

[Isaiah 62: 1-5, Acts 13: 16-17, 22-25 / Isaiah 9:1-6; Titus 2:11-14 / Isaiah 62: 11-12, Titus 3: 4-7 / Isaiah 52: 7-10, Hebrews 1: 1-6, Luke 2:1-14]

Merry Christmas! Welcome to all who join us tonight/today: parishioners, relatives and family members; to those who join us from other parishes, especially from our Family of Parishes; to students and military and former parishioners who have “come home for Christmas,” and to those who are searching for a spiritual home. “May you find all you need in this room.”

Wally was big for his age -- seven years old. Everyone wondered what role the teacher would give him in the annual Christmas play. Especially considering the fact that he was also a slow learner. To everyone's surprise the teacher gave Wally the role of the innkeeper. The boy of course was delighted. After all, all he had to learn was one line: "There is no room in the inn." He had that down in no time. Then came the night for the program. Mary and Joseph entered the stage and walked up to the inn. "Please sir, my wife is not well. Could we have a room for the night?" Wally was ready for his line. He had rehearsed it all night. He began, "there is", and he hesitated. He started over again. "There is..." and again his mind went completely blank.

Everyone was embarrassed for him, but poor Wally just didn't know what to do. Joseph thought he would improvise and started walking away toward the stable on stage left. Seeing him walking away Wally in desperation called out: "Look, there's plenty of room at my house, just come on home with me."

Is there room for Jesus Christ in your life? This is my Christmas question for you. “Will there ever be any room for Jesus Christ? In our hearts, in our families, in our workplaces, in our schools, in this country, and in the world?

There was no room for Jesus in the economic world. There was no room for Jesus in the legal realm. There was no room for Jesus even in the realm of the religious order of his time. There was no room for Jesus in the world of politics. Is there room for Jesus Christ in us and within us? That’s the meaning of Christmas! Can the Word become flesh in you and in me?

We have the choice to respond, to step into joy long after the Christmas decorations have returned to the attic for the year. Christ himself, Love Incarnate, gives us the model: Go out of yourself and encounter the other. Make a gift of yourself, and, at the same time, be ready to receive the gift of the other.

While Christmas is full of joy and celebration, the world is not exempt from sorrow during this season. For many of us, our hurting hearts experience intensified ache as memories flood our minds. Perhaps the memory is of a loved one now gone from us. Maybe the memory that haunts us is part of a painful past; something we wish could be changed or undone. Pain not only exists from the past, but in the daily present. Discouragement doesn’t stop lurking. Disease doesn’t stop waging its war. Death doesn’t pause for a few days.

No matter what is causing your hurt, allow yourself the opportunity to recognize the struggle you feel during the holiday season. The point is this: Jesus wasn’t born into ideal circumstances. Despite the stable which most of us would deem

unsuitable accommodations, the Light of the World made His grand entrance in the form of a little baby. Human flesh held the Son of God and the glory of the night could not be contained. Angels sang their glory to God and hope, true Hope for the world was born!

Regardless of the trials you face during the Christmas season, the gift you need the most is the One who longs to live in your heart. No matter the ache or the longing, the sorrow or the suffering, the birth of Jesus brought hope and healing to the entire world.

Today I invite you to look back on your own life, at the things that have happened in your own life: beautiful things, amazing things, incredible things that have happened in your life, maybe ordinary everyday things -- but ordinary everyday things can be beautiful, incredible, and amazing.

St. Paul writes in his Letter to the Philippians, Chapter 4 verse 8: "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable -- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy -- think about such things."

Show of hands – How many of you are between the ages of 18 and 35? I am watching you! I am praying for you to "Come to the Stable!" Is there room for Jesus in the Inn of your hearts and in the Inn of your lives? Will you bring him home to live in you 24/7?

I would like to close with, "Lay It in the Manger" written by Lisa Englehardt:

Your heart, your life, your very self, your humble offering...

Come to the Stable and lay it in the manger which holds the Infant King.

Your prayer for peace on earth, that war and hate might cease

Come to the Stable and lay it in the manger where sleeps the  
Prince of Peace.

Any ache or anguish, your spirit's darkest night...  
Come to the Stable and lay it in the manger where lays the Lord of  
Light.

New heaven and a new earth, God and man are once more  
reconciled...

For laying in the manger is God's Son, the Savior Child.

Come to the stable. Let Jesus make this a Merry Christmas.

For this, we can celebrate with Faith, with Hope, with Love and  
with JOY! Because Christmas, in fact, is not just a finite season of  
joy that comes and goes in two brief weeks. Christmas is the place  
where unending joy becomes possible for all of us. AMEN!