

## **Prepare Him Room**

(Luke 2:1-7)

How many of you appreciate being recipients of good old fashion hospitality? Do you know that in both the Old and New Testament showing hospitality was not just a nice thing to do, but a spiritual obligation and a dynamic expression of the virtues of Christianity. This was true because in the early church hospitality was more than having some friends over for dinner. In biblical times, strangers passing through a town, where hotels and restaurants were not readily available, depended on the food, shelter and protection that characterized the hospitality of that day. But today, because we are living in an increasingly individualistic and commercialized society, demonstrating hospitality has fallen on hard times.

I was watching an Italian comedian the other day doing his stand up routine, who illustrated the decline of hospitality very well. He explained, "I was sitting in my house a couple of weeks ago just relaxing, when my doorbell rang. This is weird. There's a different feeling when your door bell rings today as opposed to 30 years ago. Thirty years ago, if your doorbell rang, that was a happy moment in your house. It's called company. You'll be sitting there on a Thursday night watching T.V. while the doorbell rang and the whole family jumped off the couch, "O wow, put the lights on! Somebodies here!" The whole family went to the door. Nobody looked to see who it was. You just opened up the door and you would be like, "O boy, look who's here." And you would ask joyfully, "What are you doing here?" And they would be like, "I was in the neighborhood. I thought I'd stop by and see how the kids are doing." And we would say, "Come on in!

But today, if your doorbell rings, "What in the world!" Everybody ducks down. "Get down mom. Army crawl, army crawl. Get in the closet. You turn to your family and say, "Did anybody invite anyone over." There's always that person upstairs that didn't hear the bell. They come walking down saying, "What's going on around here?" We will say, "Get down, get down, somebody is outside. There at the door. O no, I think they saw movement." Sebastian Maniscalco

Remember, in the ancient middle east, especially among the Jewish people, showing hospitality to visitors was essential according to both the Hebrew scriptures and cultural norms (Deuteronomy 10:19; Leviticus 19:33)? The failure to demonstrate hospitality, even to strangers, was considered dishonorable and disgraceful. This virtue of hospitality also carried over into the New Testament and was a vital means of demonstrating Christian love to strangers and cultivating unity in the church.

But in our modern times the virtue of hospitality is not as prevalent in our culture even among professing Christians. And the reason for this is that to be hospitable we have to **make room** in our hearts and in our homes for people outside of our immediate family circle. Many struggle to make time and room for their own families let alone an outsider. The bottom line for why hospitality has fallen on hard times is that it's simply inconvenient. It takes time and attention that many in our individualistic society will not easily give up. But unless we are willing to make room for people in our lives, especially outsiders, we will not have meaningful relationships or make a real difference for Christ in this increasingly polarized society.

At the heart of why Jesus left his place in heaven, and came to earth was to make room for us in His Father's house. But sadly, many today don't have room for Jesus let alone each other. But to all who prepare Him room, Christ will not only prepare a place for us in heaven, but he will make his home in our hearts to the satisfaction of our souls. When Christ has the primary affection of our hearts we will gladly make room for Him in our lives. And when the lover of our souls has the preeminent place in our hearts we will also make room for others as He has made room for us.

**Main idea:** Jesus was laid in a feeding trough because no room was made for Him in a more suitable place.

**Biblical principle:** When Christ has the primary affection of our hearts we will make room for Him in our lives and live to the glory of His name.

This morning we are going to make some **observations** about the historical account of the birth of Christ, **answer some questions** and then make some **application** about the place Jesus has in our hearts and lives. Next week we will focus on making room for others as Christ has made room for us.

## 1. Purpose of His Advent

The first question I want to answer from our text is *what was the purpose of Christ's first advent?* In verse 6 we learn that *while Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem, "the time came for her to give birth."* Do you know that there are hundreds of prophecies that have been fulfilled related to the coming of Christ and many have to do with his birth? For example, Bethlehem, being the birth place of Jesus, was prophesied hundreds of years before in Micah 5:2.

So, what brought Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem was more than a decree from the Roman Emperor ordering a census (v.1). God was sovereignly and providentially working through the affairs of human rulers to bring about His redemptive purposes. Micah also tells us that although Bethlehem is significant because the Messiah was a descendent of King David and David was from Bethlehem, the town of Bethlehem itself was actually a small and insignificant place.

Now from this observation we learn that there was a purpose not only for why Jesus came into the world, but there was also a purpose for the place and circumstances surrounding his birth.

O brothers and sisters, because Jesus was born in Bethlehem in fulfillment of many biblical prophecies, we can have full confidence in the reliability of the word of God and trust it to reveal God's good will for our lives. Because Jesus chose the little town of Bethlehem, you can be encouraged that no matter how insignificant you may feel, God delights in using **obscure places** and **ordinary people** to do **extraordinary things**.

Remember although the circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus were less than ordinary, the virgin born babe was no ordinary child.

He was Emmanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:23). He was God in human flesh (Philippians 2). And the **purpose** behind Jesus coming into this world and taking on human flesh was to save His people and all who believe from their sin (Matthew 1:21). And he saves us from our sin, which separate us from God, so that we can have a place under His kingdom rule in this life and forevermore (Colossians 1:13-14).

