24 December 2022 St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Eve of the Nativity of Our Lord Vienna, VA

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"No Room for God?"
Text: Luke 2:1-20; Isaiah 9:2-7; Titus 2:11-14

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

How hard it must have been for Joseph, not to be able to provide better for his wife. How hard it must have been for Mary, not to be able to provide better for her child. The stable would have to do. The manger would have to do. Beggars can't be choosers.

You've heard that phrase before, but never like this. For tonight, **God is the beggar**. It's not just that there was no room in the inn for Joseph and Mary; there was no room in the inn *for God*. The Creator of all things would have to be born out back with the animals. The one who *opens His hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing* (Psalm 145:16) must lie in the very manger from which that food is eaten by beasts. The God whose heaven has streets of gold so pure that they are clear like glass, with walls made of precious stones, and each gate made of a single pearl (Revelation 21), is tonight as far from that as one can get. He is a poor beggar. **We have no room for you**.

John said this in his Gospel, which we'll hear read tomorrow morning: *He came to his own, but His own people did not receive Him* (John 1:11). **No room for God**.

Oh, you say, they didn't know it was God, otherwise they would have. I'm not so sure. Many today have no room for God in this holiday. He would like to come into their homes, into their hearts, but **there is no room**. There are already too many other things there - family and friends, preparations to be made, trips to take, gifts to give and receive, traditions to uphold, celebrations. So **no room for God**. Perhaps when Jesus said *I was hungry you gave me no food, naked and you gave me no clothes* (Matthew 25) . . . He was thinking of this night of His birth.

No room for God. Truthfully, sometimes we do it too, don't we? Our lives are so full. And keep get fuller and fuller. Our time stretched so thin. Our calendars wall-to-wall. No time for others. **No room for God**. Perhaps that's exactly the way satan has played it. Don't *reject* God! No, no, no! But this, too . . . and this, too . . . oh, and this, too . . . all good things! But before you know it, **no room for God**. We didn't plan it that way, but maybe satan did. It just happened!? Maybe not.

But God is not so easily stopped. He does not so easily give up. He comes anyway. No palace? No problem. No bed? A manger will do. Out back? Fine. God doesn't care.

There's only one thing He cares about here - YOU. To come for you. To come and be your Saviour. If He does, then it will be a perfect Christmas, regardless of all the other circumstances. None of that really matters. Only Him, here, for you. So that there will be room in heaven for you.

For if He doesn't come, if the Son of God does not come down from heaven into the womb of the virgin, into that stable, into that manger, then there is **no room for <u>you</u>** in heaven. It is closed to you. *<u>Locked</u>*. A lock that cannot be picked with your prayers, your good works, or your sincerity. That's what sin has done. Your sin and mine. Adam and Eve getting tossed from the Garden of Eden and barred from re-entering by an angel guarding the way gives us a glimpse of that. There was no way for them to get back in. To get back in to the tree of life and live.

But God promised one day they would. He would send a key. A Saviour. Who would forge a new key. A cross-shaped key. So when Jesus was born and went from the manger to the cross, was crucified out back of Jerusalem, and then rose to life from a virgin tomb just as He had from a virgin womb, the key of the cross turned in the lock **and heaven was open again**. There is forgiveness for all who believe. There is a new tree of life and we get to eat from it, as we will tonight, as the fruit that hung from that tree, the Body and Blood of Jesus, are given to us. **So there is now room for you**, in heaven.

That's why the angels are also singing this night. They didn't want guard duty. That wasn't joyful duty. But this was! To go to the shepherds and announce to them the birth of this promised Saviour. To proclaim ***Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men***. That is, **God has room for you**.

The shepherds heard that message and went to see this child, the fulfillment of God's promise, their Saviour. And they were filled with joy. For you see, shepherds weren't usually on the invitation list. *For anything*. No child told their parents growing up that they wanted to be a shepherd. It was a hard job, a dirty job, and an often thankless job. Yet God wanted them there. God wanted them there *first*! **God had room for them**. For shepherds, while the world didn't think so much of them, God did. In fact, that's what this child would grow up to be, and *wanted* to be when He grew up! And not just any shepherd, but your shepherd. The Good Shepherd.

These shepherds, working in the darkness of night, had seen the great light of the angels, and heard the great light of their message. But the greatest light they saw that night, of course, was shining from the manger. The light of God's love for them.

And that's the light that breaks our darkness, too. His forgiveness breaking the darkness of sin. His life breaking the darkness of death. His truth breaking the darkness of a world that has lost its way. ***For to us a child is born, to us a son is given***. That is our joy this night. That **God has room for us** - and not just in heaven, though that is more than we

deserve! But in His heart. That despite who we are, despite what we do, here is God's love **for you**.

Not that God doesn't care who you are and what you do - *He does!* It's just that His love doesn't come *after* you get better and clean yourself up, but *before*. It's there for you, always there for you and acts for you. That's what tonight shows us. That *while we were still sinners*, Christ was born for us and *Christ died for us* (Romans 5:8). To make us His own. And that we might live as His children. Not on the outside, but inside. Not eating the food of anxious toil, but the food He gives. Not on an endless quest for more, but receiving from His hand all that we need. For that hand that sent His Son and gave us a Saviour, will also give us everything else we need (Romans 8:32). So that, as we heard from the letter Paul wrote to Titus and his churches tonight, we live ***godly lives in the present age***.

And you know what that means? Really, simply, this: that just as God has room for us in His heart and in His heaven, and just as by His grace we now have room for Him in our hearts and homes, so too would **we have room in our hearts for others**. That we not close them out, but have compassion on them, have mercy on them, forgive them, just as our Father has us. And imagine if we did! Imagine if all the world did. It would be a very different world, wouldn't it? **A world with room for God and room for others.** Sounds like heaven.

Which is why it will never be that way on earth! Not completely, anyway. But it can start. We can start. And you do. For God is working in you, and through you. His Spirit making room in your heart for Him and for others.

So Christmas changes everything. Whether or not you get any presents. Whether or not you get what you want. For your heavenly Father has given you what you need. And when His Son came and traded the wood of the manger for the wood of the cross, and His swaddling clothes for grave clothes, He gave the gift of life to all people. To you. For as the angel said, ***unto <u>you</u> is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord***.

So that night which started with no room in the inn, ends with room in heaven for you. That's a pretty good story, which is more than a story. It is the truth. Your truth. And your gift. Merry Christmas!

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.