

Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem. They looked for lodging but found no room at the inn. Undeterred, they took simple lodging in the manger alongside of the animals. Each of us are invited to open our hearts and minds to make room for Jesus in our lives. As examples of how we might do that, we have 4 different Gospel readings for Christmas:

- With our Vigil Mass we have the example of Joseph. He was troubled that Mary was with child so he brought all of his struggles and his concerns and his doubts to our loving God in prayer. In a dream the answer came from the Angel of the Lord, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” With the assurance of the Angel and renewed trust in his beloved, Joseph laid his fears to rest and made room for Mary and for Jesus in his life. “Each of us can discover in Joseph – the man who goes unnoticed, a daily, discreet and hidden presence – an intercessor, a support and a guide in times of trouble. Saint Joseph reminds us that those who appear hidden or in the shadows can play an incomparable role in the history of salvation” (Patris Corde Intro).
- At the Mass for midnight, Mary wrapped Jesus in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Out in the fields the angel of the Lord appeared to shepherds. The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Christ and Lord.” And the shepherds witnessed the heavenly host praising God and singing the Gloria. They did this in preparation for meeting Jesus in the manger. Heaven and earth join as we gather in church to celebrate Mass. Just as the Angels sang that first night, we join with the chorus in heaven to proclaim: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will.” We are invited to put our fears aside so that we may encounter Jesus especially in the poor. In our Liturgy, He comes to us as the Word of God. With Holy Communion He comes to us as the Bread of Life.
- At the Mass for Dawn, the Angels have left and the shepherds go to see for themselves the infant in the manger. They experienced with their faith the Almighty and Eternal Son of God. When we come forward for Holy Communion. We see a consecrated Host. In outer appearances looking the same as common bread. In reality this is the Bread of Life. We form a throne with our hands to welcome Christ our King. As Jesus tells us, “Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die” (Jn 6:47-50).
- “And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart” (Lk 2:19). Mary is reverently silent in our Gospel. We know that nine months earlier she had an encounter similar to the shepherds. The Angel Gabriel came to her comforting her with the very same words, “Do not be afraid.” She was asked to be the mother of God and she said yes. “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). Mary made room for God. He was the first priority in her life. She trusted even though she did not have all the answers. Long before she was told there was no room at the inn, she made a complete and total giving of herself to God. With the proper priority, with the trust, with a selfless sacrifice to the will of God, she took everything in reflecting on all of these events in her heart. She grew in love, grew in grace, and grew into an ever-expanding role. Mary is the Mother of God. She is the Mother of the Church. She is our Mother and role model.

- On Christmas Day, we hear our 4th Gospel from John, the Beloved Disciple. He tells us, “And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14). Jesus made time for everyone. He made time for his Father and frequently withdrew in solitude for prayer so that he would do the Father’s will in all things. Jesus made time for the suffering. Responding to the faith of individuals he cured the lepers, helped the blind to see, and the lame to walk. He fed the hungry. He taught us to love our neighbors. He made time for his enemies, constantly trying to help them see and understand the bigger picture despite their prejudice and animosity against him. Jesus could have told the many people who made demands on him, there is no room at the inn. He did not. He responded in love. With God’s help, with a love that comes from the heart, we can do much to respond to the suffering in this world. “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40).

In the last nine months, the death of millions has rocked the world. “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you?” (Jn 14:1-2). Jesus is reassuring us that there will always be room at the inn in heaven. God is love. His mercy is infinite. All he asks is for us to make room for others in our lives. “Love one another as I love you” (Jn 15:12). Be merciful to others as your heavenly Father has been merciful to you.

With the pandemic in full force, experts warn us that we are not out of the woods by far. In places like Texas, Michigan, and California, hospitals are running out of ICU beds. Essentially, the sick are being told there is no room at the inn. 102 years ago, parts of our diocese suffered from the Spanish flu. Many more died in the Seward Peninsula alone than in our entire state and in a shorter period of time. God provided for his people. The hospital in Nome that had closed after the Gold Rush reopened. Orphans were taken care of. People without the training of today’s nurses and doctors rose to the occasion to comfort the sick, to bury the dead, to offer hope. In short, 102 years ago, Alaskans rose to the occasion by making room at the inn. We have that same mandate from our Lord to love God “with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” ... and to love your neighbor as yourself (Mt 22:37,39).

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone. ... For a child is born to us, a son is given us; upon his shoulder dominion rests. They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace” (Isa 9:1, 5). 2000 years ago, the world rejoiced.

With each Christmas, we continue to rejoice as we look forward to his second coming. The Lord wants us to be prepared. Make sure you leave the light on indicating that there is room at your inn to welcome the Lord.