

DO YOU HAVE ROOM FOR JESUS ?

Deacon Colleen Spaeth – December 24, 2003

Welcome to Christmas Eve! It has finally arrived – the countdown begins now. In the Church we celebrate a miracle – no, it's not that the malls are closed – it's that Jesus is born.

It is easy to understand why a baby brings forth visions of good things, isn't it? I remember the day my now twenty year old Amanda was born. It was a day of great expectation and joy.

And though I wasn't there the actual day he was born, when a little boy named Robert came to live with us in December of 1994, our Christmas had a whole new meaning.

I am sure, if you are parents, you understand what I call the "you had to be there" joy that comes into your heart and your life when a child is brought into your circle. There's nothing like it, is there? You never forget it. You are never the same. Suddenly everything that happened before that moment is mediocre, just pales in comparison to all else, and your life has more meaning than ever, more purpose.

How could it be any less with the birth of Jesus? It certainly looked different, didn't it? No baby showers for this teenage unwed mom, no fancy cradle, no fancy outfits, pampers, rattles, no baby registry to be checked.

In fact, when future dad and mom arrive in Bethlehem and try to check into a motel what are they told? No vacancy! Forget it! So where is the Baby Jesus brought into the world? In a stable, a stinky stable, a trough for a cradle, smelly hay, no blankets, no help, just an exhausted mom, and what I envision as a more than anxious future dad Joseph.

There must be something to this Jesus thing, I think, don't you? If I were to think up a story of a king to mankind, I would imagine a baby of wealth, surrounded by all amenities kingdoms brought with it, certainly not this stable setting.

But the son of God came to us, a gift to us, a simple humble gift, born in more than simplicity, but almost poverty when it came to material appearances. How could a story like this be something we celebrate all these years later?

And who are the first to hear of this new babe? Is it royalty, great teachers and prophets? No, it is the humble shepherd. Shepherds were not necessarily social animals, their reputations were as loners, quiet hard working folk, did their jobs apart from most – nightwatchmen of animals, and it was this unusual folk that first heard the news of Jesus.

Do they at once get excited – not exactly what Luke's gospel tells us. They were terrified. Their reaction is fear. Then angel of God says, "do not be afraid." Was there room in their hearts for this news of a Savior? These humble shepherds have heard the good news from angels.

I am always wary when someone says "don't be afraid", especially if before they said it I didn't feel a reason to be afraid. Like a doctor who says "this won't hurt," or "you're going to feel a little discomfort," and I think, "easy for you to say."

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I think the angels must have felt there might be a reason to be afraid. After all here's this group of shepherds sitting out in the dark field doing their usual shift, and along comes this shiny angel, as I envision this scenario, and what do they say, "do not be afraid".

It is these little guys, shepherds who first travel and check Jesus out. And was there room in their hearts? You bet.

I wonder if we could call ourselves shepherds of a type? We sit day in and day out doing what we have been called to do, at our jobs inside and outside our homes, watching over those that are important to us, sometimes maybe feeling isolated, alone, tired, wondering what is life really about, what cost does contentment have – and suddenly on a quiet night like tonight, Christmas Eve, we sit, we are quiet for a bit, and the story of an angel hits a cord in our hearts. Is there some truth here for us? Do we hear these consoling words, "DO NOT BE AFRAID". Can we make room in our house, our hearts for Baby Jesus. Can we come and see what it's all about, this thing called faith and joy?

It is true the message was to them, the shepherds, but it was also through them. They made known what they saw and what had happened to them, and all who listened were changed. Humanity, all tied up in its anxieties now had a deep basis for trust, and the words of Isaiah now come true, "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."

We can recall the words from the carol about the dark streets of Bethlehem: "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight." Yes, but not just met. The fears exist there in the dark streets of human life, but now the good news overtakes them. Our deepest hope will not let us down.

And so it is here tonight on this holiest of nights that we remember this simple Baby Jesus. Christmas begun in the heart of God, that can only be complete when it reaches the heart of man. Is there room in your home for this King? Or have you too moved him to the stables?