

## 2017-12-24 Midnight: Sue Diggory

### John 1: 1 – 14

I suspect for many of us gathering together as a family is at the centre of our Christmas celebrations. We may take it in turns to host the 'event,' we may even have a rota of who goes to which side of the family each year, but for most of us there will be a gathering, and for some of us the walls of our houses will need to become a little elastic as extra beds are squeezed in to accommodate grannies and grandads and the occasional great aunt who is only ever seems to make an appearance during the festive season, not to mention that difficult second cousin once removed.

That's what happens when we gather as families, we all squeeze in because we make room!

In first century Palestine making room for the family was common practice, indeed it was expected, and not just for the immediate family but also for the extended family. This makes it all the more unusual that we find on this first Christmas night that Mary and Joseph were faced with the problem of having nowhere to stay. Luke tells us in his account that Mary *'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 in the inn.'*

Bethlehem was Joseph's ancestral home, he was from the house and family of David, that was why they were there for the census, so where were the rest of his family, his brothers, his sisters, his cousins, all the members of his extended family that were alive at the time. They would all have needed to find places to stay in Bethlehem and they would surely have made room for the newest member of the family, Mary, especially as she was clearly about to have a baby! It might have been a bit of a squeeze, but families make room.

So why as Luke tells us was there *'no room for them in the inn.'*

Had the family already filled it up, the nice inside rooms, leaving them to what was left – an outbuilding, a stable, the place where the animals slept?

Surely someone would have made room for Mary?

Surely even the least loving and most difficult second cousin once removed would have given up their bed that night, surely even they would have made room.

Or were there no family present in Bethlehem that night – this would of course fit with the view that Joseph was a much older than his new wife and there were no surviving relatives to make room for him and his bride.

Or was this the result scandal, the scandal of Mary's pregnancy, had the wider family been so upset and shocked by the disgrace this had brought on the whole family that no one was prepared to make room for the Holy Family that night in Bethlehem.

We will never know the 'why,' and there is little point in our speculating, no, we are just left knowing that for whatever reason they were left alone to fend for themselves as best they could, bereft of any family members to help.

No mother-in-law, no aunt, no sisters-in-law and no second cousin once removed!

Just Mary, a very young and inexperienced mother, doing the best she could for her baby, along with Joseph who was trying to make things the best he could under the circumstances.

No family made room for them in Bethlehem that night. In a town packed to the rafters with fellow ancestors of David, no one could find room for Mary and Joseph, they were left quite alone as they laid their baby in the manger, on that first Christmas night.

No one invited them, no one made room for them, and the sad thing is that those who shut their doors to Joseph as he searched for a room, as he searched for a safe place for Mary his wife to have her baby, they were unknowingly shutting their doors on God, on God incarnate himself. When they failed to make room for the Holy Family that night, they failed to make room for the creator of the world, they failed to make room for the maker of heaven and earth, they failed to give a welcome to God as he came to us his creation in the form of a tiny and vulnerable baby, as he came for us all.

Remember the words of the Angel to the Shepherds,

*'Do not be afraid, for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people, to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord.'*

The Christmas good news is for all, for you and for me, news that is part God's plan, a plan that began long ago. A plan that did not start with Mary and Joseph alone in that stable in Bethlehem, when no one would make room for them. It did not begin with the angel appearing to Mary, or even with the prophets who foretold of the event centuries earlier. The Christmas story began with God looking on his creation, so beautifully made and so sadly gone astray, a story that would be fulfilled in the Bethlehem stable that night when *the word became flesh and lived among us*, when God chose to come in human form, not as a king born in a palace, but as a baby born into lowly and humble circumstances, to begin life laid in a feeding trough alongside the animals who slept in the stable.

God came and comes to all from the lowliest shepherd to the most majestic king, God comes as the Angel told on that first Christmas night for 'you.' The miracle that

first Christmas night, of the coming of Immanuel, "God with us," is that we see that though Mary and Joseph may have been forsaken by others, they were never forgotten by God. They had no status, no power and no wealth. The only thing they had to offer their son was love.

Having nothing to offer but love is, I suggest exactly what the creator of heaven and earth had in mind all along. Love, the word that is at the centre of why we are here tonight, the love of God for his creation, the love that caused heaven to come to earth on that first Christmas night, the love that unlike those who refused to make room for him that night in Bethlehem long ago, makes room for us all, the love that longs for us to be those who will make room for him in our hearts, the love that bids us say, incarnate Christ, be born in me this Christmas night.  
Amen.