

Prepare Him Room

(Luke 2:7; Hebrews 13:1-2)

This past week my wife and I became grandparents again. We've been anticipating for months the arrival of our new grandchild. And when we found out it was a girl, we were even more excited. You see, we have four sons and one grandson. No girls in the family. There was only one queen in the family, but now the long awaited little princess has arrived.

You know, when you're anticipating the arrival of a child or grandchild, while you're waiting, you make preparations. In some cases, parents that are expecting, will remodel or decorate a room in their house to provide a more suitable place for when the baby arrives. My wife has been buying clothes before our little princess was even born.

Sometimes for mothers and fathers the reality of bringing a child into this world changes them. It's mature them. It motivates them to shed off their adolescent behaviors and get their priorities straight so that they can more responsibly care for their child.

Now, if some parents today spare no cost to prepare physically, emotionally and even spiritually for the arrival of their child, how much more Mary and Joseph. Mary and Joseph knew that the child Mary was carrying was conceived by the Holy Spirit. They knew that the child in her womb was the Son of the Most High, the messiah, who will save his people from their sin (Luke 1:21). They knew he was Emmanuel, God with us. And yet, because of the circumstances his earthly parents found themselves in, there was no crib for a bed when the child King was born. So, they laid Jesus in a manger because better accommodations were unavailable. No doubt, if they could have—if they were not away from home, Mary and Joseph would have prepared a more suitable place for Jesus.

Based on the circumstances at the time, Mary and Joseph did the best they could do. But let me submit to you also that Jesus had something

way more important than a customized crib. He had parents who feared God and made room for Jesus in their hearts. Can I tell you, what makes a house a home, as God intends, is not the quality of the furniture, but that we've made room for King Jesus in our hearts and His love is being manifested in our lives?

Moreover, when Jesus is at home in our hearts, we can be in a house that doesn't feel like a home, or we could have grown up in a broken home, and although there may be sorrow because of these difficult circumstances, our souls can be at home, our souls can be at rest when Jesus is at home in our hearts. When Jesus is at home in your heart it doesn't mean you will never experience sorrow, but it does mean that you will not sorrow as one who has no hope.

Now do you know that hospitality is at the heart of why Jesus came into the world? He left His place in heaven and came to earth to take our place on a cross so that we can have a place in His Father house. And until that day when Jesus comes to take us to the place he's prepared for us, his first coming made it possible for Him to make his abode in our hearts. And when the lover and satisfier of our souls is at home in our hearts, we will make room for others as He has made room for us.

Main idea: We incarnate the love of Christ by making room for others as Christ has made room for us.

This morning we are going to look at 3 reasons why hospitality is central to the message of Christmas and the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

1. Make room for the Savior

The first reason why hospitality is central to the true message of Christmas is that in order to experience the salvation that Christ's first coming made possible, we must make room for Jesus in our hearts and lives. Because this was the main theme of last week's message, we won't spend as much time on it, but remember that the Christ child,

according to Luke 2:7, was *laid in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*”

As I noted already, due to the circumstances surrounding Christ’s birth, like the influx of people in Bethlehem for the census, more suitable accommodations were unavailable when Christ was born. The best Mary and Joseph could do for a bed for the newly born King was a feeding trough. No doubt if they could have—if they were not away from home, Mary and Joseph would have prepared a more suitable place for Jesus. Perhaps, Joseph, who was a carpenter, would have made him a customized crib.

And of course, His Heavenly Father could have providentially arranged it so that Jesus was born in a palace. But in his first coming Jesus didn’t come for man to give him a crown of gold. He came ultimately to wear a crown of thorns so that we could receive the crown of eternal life. Remember, eternal life is more than living forever in heaven. Eternal life is God made known in your heart through Christ in the person and power of the Spirit.

And eternal life begins when through repentance and faith we make room in our heart for Jesus and receive Him there as Savior and Lord. And from that moment on we must continue to make room to grow in our love for Christ and to fulfill His purpose for our lives.

