

One line in the Christmas story stands out for me. Maybe it is because when I was eight or nine I sang this solo:

“I can give you no room, no room today.

For the inn is crowded, and so wilt stay.

Bethlehem is filled with strangers from afar their taxes to pay.

In the stable you’ll find shelter and rest before you go on your way.”

Maybe that is the reason this line always stands out for me: “and she laid him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn.”

I remember a night when there seemed to be no place for us. I was ten, traveling with my family on a trip to Idaho and back. It was late – every motel sign we spied proclaimed, “No vacancy” I remember the darkness. To this day I remember the darkness. And the level of anxiety that was rising in that car with each passing mile. It had been a long hot day of driving and four kids and their parents were ready for sleep. We must have found a place after a while but in my memory the darkness is what stuck.

And she laid him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn.

A royal palace, a peasant hut, a cattle stall – for a baby it does not matter as long as there is warmth, and milk, and love. In Mary’s arms, at her breast, wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in the manger he did not know that there was no place for him that night. This might be a reminder to all of us about what our children need and what they do not. What they need is our care, and our confidence in God’s care for us and for our children. With these they will be all right, whether the home is finely decorated or simple and bare.

In Luke’s telling this story I sense a calm – “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 place for them in the inn.” It is almost as if the no vacancy signs were just an afterthought in this story – the surroundings just mentioned at the end.

For those who have never spent a night out in the shivering cold – whose noses have only sniffed the scent of a freshly washed pillowcases – it might be easy to gloss over the difficulties Mary and Joseph faced. Yet as God speaks to us through St. Luke’s telling of this story trusting in God is right in the center. Emperors make decrees and innkeepers have no room but even in the most difficult circumstances when a mother and a father believe in God things will be all right. Oh, Mary’s faith will be tested – the day will come when she will want to protect her son from all the gossip about him. Neighbors will be saying Jesus is crazy and Mary will come with family members to take Jesus home with her but he will not go. And the day will come when she will watch her own son murdered on a cross. She will witness the ridicule and the mocking and his God-forsaken cry. She will suffer the deep sorrow that the death of a child brings. But when Easter morning has dawned she will know just how much things will be all right for those who trust in God.

How can we know what could happen to us and to those we love even this night? In a world in which the only Son of God will one day be crucified who can be safe? You? Me? Yet most of the time we are safe. And our children are. And we think that maybe, just maybe we can keep it that way. We can call ahead for reservations and never have to worry about no vacancy signs. We can look both ways before we cross the street and teach our children to do the same. We can lock up anyone who is a threat and maybe even arm ourselves for battle at any time of the night or the day. We can get all our shots and eat the right foods. But in a world where the only Son of God is crucified no one will be safe – ever.

But you who trust in Jesus will be saved. Not safe but saved. That is why the angels sang-not because all wars would cease with the birth of Jesus. Nor because God’s children would never get sick or die. Never have an accident. No, the angels sang that night because sin and sickness and suffering will not rule over you when you

trust in Jesus. You will experience them in the same way Jesus experienced pain and suffering and death on the cross. But they will not rule over you who trust in Jesus.

You will be all right. The way Mary and Joseph and Jesus were all right that night though there was no place for them but the place where the animals fed. For they belonged to God and not to the darkness of the night nor to the cold of human hearts who would not welcome them nor to the tragedy of the cross that would one day come to this son of theirs.

You will be all right. For in Jesus Christ you belong to God and you shall forever. You will be all right.