

**Rideau Park United Church, Ottawa
December 29, 2019 – Elizabeth Bryce**

**Readings: Luke 2:1-7
Matthew 2: 13-15**

Sermon: Do you have Room? (Sunday after Christmas)

Another ledger almost finished. Oh, I was hoping I wouldn't need a new one until the next order. Let's see – maybe there's room for one more list...

Is there room? Well, that brings back memories...

"Do you have room?" they asked. Really! Did I have room? What were they thinking? It's the census for goodness sake. Everyone has returned to our little city for the census, and there just isn't enough room. Do you have room? Are you blind – can't you see that you can barely move in Bethlehem?

I already have my husband, three children and the cat in my bed. Well, I suppose we could put someone under the table in the kitchen. Do I look like I have any more room?

I tell you, that's just about what my husband and I were thinking when the couple asked us if we had room. My husband started to explain: "we are only a small inn..." then he stopped, staring at the young couple. When he gave me "the eye" with a nod of his head – I knew he wanted me to look closer.

I didn't want to look – I knew that if I started looking at her, I would keep on looking until I found a small corner in the inn for them somewhere. I knew it. But I did look and I realized it wasn't just two people needing shelter, it was two and nine tenths - she was so very pregnant.

Do you have room? Sigh. "Just wait a moment, I'll find something. Why don't you men take the donkey to the stable and I'll start moving the furniture again?" They came back smiling, pulling Mary back there with them – why not, they said, we keep a nice place, the barn is dry and mostly clean.

There was something different about the barn that night, though, I have to say that. Usually it was full of deep shadows – I never liked going in there once it got dark. But that night the animals were all quiet. No noise, no chickens running about, no stamping and no flies.

And it seemed like the shadows were banished.

Oh, I know that sounds crazy, but it gets crazier. Something happened that night. Something I still don't understand.

Caesar's army were patrolling the streets. Shaking people down as usual – sorry! I mean "collecting the taxes that were rightfully owed to Caesar." Relatives arriving from

everywhere because they had to be registered. Herod was antsy with all the talk about Rome and rebellion, he knew his own army was too small to protect him from the Emperor if suspicion of a rebellion made it to Rome. We were all so scared about what was coming around the next corner.

Then, In the midst of all this chaos, there was our stable and this young couple, and finally the baby – arriving safe and sound, with my help. It was peaceful there, and I was glad I made the room. In the midst of all the violence and fear – a new life, protected and loved – and we were part of it, because we found room.

I was finally back in my own bed, falling asleep squished between my husband and my youngest, when I heard the sound of a sheep bleating. Good, I thought, now I can count sheep until I fall asleep...

Wait a minute. We don't have sheep! And this is the time of year when they are all out in the fields, with the shepherds?

I looked out the window – and there were sheep everywhere! If we had any room left at all – it was full of sheep – and their shepherds, hanging around the door of the stable!

“Oh, that poor woman!” I thought, and crawled over my children to go shoo them away.

“You don't understand,” the shepherds said. “The angels came and told us to come! Remember what the prophet Isaiah said: how a child would be born in Bethlehem! God with us! Right here, right now!”

I looked in the stable, and the baby was lying there on the clean straw in our manger. It wasn't dark and scary, it was – I don't know – Hopeful?? It's a funny word, considering everything that was going on in the world that night. But somehow it wasn't any of those things. I wasn't any of those things. I had room in my heart for love and joy and peace and even hope.

I realized I DID have room, I always had room. Not just a physical space, but I had room in my heart – a special room that God filled with hope when that little boy was born in my stable.

As I returned to the house, and the shepherds went back to their fields, I knew that soon Bethlehem would be waking up, wanting their breakfast, worrying about the day ahead. They would not realize that a saviour had been born in their midst. Would **they** have room?

To think I almost missed it. We **did** have room. Not just at the inn, but in our lives. It's hard to explain, but since that night, I have felt more generous, less anxious – more hopeful. I just always remind myself there is room.

Well, Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus didn't stay long. Just long enough for Joseph to have that dream. He just seemed to know that it wasn't safe, that Herod's soldiers would be prowling around looking for that baby.

Well, I hope wherever they went, they found room. No, I hope they found **people** – ordinary people like me, who decide to MAKE room for a family in need. Because somehow I know that God will clear a little space in their hearts for the One who comes to give the world hope.

Wherever they go, I know love will find them - they will find room.

Thanks be to God!

49 VU – No crowded Eastern Street

A new carol for many of us, but it was a poem written by a woman from Manitoba, who sent it in to the Anglican church of Canada when they were creating a new hymn book. Robert Fleming (another Canadian) wrote a tune to go with it. When the Anglicans and United Church published a joint hymn book in 1970 – then we in the United Church got our hands on it. It was very popular in Saskatchewan, because of the references to the prairies and it's always been one of my favourites.