We often hear during the Christmas season that in the midst of the busyness of it all we need to be make time to reflect and celebrate the reason for the season. But I want to suggest to you that although reflecting on the implication of Christ’s first advent and celebrating it can be edifying to the soul, doing so should not simply be a seasonal affair. Furthermore, what allows us to experience the transforming presence of Christ is not the seasonal celebration of His birth, but the daily cultivation of our relationship with the living Christ and consecration to His will and ways.

But this kind of hospitality to Jesus will not come easy in this life. As Darryl Eyb explained, “Making room for Jesus is costly. To make room

for Jesus means embracing him and inviting him into all aspects of our daily life.”

But the truth is there may be some rooms in the house of our lives where Jesus would not be comfortable. So, what some Christians do is, they lock him out. They haven't given him the key. Jesus can take the key, but that's not how a love relationship works. Jesus said, “*if any man opens the door I will come in...*” (Rev. 3:20). However there may be rooms in our lives that we have to clean out for Jesus to be comfortable and at home in us. But the truth is we can't clean out those rooms by ourselves and He doesn't expect us to. But we do need to surrender them to God and give Him the key. Or as Robert Munger put it, we need to sign over the title deed to the Lord and say, “You run the house.”

So what kind of hospitality have you been giving to Jesus? “Are you making your heart a comfortable place for the Holy Son of God to dwell” (Steven Cole)? The transforming presence of Christ is experienced as we daily cultivate our relationship with Christ and consecrate ourselves by faith to His will and ways.

2. Make room for the saints

Secondly, the reason that hospitality is central to the Christmas message is because the message not only calls us to make room for the Savior so that He might be at home in us, but to also **make room for the saints**. When God's word says in Luke 2:7 that after Mary gave birth to Jesus she *laid him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn,*” these words would have struck first century readers in a much deeper way than the average reader today. You see, as I noted in the previous message, hospitality was not only essential to the way of life for ancient Jewish people, but in the early church it was a vital expression of the virtues of Christianity. The failure to demonstrate hospitality to even strangers would have been considered scandalous.

So, to first century Christians reading that Jesus was laid in a manger because no place was made available for Joseph and Mary, who was with child, would have been staggering. Keep in mind that although the traditional telling of the Christmas story involves a heartless inn-keeper turning them away, it's more likely that Mary and Joseph were staying with family. Remember, that the Greek word Kataluma, which is translated as inn in verse 7, can also mean guests room or private house.

In light of this, it's very possible that it was a family member of Joseph not an inn keeper who would not provide better accommodations for Mary, Joseph and the new born babe. Could it be that the guest room was already occupied by another family that came to town for the census? The owner could have asked whoever was occupying the guest room to give it up, but perhaps he didn't want to inconvenience them. Or maybe because Mary became pregnant before marriage, it would have been considered a scandalous thing to give them the guest room.

Whatever the reason that better hospitality was not afforded to Joseph and Mary from family, who knew she was nine months pregnant, they were displaced. Knowing what we know today we may surmise, if they had known who Jesus was perhaps they would have made room. But for those of us who claim to know Jesus, the greater question is, do we really make room for him today?

Remember Jesus knocks on the door of the house of our lives. And to give him the honor due Him, he should be given more than a guest room, he should be given the keys to our house. Does he have the keys? Can I tell you, one essential indicator that he has the keys to our house is that we make room to SERVE HIS FAMILY in love as He has made room to serve us.

Remember Jesus said that when he returns in His glory He will commend the saved for their radical hospitality unto Him. After commending them, God's words says in Matthew 25:37-40: *"Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? 38 And when did*

we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? 39 And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you? 40 And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’ (Matthew 25:37-40)

Jesus clearly demonstrated, along with other passages in the New Testament, that showing hospitality to His family is a vital means of displaying the love of Christ and cultivating unity in the church. He also taught his disciples that love and unity among the saints, which we display best through hospitality, is the way the people in the world will know that the first Christmas really happened—that the Father sent Jesus into the world and that we are his disciples (John 13:34-35; 17:22-23).

