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**“No Place in the Guest Room”**

**Scripture:** Luke 2:1–7 (NRSVUE)

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 In this busy world we live in, it’s not easy to settle down and get into the Christmas “spirit.” It seems everything is so fast paced that we jump from Halloween straight over Thanksgiving and land smack-dab in the middle of the Christmas season with all the lights and decorations, the family gatherings and the presents. Time moves so swiftly that in all the preparation, we may struggle to find our Christmas joy. Maybe the solution is to wear a Santa costume for Halloween. Maybe that would give us enough time to ease into the true joy in celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ.

 This particular Christmas season, it may be especially difficult to find joy in light of all that has happened to our Israeli and Palestinian siblings in the land of Jesus’ birth. So, the last line of Luke 2, verse 7, “no place in the guest room,” speaks volumes. This phrase pales in comparison to the loss of life, violence and suffering there among God’s precious peoples. How can this lack of hospitality exist in the land where “a light has shined”? Where “the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light” (Isaiah 9:2)? How can there be so little grace in the land where “there will be no darkness for those who were in trouble” (Isaiah 9:1 MSG)?

 How can it be that in our own cities, suffering and violence have become the norm … oppressive social systems perpetuate community trauma … and loving our neighbor as ourselves has seemingly become “every person for themselves” in this “dog-eat-dog” world where we “… see only distress and darkness”? Is there hope?

People of God, yes, there is! Because a “light ***has*** shined” over 2,000 years ago in the birth of Jesus the Christ, there is still hope. There is still hope that hospitality and grace will somehow permeate the spirits of those whose hearts have “no place in their guest rooms” for those with differing opinions or varying ancestral beliefs. There is still hope that God’s love shown through the incarnation will cause attitudes to be changed toward “neighbors” so that true shalom will reign throughout the troubled land.

 For it is God’s love of humanity that soothed Joseph’s doubts about his commitment to Mary, who found herself miraculously pregnant. It is God’s love of humanity to which Mary responded, “let it be done with me according to your word.” It is God’s love of humanity that announced to lowly shepherds the “good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.” The shepherds, like Mary and Joseph, made “a place in the guest rooms” of their individual lives to receive the love of God in these special ways. Let their examples strengthen us in faith, hope and love … and move us toward the true joy of Jesus’ birth in this Christmas season.

 **Please pray with me**: “Holy God, as you have accompanied Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem and your people through times of captivity, wilderness and exile … shelter and sustain all those who flee persecution, oppression, warfare, violence, hunger and poverty. Make a place, not only in “the guest rooms of our hearts,” but open our homes, our gates and doors, especially in this Christmas season, so our siblings might find safety, peace and welcome — a place to live in freedom and without fear; through Jesus Christ, the hope of the world. Amen.” *(Adapted from the Book of Common Worship, pastoral edition, page 269)*

May “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Corinthians 13) in this Christmas season and forevermore. Amen.

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