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NO ROOM IN THE INN

Luke 2:6-7, John 14:1-3; Christmas Eve; December 24, 2024

Even those who don't know very much about the Christian faith know some of the details of Jesus' birth. They know where He was born, Bethlehem. They know about the Christ Child being born in a stable and laid in a manger, as many of the carols note:

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed... where, The cattle are lowing. (LSB 364.1, 2), Or,

*Now sing we, now rejoice, Now raise to heav'n our voice;
He from whom joy streameth Poor in a manger lies... (LSB 386.1)*

Even the reason why Jesus was born in a stable and laid in a manger is familiar to many people.

And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And [Mary] brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger; because... there was no room for them in the inn.

Why was there no **room** – literally, “**no place**” (τόπος) – for them in the inn? Caesar Augustus had decreed that all the residents of the Roman Empire had to go to the hometown of their ancestors to be enrolled for a census and taxing. Mary and Joseph were “**of the house and lineage of David,**” that is, King David's descendants, along with a lot of other people. The “little town of Bethlehem,” the “**city of David,**” was King David's hometown. By the time Mary and Joseph got to Bethlehem, apparently the place was already full.

There was **no room/no place for them in the inn.** (Luke's word for “inn” can also mean the guest room in a house.) Apparently, the only place left open to the couple expecting the birth of Mary's first child was a stable with a manger, a feeding trough for animals, *no crib for a bed.*

More important than knowing these details is why they matter. Who is this Baby born in Bethlehem? What does Jesus being born in a stable and laid in a manger show us about what He came to do for us?

The Christmas angel announced to the **shepherds abiding the field, keeping watch over their flock by night**, that the Baby wrapped in **swaddling clothes, lying in a manger** was the **Saviour, Christ the Lord**. Before Jesus was born, an angel had announced that Mary's baby should be called **Jesus** because He would **save His people from their sins** (Mt 1:21). The name "Jesus" means "**the LORD saves.**" What did Jesus come to save us from?

That Jesus is the **Christ**, or Messiah, means that He is the Anointed One of God, the rightful heir to the throne of David and King of the Jews. Why would a King be born in a Bethlehem stable and laid in a manger? Wouldn't it make more sense for Him to be born in a palace and laid in a royal crib? Christ the King's place of birth was very humble, very lowly.

That Jesus is the **Lord**, even though He is "born of the virgin Mary," confesses Him as God Himself: God the Son with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Isaiah had prophesied that **the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel**. Matthew explains that the Hebrew title "Immanuel" means, "**God with Us.**" Jesus is "God with Us" in human flesh. "Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and true Man, born of the virgin Mary, is [our] Lord," Luther's Small Catechism rightly explains.

That God Himself in human flesh, Christ the King, was born in a stable and laid in a manger because there was no room/no place for them in the inn, helps us understand what kind of Savior God sent into this world. Jesus was born in the humblest of circumstances. Jesus came in lowliness to share in our poverty, which we sang about in "What Child Is This." *Why lies He in such mean estate Where ox and ass are feeding?* (LSB 370.2)

We usually think of the word "mean" as describing bad treatment of others. In Old English, "mean" described something of little value, something common, without dignity, even contemptible, bad or wicked, but definitely not exalted, royal or kingly.

Jesus' "mean estate" in the stable shows us that He came down to our level to save us. In our wickedness and sins, God could rightly treat us with contempt, meanness, but He stoops to our level to save us.

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The carol, “What Child Is This,” describes the “meanness” of the manger and then goes on to connect it to the “meanness” of Christ’s suffering and death for us and for our salvation.

*Why lies He in such mean estate Where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear; for sinners here The silent Word is pleading.
Nails, spear shall pierce Him through, The cross be borne for me, for you;
Hail, hail the Word made flesh, The babe, the son of Mary!*

God’s Christ was born in poverty and meanness: **there was no room/no place in the inn** for Him. He left his palace throne room in heaven to take on our “mean estate” on earth, which is rightfully ours as sinners. We deserve to be born into such poor circumstances, but not Him. We don’t deserve to live in a palace. And even if the “inn” of Luke’s Christmas account was an ordinary guest room in a house, a place we are accustomed to staying in, His place was in the stable with the animals. Why did God’s Son stoop so low at His birth?

When Jesus was about to suffer, die on the cross, and then rise from the dead to forgive our sins and save us from death and hell, He explained why He was about to go through all that for us. In John 14, Jesus says: **“Believe in God; believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many rooms/mansions (KJV). If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place (same word) for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also”** (14:1b-3).

God’s Son, who had a place in heaven but no place in the inn when He was born, came in lowliness to save us from sin and death and raise us to life again. He saved us by taking our “mean estate” in this world and died on the cross. Risen from and dead and gloriously ascended into heaven, He has gone to prepare a place for us to dwell with Him in His Father’s house in heaven.

When God’s Son, Jesus Christ the Lord, was born, He was **laid in the manger because there was no room for them in the inn.** There would be no place for us in heaven if Jesus had not done this for us. Every time we hear the Christmas story and the details of Jesus’ lowly birth, may we rejoice that He did this to make a place for us forever in His Father’s house. In the name of Jesus. Amen.