Remember, in Matthew 1:21, concerning the Virgin Mary who was with child, the angel of the Lord said to Joseph: “*She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins*” (Matthew 1:21b).

Brothers and sisters, let me ask you, has the purpose for Jesus first advent been fulfilled in your life? Have you been saved from your sin? “Yes Pastor, I asked Jesus to forgive me of my sin.” O brothers and sisters, to be saved doesn’t just mean that you’ve been forgiven, as great as that is. To be saved from your sin means that you’ve been set free from both the penalty and the power of sin. To be saved from your sin means that you’ve given Jesus the rightful place in your heart to be both your Savior and Lord. To be saved from your sin means that the Spirit of God took up residence in the house of your body not to rent your house but to own your house. And when Christ is at **home** in your heart his glory will shine in and through your life.

Now do you know that if you’re saved, although Christ lives in you in the person and power of the Spirit, he may not be at home in you? In Ephesian 3:14-17, Paul prays for believers to be strengthened by the Spirit in their inner beings so that Christ may  **dwell** in their hearts by faith. The word dwell means more than Christ’s residing in your heart, which is true of all believers. The word dwell in relation to Christ means that he’s at home in your heart. That is to say, when Christ is at home in your heart you know a greater fullness of his power and presence in your life to be all that He saved you to be. But this may not always be the case, because if we are not careful, we can allow other things and other people to take the place in our hearts that only Jesus should occupy. We will look at this more in a moment, but for Christ to be at home in us he must have the primary affections of our hearts, which we need to cultivate day by day.

This brings us to a second question that relates to both his first and second coming.

## **2. Preparation for His Arrival**

What, if any, preparations were made for the prophesied arrival of the newly born Son of God? Notice again that in verse 6 we see that *while Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to give birth*. It's important to note here that it doesn't say that they had just arrived in Bethlehem. It appears that they had been there already for some length of time.

This calls into question the traditional telling of the Christmas story where you have Joseph and Mary, who was ready to give birth, frantically looking for an ancient Motel Six, having just arrived in Joseph's home town. It's very possible that they were already staying with relatives or a Jewish family when it came time for Mary to give birth. Remember, showing hospitality, even to strangers, was essential among Jewish people, especially during the time of Christ's birth.

Now in light of this, we read that when it came time for Mary to give birth, Luke recorded: *"And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn"* (Luke 2:7).

As I noted already, the traditional way that this passage has been interpreted is that Mary and Joseph, having just arrived in Bethlehem, went to an ancient motel six, just as Mary was about to give birth. But a heartless innkeeper comes to the door and advises them that there was no room in the inn. So Mary ends up giving birth to Jesus in a stable and afterwards lays Him in a manger.

But, although we can't say with certainty what took place, there are other more likely scenarios. Remember that it appears from verse 6 that Mary and Joseph were already in Bethlehem for a certain length of time for the census, when the time came for Mary to give birth. And

due to the strong convictions about hospitality in their day, it's unlikely that Mary and Joseph were homeless.

It's important to note also that at the time of Christ's birth a typical peasant home in the small town of Bethlehem had two levels. The first level had a dirt floor toward the front part of the house by the door. In this area, animals were often brought into the house at night to protect them from bad weather and or thieves. You could also find a manger in the front part of the house for the animals. The back part of the first floor had a raised platform where the family ate and possibly slept. The second level of the house would often contain a **guest room**. And by the way, the Greek word *kataluma*, translated as "inn" in verse seven, can also be translated as *guest room*, as we see in Luke 22:12 and Mark 14:14.

So it could be that because of the influx of people in Bethlehem for the census, the guest room in the home where Mary and Joseph ended up staying, was already occupied. The guest-room would have been a more suitable place for Mary to give birth, but it was unavailable. So Mary instead gave birth on the first level of the house and afterwards Jesus was laid in a manger that was cleaned up and prepared for him.

So it's possible that the owner of the house, which may have been a relative of Joseph, made some accommodations and preparations for Mary, Joseph and the new baby. Did Jesus deserve better? Of course he did. Could God have providentially worked it out so that a guest room would have been available when Jesus was born? Most certainly. But Jesus didn't come into this world so that man would sacrifice for him and make his life more comfortable on earth. He left the glory and riches of heaven to walk in our shoes on earth, to take our place of punishment so that we could inherit eternal life.

Do you know that having *eternal life* in Christ means more than living forever in heaven? In his high priestly prayer in John 17:3 Jesus explained: "*And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent*" (John 17:3).

Notice that eternal life is first of all about knowing God. And knowing God means more than having knowledge about God and the bible. To know God means to be in a real and intimate relationship with God. And knowing God necessitates knowing Jesus Christ, whom the Father has sent into this world to reconcile us to himself.

Eternal life doesn't begin when we die and go to heaven. Although, as believers we look forward to a new heaven and a new earth where we will live forever in God's presence, eternal life begins on earth the day we receive Christ. And from that moment on, we must cultivate this new life in Christ by making communion with Him, through prayer, through the word, and in fellowship with the church, a priority. We must not allow Him to get crowded out of our hearts and lives by the cares of this life. If Christ is to be at home in our hearts, we must also keep our bodies, which are the temples of the Holy Spirit, clean from the defilement of sin.