But in our modern times the virtue of hospitality has fallen on hard times. 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. Many struggle to make time and room for their own families let alone an outsider. The reason for this is that hospitality is inconvenient. It takes time, attention and energy 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 difference for Christ in this increasingly polarized society.

This leads us to a third reason why hospitality is central to the true message of Christmas.

3. Make room for the stranger

When Christ, who came to make room for us in His Father’s house, is at Home in our hearts, while we are on this earth, we will not only make room for the saints—who are the family of God, but we will also **make room for the stranger**—the outsider. This hospitality to strangers is at the heart of the true Christmas story.

During the time of Jesus birth, showing hospitality to strangers was a common and essential cultural practice especially among Jewish people. Because hotels, rest stops and restaurants were not common, or did not even exist, people traveling long distances depended on the hospitality of others for food, shelter and protection. Hospitality was more than an occasional practice offered to close friends and extended family. Extending hospitality, especially to strangers, was vital to human flourishing, the stability of families, the health of the community and the society at large.

In light of this, it's astonishing to think that in the entire town of Bethlehem a more suitable place, besides a manger, could not be offered to a couple who were about to have a child. But as I noted before, Jesus accepted not having a place to lay His head, but rather chose a place on a cross so we who were strangers—we who were far off—we who were without hope can have a place in the family of God. And until Jesus comes, we are on this earth to make room for others, including strangers, so that they can come to know the saving love of Jesus Christ.

Now although hospitality is not valued in our individualistic and commercialized society as it was in Jesus day, it is still a vital means of expressing the virtues of Christianity and reaching our neighbors for Christ. The fact that hospitality is not valued in our society is all the more reason why the church needs to be even more intentional about showing hospitality. We must resist conformity to an increasingly polarized society and seek to build bridges not walls so that we can get to know people who need to get to know Christ.

When we speak of hospitality today often what comes to our minds is having Christian friends over for dinner who we have things in common with. I don't want to minimize the importance of cultivating our unity in Christ by making room in our homes to build one another up in the faith. The Apostle Paul wrote, "*So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith*" (Galatians 6:10). To have meaningful relationships that are an attractive example of who Christ is we need to do more than just meet together on a Sunday morning. We need to

make room for each other in our everyday lives, especially in the intimacy of our homes. One way we encourage this at MBC is through Life Groups. But Christian hospitality is more than being comfortable with people we have things in common with, while enjoying good food. It extends beyond people we know and welcomes strangers. As Darryl Eyb put it, “It is offering our best for the comfort of others.”

In Hebrews 13:1-2, God’s word highlights the vital practice of showing hospitality not only to the saints, but to strangers. The author of Hebrews writes: “*Let brotherly love continue. ² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares*” (Hebrews 13:1). As you may know, the first 12 chapters of Hebrews contains deep theological truths about the person and work of Christ. But deep theology about Christ is not meant to puff up our heads with knowledge, but to enlarge our hearts with love for others, especially those without Christ.

Notice that after 12 chapters on the doctrine of Christ’s superiority, the author of Hebrews shifts gears in chapter 13 to show how we are to put our theology of Christ into practice. And the first thing he focuses on is expressing love and hospitality to both saints and strangers. Interestingly, the Greek word for hospitality is *Philoxenia*. It’s a combination of two words, *philo*, which means friendship love, and *xeno*, which means foreigner. So Christ-like hospitality is more than making room for people like us, but also for people who are different than us.

In His book titled *Beautiful Resistance*, Jon Tyson in a chapter on how hospitality must resist fear, writes: “The reason God calls us to this kind of love is that this is the way he has loved us. We often forget what our lives were like before God saved us. We project ourselves into the story of salvation in distorted ways, misreading Scripture as though we were the insider group. But nothing could be further from the truth. Paul described our condition before Christ as outsiders. In Ephesians 2, he wrote, “*Remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called ‘uncircumcised’...were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the*

world” (Ephesians 2:11-12). Separate, excluded, foreigners, hopeless. In the story of redemption, we are the strangers. We are the outsiders. We are the other. Ever since our expulsion from Eden, the angel has barred the way back. We have wandered as strangers on the earth, seeking a place to belong. Our sin has disconnected us from the source of life and left us in need of redemption. From the beginning, though, God has sought to welcome us back. His perfect love has cast out fear and turned strangers into sons, the [demonized] into daughters.

