nervous* about being in front of all those people.  
Mary and Joseph knock.  
She opens the door.  
Joseph says, "My wife and I have traveled from afar  
and need a place to spend the night.  
Do you have a room?"  
The innkeeper hesitates,  
struggling to remember her lines, until...  
finally she blurts out: "Sorry, we don't have any room,  
but would you like to come in for a drink?"  
An Episcopalian innkeeper, no doubt!<sup>1</sup>

And then there's the one about the young boy  
who wasn't about to let that happen to him.  
He rehearsed and rehearsed his one line...  
And just in case something happened,  
he had his one line cribbed on a 3x5 card  
which he held in his hand.  
He was ready!

Well, it's the same plot line:  
Joseph knocks on the door ...  
the innkeeper opens it...  
Joseph asks if there is any room,  
at which time the innkeeper earnestly speaks his one line:  
"I'm sorry, but there's no more room in the inn."

The problem is that "in the moment,"  
when he actually opens the door  
and sees Mary and Joseph standing there,  
his heart is touched

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<sup>1</sup> I found this one in a sermon by K.C. Ptomey preached at Westminster Presbyterian Church, Nashville, TN., Christmas Eve 2007.

and he is blown completely off dramatic course.  
And after a moment's hesitation,  
    knowing he has to say something...  
        he ad-libs an unscripted line.  
He looks at Mary and Joseph and says,  
    "Oh, come in... come on in... we'll make room somewhere."<sup>2</sup>

I tell you these stories because later tonight,  
    there'll be a knock at your door.  
It may come as we sing the carols that mean so much...  
    as we hold candles and feel the warmth  
        and take our annual stand against  
            the darkness and the cold...  
there'll be a knock at your door  
    inquiring whether there's any room for him  
        in the inn that is your life.

And not only tonight, this knock will come countless times in 2011:  
    when you've been hurt and need to forgive...  
    when you're asked to put your wants and needs aside  
        so that you might be Christ to another...  
    when there's a stranger in need of welcome...  
    when there's a temptation you need to resist.  
        There'll be a knock at your door.

And my very simple Christmas Eve hope (for you and for me)  
    is that each time there is, we will ad lib the kid's line:  
    "Oh... come in, come on in, we'll make room somewhere."

The truth is there could have been  
    plenty of room that night in Bethlehem.  
Inns back then weren't like our modern motels with separate rooms. They were open spaces in  
which the owners  
    and the guests  
    and probably all their animals  
        shared a complex of chambers.  
Which means that somebody could have moved aside...  
    some family could have squeezed together...  
or failing that, somebody NOT pregnant  
    might have given up their spot and moved to the stable out back so these desperate  
travelers might find a place.  
    Somehow room could be made.

And when that knock comes to our door later tonight,  
    or tomorrow morning...

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<sup>2</sup> This one is from a sermon by Michael Lindvall preached in the Brick Presbyterian Church, New York, N.Y., Christmas Eve 2004.

or next week...

or next year...

the truth is the same.

However crammed with stuff your life may be...

however complicated and full of doubt...

however frightened you are about something...

however much guilt or regret you are carrying around right now...

however many other things you've got going on

that you just have to do first... ROOM CAN BE MADE.

In the end there's only one thing you have to do to make room.

You don't have your life together...

you don't have to have all your theological ducks in a row...

you don't have to stop asking questions...

and God knows, you don't have to be good first.

All you have to do

is admit that God is the one guest

you most need to make room for...

to realize that among all the others

knocking on your door trying to get in,

this is the guest that matters most.

Absolute certainly...

theological sophistication...

a together life... NOT REQUIRED.

Your only essential line is that kid's brilliant ad lib:

"Oh... come in, come on in..."

we'll make room somewhere."

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.