



December 24, 2011  
Christmas Eve Family Service  
Pastor Mark Toone  
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

## *No Room* Luke 2:1-7

Last week I asked our staff to share their most memorable Christmas. Our most memorable Christmas was 16 years ago tomorrow when our son, Cooper, was born. A Christmas baby! But Lance Brown's story was pretty memorable, too...for a different reason. This is how Lance looks today. But this is how he looked when he was eight years old. That was when Lance decided to hide in the living room so that he could catch Santa when he came to their house. So, when mom and dad weren't looking, Lance snuck out of his bedroom and hid behind the couch. After a while, he heard someone coming into the room. He was real excited. But it wasn't Santa; it was his dad. Lance didn't want to get caught so he was REALLLY still. But his dad noticed that the couch was out away from the wall. So he walked over to it... and SHOVED it back against the wall. But he shoved it so hard that it gave Lance a concussion and broke two ribs! Lance spent Christmas in the hospital!

Now kids...why did Lance get hurt when his dad pushed that couch closer to the wall? I'll give you a hint. Mom or dad...or any adult...if you are sitting next to a kid, I want you to smooooosh over to them as close as you can get. Now kids...how would you like to sit that way for the rest of the service? Why? What's wrong? How about if I go down here to this pew and just squeeeeeze right in here? Would you mind if I sat here with you for the rest of the service? Why? Ohhhhh...no room! There's no room in the pew, is there? There was no room behind the couch, was there? No room.

In our Christmas story, we heard those same words tonight, didn't we? Where was there "no room" in the story? Where? In the inn! Let's read that part one more time. While Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Do you remember where Mary and Joseph lived before they came to Bethlehem? Nazareth. Do you know how far it is from Nazareth to Bethlehem? About 80 miles! And how did they get to Bethlehem? Did they fly? Take a car? No! They walked. Maybe they had a donkey. That would be like walking to Seattle and back. And remember... Mary was ready to have a baby. She was about to pop!

Do you think they were tired when they got to Bethlehem? Yes! But Bethlehem was crowded! There were lots of visitors there that night. But that's okay. Joseph had a reservation in the hotel, right? He called the hotel in Bethlehem on his cell phone and told them to save a room for them, right? Noooo! By the time they got to Bethlehem, every room in the inn was taken. So where did they end up sleeping? In a barn! Why? Why did they have to sleep in the barn? BECAUSE...there was NO ROOM in the inn!

Was it clean in the barn? Was it quiet in the barn? Was it smelly in the barn? Was there cow poop on the floor? Can you imagine having a baby on a cow-poop floor? But that's where Mary had Jesus...in a barn...and she put him in a manger ...that's what they call a trough where they fed the cows. Do you think the cows came over and sniffed the baby and wondered what he was doing in their manger? "Heyyyy....this isn't hayyy! What's this baby doing in my manger?"

So...Jesus...the Son of God...was born in a barn because ...NO ROOM! What do you think about that? What about the innkeeper. Was he a bad guy for not giving Mary and Joseph a room? Kinda? But there were already other people in the rooms. Should he have kicked them out? Maybe he should have given them HIS room so that Mary didn't have her baby in a barn. But he didn't. There was no room in his inn...and because he wasn't willing to MAKE room for them...he missed out on the chance of a lifetime: to have the savior of the world be born in HIS inn. How cool would THAT have been? He could have put up a sign: "Jesus, Savior of the World, born here!" Would that have been good for business? But he couldn't do that. Because there was ...No Room!

You know...it's easy for us to get mad at that innkeeper; to think he wasn't a very nice guy...because he didn't make room for Jesus. Because he put them out in a barn. It's easy to wag our fingers at the innkeepers. And say, "Tsk, tsk, tsk." "You should have made room for Jesus!"

The only thing is... there are lots of folks here tonight who don't have much room for Jesus in their lives, either. I need some volunteers. [Kids come forward] Let's pretend this wading pool is your life, okay? You fill your life up with important things, don't you? What kind of things fill up your life? [Put in kids with signs: Parents, brothers, sisters, pets, school, friends, sports, pets.] There are also some not-so-good things that fill up your life, too, aren't there? Homework. Tests. Worry. Nightmares. Bullies. So...how do you feel in there?

Wait a second! We're missing something. Something really important. What is it? [Bring in manger] What's wrong? WE don't have room for Jesus, either, do we? That's not okay. What are we going to do? We could try this. [Cram Manger in among the kids] Will that be okay? Well what are we going to do?

There's only one thing you can do. This. [Pull all the kids out and put manger in center] First you have to put Jesus right at the center of your life. And then...you discover that he will fit in all the rest like it is supposed to fit. (Take "good" signs and place in manger). You know what else is cool about putting Jesus in the center of our lives? We can ALSO bring him the bad stuff...the stuff that scares us and hurts us and makes us feel really awful.

Christmas Eve is a wonderful time to come and sing and light candles and make family memories. But it is also a time to ask some really important questions about our own lives, isn't it? Like, "Is there any room for Jesus in my life?" Our lives get so crowded with important things. Adults too, right? Job, marriage, finances, sports, hobbies, civic responsibility...all good things. And we have our tough stuff, too, don't we. Divorce, depression, anxiety, failure, debt, unemployment.

If we fill up our life with all of those things...both good and bad... we discover that we are no different than the innkeeper. We're not bad; not mean. We just don't have any room for Jesus. No room in our schedules, no room in our Sundays, no room in our thought life, no room in our conversations or our priorities. How many here would admit that they don't have any room for Jesus in their life?

You know the real loser in Bethlehem that night, don't you? The innkeeper! He could have played a part in the greatest drama of all time. But he missed out. Because he had no room in his life. What about you? Do you realize how much you might be missing out on? How much God loves you and wants you to experience his love? That He has a plan for your life that is far better than the craziness you are experiencing right now? Do you realize that God actually wants to use you to accomplish something great?

And do you realize that God ALSO wants to take all that is broken and clean it up and make it right? Your life may be filled with really good, really important stuff. But if Christmas is true...there really is a God...and He REALLY sent His Son to so that you could know Him and love Him and learn how to live life his way... if these things are true...and you don't have any room in your life...or home...or schedule...for Jesus and his people...I PROMISE you...you and your children are missing out on God's very best for your life. Missing out! What a great Christmas gift to yourself if you decide that tonight is the night that you will make room in your heart... in your life... in your family... for Jesus.

Have you been thinking about what I said? Asking yourself the question, "Is there any room in my life for Jesus? Maybe you would say, "I'm still not interested. I like my life the way it is." Could I challenge you to pick up one of these packets and just try reading the story yourself? Try reading what the Bible says about Jesus and see if it makes you more interested.

Or maybe this has stirred something in you; you want to know more. It might take some courage but what if you signed up to come to Christianity Explored? This class might change your life!

Or maybe your next easy step would be to make room on Christmas Day for Christ...to come back tomorrow morning and join us as 10:00 for HIS Birthday celebration.

Or maybe...you are ready to make a commitment tonight. To make room for Jesus tonight. As you light the candle in a moment, offer a prayer like this: "Jesus, I want to make room for you. Help me!"