

## Wesley United Methodist Church

December 24, 2014

"No Room for Jesus."

Luke 2:107

After some last-minute Christmas shopping, Clara Null was rushing her grandkids into the car. After she closed the door, four-year-old Jason said, "Grandma, Susie has something in her pocket." He reached into Susie's pocket and pulled out a new red barrette.

Though she was tired, Clara knew it was important for Susie to take the barrette back to the store apologize to the manager and put the item back where she had found it. So, they did just that. Later, they stopped for a few quick groceries. At the checkout, the clerk asked, "Have you kids been good so Santa will come?" Big brother Jason said, "I've been good, but my sister just robbed a store."

Well, I am certain on this Christmas Eve that all our boys and girls have been good. How exciting it is to wait for Santa. Even more exciting, however, was the coming of the baby Jesus.

You may have heard of the man in Wales a few years ago who sought for 42 years to win the affection of a certain woman. Finally, in 1985, on his forty-third attempt, she said, "Yes." By then they were 74 years old.

Every week for more than 40 years, this rather shy man slipped a weekly love letter under his neighbor's door. After writing 2,184 love letters without ever getting a response, this persistent old man finally summoned up enough courage to present himself in person. He knocked on the door of the reluctant lady and asked for her hand. To his delight and surprise, she accepted.

There is something about a personal visit. More than 2,000 years ago, God made a personal visit to the earth in the babe of Bethlehem. It's probably the most loved story ever told. It begins like this:

"In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria). And everyone went to his own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, 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." *Luke 2:1-7*

"No room for them in the inn." Those words have touched hearts for over two thousand years. "No room." Is there room for Christ in your world this evening? That's the simple question we need to ask. Do you have room for him? So many things can crowd him out.

For example, the busyness of this season of the year can crowd him out. This service this evening may be the first chance many of you have had to catch your breath and to take in the true meaning of this holiday season.

Our coldness of heart may also keep him out. Not everyone is prepared spiritually for the coming of Christ into your heart.

In a story written by Harriet Richie told about an incident in her family's life that revealed to her the true nature of Christmas.

Following their church's late night Christmas Eve service, Harriet's family decided to stop somewhere for a late-night breakfast. The only place open that late on Christmas Eve was a truck stop at a nearby interstate junction.

A few big diesels rumbled outside. Inside a few truckers sat at a counter. A jukebox played a country song that went something like this: "When You Leave, Walk Out Backwards So I'll Think You're Coming In." On the front window were a few multicolored blinking lights. The

place smelled like bacon grease and stale cigarette smoke. A one-armed man stood behind the counter. The family squeezed into a booth. A thin waitress named Rita sauntered over. She managed a weary smile and handed them their menus.

Harriet looked around. She felt a little bit like a snob and out of place. Her family had just come from a beautiful Christmas Eve service. And soon they would be heading to their lovely home for the night. She thought one day they would look back with a laugh and say to each other: "Remember the Christmas we ate breakfast at that truck stop with that awful music and those tacky lights?"

She was staring out the window when an old Volkswagen van drove up. A young man with a beard and wearing jeans got out. He walked around and opened the door for a young woman who was holding a baby. They hurried inside and took a booth nearby.

When Rita, the waitress, took their order the baby began to cry and neither of the young parents could quiet him. Rita reached over and held out her arms. "Sit down and drink your coffee, hon, let me see what I can do." It was evident that Rita had done this before with her own brood. She began talking and walking around the place. She showed the baby to one of the truckers who began whistling and making silly faces. The baby stopped crying. She showed the baby the blinking lights in the window and the lights on the jukebox. She brought the baby over to Harriet's table. "Just look at this little darlin'," she said. "Mine are so big and grown." The one-armed man behind the counter brought a pot of coffee to Harriet's table. As he refilled their mugs, Harriet felt tears in their eyes. Her husband wanted to know what was wrong. "Nothing, just Christmas," she told him, reaching in her purse for a Kleenex and a quarter. "Go see if you can find a Christmas song in the jukebox," she told the children. When they were gone, Harriet said, "He'd come here, wouldn't he?" "Who," her husband asked. "Jesus," Harriet said. "If Jesus were born in this town tonight and the choices were our neighborhood, the church or this truck stop, it would be here, wouldn't it?"

Her husband didn't answer right away, but looked around the place, looked at the people. Finally he said, "Either here or a homeless shelter." "That's what bothers me," Harriet said. "When we first got here I felt sorry for these people because they probably aren't going home to neighborhoods where the houses have candles in the windows and wreath on the doors. And listening to that awful music, I thought, I'll bet nobody here has even heard of Handel. Now I think that more than any place I know, this is where Christmas is. But I don't belong."

And as they walked to the car her husband put his arm around her. "Remember," he reminded her, "the angel said, I bring good news of great joy to ALL people."

If you have a cold heart, that story will mean nothing to you. If you have room in your heart for Christ this night, it could change the way you look at the world.

A Christmas sermon written by someone long ago. "Tonight I want to tell you the story of an empty stocking. Once upon a midnight clear, there was a child's cry, a blazing star hung over the stable and wise men came with birthday gifts. We haven't forgotten that night down the centuries. We celebrate it with stars on Christmas trees, with the sound of bells, and with gifts.

But especially with gifts. You give me a book, I give you a tie. Aunt Martha has always wanted an orange squeezer and Uncle Henry can do with a new pipe. For we've forgotten nobody, adult or child. All the stockings are filled, all that is, except one. And we have even forgotten to hang it up. The stocking for the child born in a manger. It's his birthday we're celebrating. Don't let us ever forget that.

Let us ask ourselves what He would wish for most. And then, let each put in his share, loving kindness, warm hearts, and a stretched out hand of tolerance. All the shinning gifts that make peace on earth."

Wouldn't that be a wonderful tradition for us to begin in our homes this Christmas Eve? Hang up an extra stocking for the Christ child? And, perhaps, put in that stocking something truly relevant to the season. Perhaps a gift to be presented later to a person in need. Or simply a prayer saying that you will be more like Jesus in the year ahead. Is there room this night in your world for the Christ child, or is there still no room in the inn?