We don't know for sure how much, if any, preparations were made for the arrival of Jesus on that first Christmas. But what we do know is that the accommodations Jesus was given was not fit for the King of kings. But in His first advent Jesus accepted poverty, suffering and death to bring us salvation. Having now accomplished salvation for us, Jesus has gone away to prepare for us a place. And he's coming again to receive us so that where He is there may we be also (John 14:1-6).

In light of so great a salvation, let me ask you, as we await the coming of the Lord, what place does Jesus have in your heart and life? O when Christ has the preeminent place in our hearts that only He deserves, we will know His fullness in our lives.

This brings us to a final application question that the humble arrival of Jesus and his purpose for coming into this world, should lead us to ask.

### **3. Place in our Affections**

What place does Jesus have in your heart and in your affections? Remember, in Luke 2:7, after Jesus was born, Mary “*laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*” There was no room for better accommodations for Jesus, because the inn or guest room was apparently occupied. Perhaps, if they knew who Jesus was, somebody would have given up their room for Jesus. Some room was made for Jesus, but it wasn’t the best room.

What about us? How many of you know, we make room in our lives for the things that are important to us and for the people that have our greatest affections. You know, my grandson can show up at our house with mom or dad unannounced and we will make room for him. In fact, he has a toy room and a guest room reserved for him at my house. And even if we lived in a tiny apartment, we would make room. In fact, if our bed wasn’t big enough, my wife would put me on the sofa. Because we love our grandson and he has the affections of our hearts, there will always be a place for him.

Do you know that the reason many professing believers do not know the fullness of Christ in their lives is because something or somebody is occupying the place in their hearts that should only belong to Him? Many today want Jesus to be their Savior, but they don’t want Him to be their Lord. Many do not know the fullness of Christ’s power and presence because they simply do not have any room for him, especially if making room for Him means being inconvenienced.

During the marriage conference, Bob Mohler shared something with us that was very insightful. He said that whenever a husband says to him that he doesn’t want to be married anymore because he’s fallen out of love with his wife, he will ask the husband, “What’s her name?” He said that in every case that he’s encountered this, there was always another woman in the picture who the husband gave his heart too. In other words, the problem wasn’t that he just fell out of love with his wife, but that he gave his affections to another woman. And consequently he’s unwilling to make the intentional investments necessary to restore his marriage.



Do you know that Jesus took issue with the church of Ephesus because although they were orthodox in their doctrine and were outwardly doing religious things, they had abandoned the love they had at first? (Revelation 2:1-4). Jesus didn't say they lost their first love, as many wrongly misquote the verse. They abandoned the love they had at first by simply going through the motions of religion and not cultivating an intimate relationship with Christ.

What place does Jesus have in your heart? Have you fully made room in your heart for Him? In Revelation 3:22, Jesus says to the church of Laodicea, *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me."*

Often this passage is used to speak to unbelievers as an invitation to receive Christ as Lord and Savior. However, although it can apply to the unsaved, in context, Jesus is speaking to believers in the church (Rev. 3:22). What does Jesus desire as He stands outside the door of our hearts? He desires to dine with us! In other words, He wants us to know the all satisfying joy and peace of close communion with Him.

The question is, what is Jesus doing standing outside the door of a Christian's heart? Shouldn't close communion and fellowship already be the experience of every believer? It should be, but the reality is that for many it's not. Jesus has been shut out of their lives. We may not profess to having no room Christ, but our actions and priorities may be saying, "I don't have time to commune with you. I'm too busy running my own life?" Consequently, many professing Christians today have a superficial faith that is making very little difference in their lives and in the lives of the lost world around them.

But Jesus in His grace and mercy doesn't walk away from us when he finds that we have no room for him. He graciously and lovingly stands on the other side of the door and knocks. Christ waits patiently at the door and He knocks. He knocks by the outworking of his providence, the warnings and teaching of His word, and the influences of His Spirit.

Now, if Jesus is standing before a closed door in our lives, how do we open it so He would come in and take His rightful place on the throne of our hearts? We open the door by repenting of our pride, self-sufficiency, and reliance on human wisdom. If we try opening the door to a house that's not been cleansed, Jesus will not come in to fellowship with us. What fellowship has light with darkness? We must prepare Him room. And preparing Him room means we must clean house. And for some of us, cleaning house may mean moving out of your boyfriend's house or sending him packing. It may mean cutting back on your hours at work or even getting another job so that you can make more room for Christ's and His priorities in your life.

## **Conclusion**

Charles Spurgeon once said, "If you have room for Christ, then from this day forth remember, the world has no room for you." And that's alright, because Jesus is better than anything this world has to offer.

Do you have room for Christ? Is He knocking on the door of your heart? Don't hide. Don't turn the lights off. Run to the door and open it in repentance and faith. He will come in and dine with you forevermore. O may Jesus, who came into this world to take our place on a cross, always have the preeminent place in our hearts and lives to the glory of His name.