

Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you, he is Christ the Lord,

A common sight on the dusty, pot-hole-ridden roads of Malawi where I grew up, was overloading vehicles. It didn't matter if it was a mini-van stuffed with 15 people, a few small livestock and half a dozen fresh fish, or if it was the back of a pick-up truck brimming over with all sorts of katundu (stuff). It was this common sight that led to the unofficial motto of Malawi – "there's always room for one more." There's always room for one more person on the bus, always room for one more piece of luggage on the back of a pickup, there's always room for one more goat in the minivan.

Apparently this attitude was not picked up from the Israelites, or at least the ancient Israelites from 2,000 years ago in Bethlehem. "No room" is the way it is described in the Bible. There was no room for Mary, Joseph, and their soon-to-be-born child in the inn. And because there was no room, the baby Jesus was born in a stable, a place where animals would be, and he was placed in an animal feeding trough, commonly called a manger. All because THERE WAS NO ROOM for them in the inn.

*(Read Luke 2:6-7)*

This afternoon, we've turned through the pages of the Bible to see God describe in great detail this wonderful Savior that would come. We've seen the reason why the Savior would have to come, the power of this Savior, and yet the humble origins of this Savior. It's a story that many are well familiar with, it's a story that gets told this time of year. Mary, the virgin mother of the Savior, and her betrothed husband Joseph make this long and arduous journey from the northern part of Israel to the south, to a small town named Bethlehem. Why this journey? Because Joseph came from the line of King David, who happened to be from Bethlehem, and a census required him to go back there.

But when he got there, there was a little problem. He didn't make any reservations beforehand. And just think, Joseph wouldn't have been the only one traveling back to Bethlehem, there were perhaps hundreds of others who were going back for the very same purpose he was, to register for a census. Traveling with his wife who was about to give birth didn't make matters any easier. And so we shouldn't fault Joseph, we shouldn't fault the residents of Bethlehem, simply THERE WAS NO ROOM for them.

And so they ended up in a place where they didn't expect to be, a stable of sorts, where Mary gave birth to the Christ child. She wrapped him in strips of cloth and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Look at the simplicity with which Luke describes the account. That's it, no more details, as much as we would like to know them. Look at the lowliness and humility with which Luke describes this account. You wonder if the residents of Bethlehem knew what was about to happen, if the scene would have been any different? If you would have had people clamoring to give up their rooms to house Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus.

And yet the reaction from the residents in Bethlehem isn't all that unusual. In fact, Bethlehem having no room actually parallels with the Bible's description of all of our reactions to not only the Christ child's birth, but to his whole purpose. Just like there were many residents of Bethlehem who said "no room" for Joseph and Mary, all of us by nature have said, "no room" to our Savior also. Oh sure we may find room for our Savior at a special event like Christmas, but how easy is it for us to say "no room" to the Savior at other times during the year?" How easy is it to say "no room" for Jesus because too many other things have made room in my heart?

This in turn makes what God did all that much more spectacular. He would have had every reason in the world to say THERE'S NO ROOM in heaven with me. But he didn't. That's why he sent his Son, because he sent his Son not to rule the world but serve it, because he sent his Son not in a stately palace, but a lowly stable. THERE WAS NO ROOM in God's heart to not have us be a part of it. That's why he sent Jesus. He sent Jesus and made room in our hearts.

Even though Jesus was born in such a lowly state, God saw to it that there was a heavenly announcement of his birth. God saw to it that even the oft-forgotten shepherds would get to come and see the Savior. God saw to it that wise men from the East, non-Jews, would find the king not just for the Jews but for the whole world. God saw to it that men would record the event of the Savior's birth, so that we could hear it and celebrate it as if we were there with them. Where there was NO ROOM, God made room. He made room in a stable in Bethlehem, he has made room in your heart, and he has made room in heaven as well.

What a glorious message to hear, what a glorious message to believe. That God has made room for you. He did not make room for you because you made room for him. But you now make room for him, because he first made room for you. May the peace of God be with you this Christmas Eve. Amen.