

“Overbooked”

Luke 2:1-7

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 Georgetown Presbyterian Church
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Many of you who have attended the Night of A Thousand Candles at Brookgreen Gardens have heard Ron Daise perform “A Gullah Christmas Story.” At one point in the story he tells of a time when he and his wife were traveling through parts of rural South Carolina. I believe it was during the evacuation for Hurricane Hugo. His wife was great with child, seven or eight months along in her pregnancy. It was late in the day, and they were road weary. They needed to find a place to stay. This was before the time of Trip Advisor or Travelocity, so they had to go from motel to motel looking for a vacancy. Because of the hurricane, all the motels were either booked or closed.

The situation became a bit more urgent when Ron's wife started to have some contractions, and they feared that she might be going into labor. They did manage to find a hospital, where Mrs. Daise received care in the emergency room; eventually, her pains stopped, and she was discharged from the hospital. In the meantime, Ron was able to find a motel room where they could rest and wait out the storm in safety.

For several hours that day, Ron Daise and his wife almost certainly felt like Joseph and Mary had felt on a certain night 2000 years ago. As Luke tells us, “[Joseph] went [to Bethlehem] to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them at the inn.”¹

There was no room at the inn...

We just saw the children enact the story of the birth of Jesus. In Latin America there is a Christmas tradition called “Las Posadas,” that reenacts the struggle of Mary and Joseph to find lodging. The Las Posadas (the word “posadas” is Spanish for “inn”) observance takes place on nine consecutive evenings in December, beginning on December 16. Nine homes or families are selected in advance, with each playing the part of a village inn. Each night the villagers form a procession and accompany Mary and Joseph to the designated inn for the evening. They carry candles and sing songs depicting the story of Mary and Joseph. On the first eight nights, the family designated as the “inn” sings a little song which indicates that there is no room for the Holy Family, and Mary and Joseph are sent away. On the last night, the procession is admitted into the home, where a Christmas crib with a manger has been set up.

What we just saw a few minutes ago was cute and adorable. But lost in the cuteness of our children's pageant is the sense of desperation that Joseph and Mary must've felt, not only when they realized that there were no rooms to be had anywhere in town, but especially when it became clear that Mary was about to give birth.

It seems that, because of the census ordered by Caesar Augustus, Bethlehem was overbooked.

¹ Luke 2:5-7

Bethlehem was overbooked, and so there was no room at the inn.

What was true for a town that was overbooked and unprepared for the Messiah is also true for us today. It has nothing to do with hotel rooms and occupancy rates. For isn't it the case that we live in a time when everyone is encouraged to overbook their lives? Isn't it the case that we face pressure on all sides to fill every moment of our lives with some sort of activity? Isn't it the case that virtually every other activity brings with it a sense of urgency that pushes our devotion to God off to the side? We don't mean to be that way, but isn't that the way it often turns out?

Is it possible that today, if Joseph and Mary were to arrive on the doorstep of our lives, we would have no room for them? Are we too busy, are our lives too full for us, to be able to notice the Savior coming into the world? Have we overbooked our lives, so that there is no room for the Lord to enter in?

There is a classic devotion booklet to which I have referred from time to time over the years. It's called "My Heart, Christ's Home." It begins with a man telling of the time when he invited Christ to come and live in his heart, as if the man's heart were a house in which Jesus could dwell. And so Jesus came into this man's heart. Only, Jesus would not stay in the guest room, or even in the living room. Jesus wanted to inhabit every room in the man's heart: the library, which represented the things the man put into his mind, the books he read, the shows he watched; the game room, which represented the things the man did for recreation; the dining room, which represented the appetites of the man's spirit, things like money and power and status; there were other rooms, as well. The thing that every room had in common was that the man was uncomfortable having Jesus share those things with him, because he knew there were things that pushed Jesus aside or displeased Jesus.

It is a story that has too many parallels in our lives, I fear. For even when Jesus comes into our hearts, there are areas of our lives that we don't want to relinquish, there are goings-on that make us turn our backs on Jesus. We have overbooked, and much of that which we have allowed to occupy space in our hearts is not appropriate for our Lord.

If Joseph and Mary were to arrive on the doorstep of our lives, would we have room for them? Are we too busy, are our lives too full for us, to be able to notice the Savior coming into the world? Have we overbooked our lives, so that there is no room for the Lord to enter in?

In "My Heart, Christ's Home," the man makes a conscious decision to clear out his heart, so that Christ may enter in and dwell throughout it. He cleans up his mind, he changes his appetites, he finds time to spend in the company of Jesus. The last room he turns over to Jesus is a dark closet in which the man has tried to hide the shameful things of his life. The man can't even go into the closet to clear it out – he simply gives Jesus permission and authority to empty it of all its foulness, and clean it from floor to ceiling. Finally, after the man has given Jesus a key to every room in the house, the man hands over the title. Jesus changes from guest, to owner.

It is a beautiful picture of what every one of us needs in our own lives. The Advent longing calls out, "Come, Lord Jesus!" The truth is, that is the cry of every human heart. Yet there is no room at the inn.

Let every heart prepare him room.

Let every heart prepare him room.

It was the typical Christmas pageant. Miss Lumbard was trying to assign all the children to their appropriate roles. Wallace Purling wanted to be a shepherd and have a flute,

but Miss Lumbard found a more important role for Wally. He was about nine, and rather big for his age, but also a bit slow. Miss Lumbard thought his size would make the lines of the innkeeper more forceful. And besides, there were only a few lines that Wally had to remember.

So it was as the pageant began. The usual crowd of parents and loved ones gathered for the annual program. The play started with an angel appearing to Mary, and then Mary and Joseph began their journey. Wally watched intently as Joseph and Mary made their way to Bethlehem.

Then the time came. Mary and Joseph appeared at the door of the inn. Joseph knocked on the door and Wally the innkeeper was there waiting.

"What do you want?" bellowed Wally in the most intimidating voice a nine-year-old could muster.

"Sir, we seek lodging," came the reply from Joseph. "We have traveled so far, and we have asked everywhere for a room, but nobody has a room."

"There is no room in the inn for you," said Wally, looking properly stern.

Joseph began to beg the innkeeper. "Please, sir. This is my wife, and she is heavy with child, and she needs a place to rest."

This time Wally just stood at the door and stared at Mary. There was a long pause. The people in the congregation were beginning to feel an uncomfortable tension in the silence. Finally, the prompter whispered loudly from the side of the stage: "No! Be gone!"

Wally obediently repeated his words, "No! Be gone!"

Joseph placed his arm around Mary and walked away with an expression of sadness. The tired little mother of Jesus laid her head on his shoulder. But the innkeeper did not go back into the inn, as he was supposed to do. Wally stood there watching the forlorn couple. His mouth stayed open, his brow was creased, and tears began to well up in his eyes. Suddenly this Christmas pageant became different from all others.

"Don't go, Joseph," Wally called out. "Bring Mary back." At this point Wally's expression changed into a beaming smile. "You can have my room."

Can we resist the temptation to overbook our lives? Can we call out to our Lord, "Come, Lord Jesus! You can have my room. You can have my heart."?

Let every heart prepare him room.

Amen.