If you were to trace the hospitality of Jesus through the gospels, you would find that hospitality wasn't one of Jesus's strategies; it was the strategy. “Robert Karris concludes: “In Luke's Gospel Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal.” Jesus ate with sinners, tax collectors, and fishermen. He included and welcomed those turned into the other by the religious culture of his day. He humanized those, others dismissed as outsiders, and extended the welcome of God...If we are going to continue the life-giving, healing ministry of Jesus, we must [also] open our hearts and lives to create environments of welcome.”

So hospitality is not just another church growth strategy to increase church attendance. Making room for outsiders as Christ at His expense made room for us, is at the core of how we are to live out the gospel. It is the way outsiders can experience the welcome of God so that they too can have a place in the kingdom of God. Gospel centered hospitality is the way we join God in what he is doing in the spiritual realm to fulfill his purpose in the earthly realm.

Notice that when exhorting believers not to neglect showing hospitality to strangers, the author of Hebrews adds, “*for thereby some have entertained angels unawares*” (Hebrews 13:1b). When the author of Hebrews refers to angels in the context of hospitality, he's not saying, show hospitality, because you never know, it may be an angel you're ministering too. In other words, he's not saying that what we might possibly be doing for angels is a bigger deal than ministering to strangers. What he's saying is that when we practice hospitality to strangers, which is at the heart of living out the

gospel, we join in an activity that touches the spiritual realm and has far reaching implications.

As Jon Tyson explained, “In the Scriptures, angels are messengers sent to warn or bring good news. What is perceived as a threat may actually be a promise. By refusing hospitality, we may be shutting out the help and guidance of God himself. What would have happened to Abraham if he had refused to show hospitality (Genesis 18:1–10)? What would have happened to Lot if he hadn’t welcomed the strangers (Genesis 19:1–25)? What would have happened to Mary if she had refused the angel (Luke 1:26–38)? What would have happened on the road to Emmaus if the travelers hadn’t welcomed Christ (Luke 24:13–32)? What will happen to us if we refuse the stranger? If we rely on cultural lenses rather than biblical ones, we may be shutting God out of our lives. Matthew 25 tells us that God has disguised himself among the broken and the poor (verses 34–40). Hospitality is the lens that lets us see through the disguise to Christ himself. Rather than robbing us of our rights, hospitality may be opening a door of eternal reward” (Beautiful Resistance, Jon Tyson).

O brothers and sisters, for the Christian who seeks above all to make room for Christ in their hearts and lives so that they might experience His transforming presence and power in them and around them, let me ask you, have you made a place for hospitality? Remember, when explaining how the righteous have shown hospitality to Jesus, God word says in Matthew 25:40: “*And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, [] you did it to me.’*”

We make room for Jesus by making a place in our lives for hospitality. And you know, you don’t necessarily need a house to do it. You can join with others to make a place that welcomes the needy as Christ has welcomed us. In fact, no one demonstrated loving hospitality better than Jesus and He didn’t have a place to lay his head. Hospitality, which is the heart of the Christmas story, begins not with making a place in our residence, but with making room in our hearts for it.

As Christine Phol writes, “Whether or not we can always find room in our houses, welcome begins with dispositions characterized by love and generosity. Hearts can be enlarged by praying that God will give us eyes to see the opportunities around us, and by putting ourselves in places where we are likely to encounter strangers in need of welcome. At different times in our lives our capacity for hospitality will vary, and different kinds of strangers will require different types of responses. Although a particular family may not be able to take a homeless person into their home, that family can participate with others in creating a place that is welcoming to homeless people. When our lives are open to hospitality, opportunities will come to make a place for others. And, in doing so, our places and our lives will be enriched and transformed.”

Conclusion

O may we daily make room for Christ and seek Him to enlarge our hearts so that we might make room for saints and strangers in a world that desperately needs to know the welcome of God.