



**Each one of us is an innkeeper who decides if there is enough room for Jesus.** Tonight, especially, we are called to decide if there is enough room for Jesus in **our** inn.

Brene Brown says that “knowledge is just rumor until we take it into our bones”. Until we move from the head to the heart. As long as the knowledge stays in only in our heads, it often doesn’t *really* affect how I live or how I treat others. I can know it- but I don’t live it. I can spout off the words but they aren’t deep, down, part of my soul. They aren’t part of who I really am, before God or before others.

Perhaps one reason Jesus comes to us first as an infant is that we are often more open to an infant than to an adult. We can wonder and marvel at the precious life before us, hoping and dreaming that life will be better for this new infant in our midst that it has been for us.

Phillips Brooks, the rector of the Church of the Holy Trinity in Philadelphia, wrote “O little town of Bethlehem” that includes the words “the hopes and dreams of all the years are met in thee tonight.” Neither Rev. Brooks nor Lewis Redner, who wrote the music, thought this carol would last beyond that first Christmas of 1868. And yet, it is a carol that we sing each year as a reminder to us of our longing, our hopes and our dreams.

Mary ponders the words and the events that she has been part of for at least the last 9 months. She was a young girl going about her own world, with her own concerns, when the Angel Gabriel started her down a new and terrifying path. She, who was unmarried, was pregnant. And not in the ordinary way. She looked to her cousin Elizabeth for guidance. She returned home to tell her betrothed, Joseph that life for them would not be as they had hoped and dreamed. Something more wonderful, more miraculous, was happening. Did they have the courage- did they have the faith- to walk in the ways that God was calling them to.

And so we come to this night. A remembering of that night so long ago. A night when the child Mary had carried is birthed. In celebration of this new life, the angels sing. The shepherds come and relay to Mary and Joseph that the child- the baby Jesus- was from God. Was God in human flesh. One like us.

“As Christians we recognize Jesus born in Bethlehem as the Messiah, and that was 2,000 years ago. What we now celebrate on Christmas is a remembrance. It’s not a reenactment, nor is it a re-visitation – but a remembrance, a living reminder, that Jesus the Messiah was already born among us, and is really present to us now, which invites a whole different way to look at life every day.”<sup>1</sup>

James Koster writes:

Like that day two thousand years ago, God longs for a temple in which to reside. God longs for a temple, not of stone and light, no matter how glorious, but of flesh and blood

<sup>1</sup> <http://ssje.org/ssje/2011/12/20/look-br-curtis-almquist/> (December 23, 2015)

and a heart of full of love. Like Mary, you are God's temple and God's spirit dwells in you (1 Cor. 3:16) for when you say 'yes' to God you open yourself to God and God's glory abides in you; when you say 'yes' to God, the Word is made flesh and dwells among us (John 1: 14).

Although everyone loves a baby, Christmas is not actually about babies. Christmas is about saying 'yes' to God. Christmas is about making space for God. Christmas is about becoming God's temple. Christmas is about opening the temple of your heart to the love, and life and light of God.<sup>2</sup>

Doing so makes us vulnerable. Not everyone appreciates our faith and we are sometimes derided for believing something that can't be scientifically proven.

Lately there seems to be lots of talk about the practice of mindfulness. We look to the past or to the future but we seem to miss the present. We long for days past that are now perceived as less stressful, as less violent, as days when jobs were plentiful and salaries were enough that everyone could at least be middle class. Our perceptions are not always accurate and when we focus on the past, we miss the good of today. And yet, if we can be honest with ourselves about our past, we can learn from our mistakes. We can remember the good times. We can forgive the hurts and grieve the sorrows. Our present life can be fuller and richer when we can see our past honestly.

Similarly, when we live in a world of "if only" or "when" we also miss the good of today. The present will become the future soon enough and then we will long for what we missed of today. How often have you heard someone say "I can't believe this year is almost over" or "where did the time go?" How many of us are stressed by a list that never seems to end. As soon as we cross one thing off two more things are added. **Stop.** Who made the list? Who decides the priorities? You did. I do. Lists can get in the way of knowing the wonder of the present moment. Lists can get in the way of knowing Jesus – not just the intellectual assent but knowledge that seeps into our bones and impacts how we live.

Curtis Almquist suggests the following:

So where do you look, or how do you look, or at what do you look to know Jesus' presence, and power, and provision? You look at now. Now is the most important time. Where Jesus' real presence will be most real is in the present, now.

The great 18<sup>th</sup> century spiritual director, Jean Pierre de Caussade, called this "the sacrament of the present moment." Remember that a sacrament is "an outward sign of an inner grace." Life – our outward life – is sacramental, every moment of it teeming with God's presence. How we can know the real presence of Jesus is by being really present to life. It's to live our lives with a kind of attentiveness like when someone grabs your

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<sup>2</sup> <http://ssje.org/ssje/2011/12/18/the-temple-of-god-br-james-koester/> (Dec. 23, 2015)

arm and then, pointing at something says, “Look!” And you’re all eyes to take it all in. That’s real living: being really present to Jesus’ real presence, now.<sup>3</sup>

This Christmas live with attentiveness to our world and to our surroundings. Those surroundings include the baby Jesus, God come to live with us.

One reason we celebrate Christmas is because of hope. Our hopes and dreams of all the years and for all the years are symbolized in the baby Jesus. In a new life full of possibilities. In the celebration of angels singing “Glory to God” and “Peace on earth”. Of shepherds who travel across the fields and into town to see this new thing that God has done. We also celebrate because we need reminding that we, too, are loved by God and called to do our part in bringing a life of peace and justice and mercy into being. We need this annual reminder that those hopes and dreams are possible if we will do our part.

“Christian hope is a kind of faith, a subset of faith, or, at least, closely related to faith. I think of it this way: hope is the confident anticipation that God’s mission, God’s vision for the human enterprise will indeed be fulfilled, made real—on earth as it is in heaven. Christian hope is the confident anticipation that what the Scriptures call the Kingdom of God is actually going to happen—in real time, sooner or later. Jesus went all around proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom: hope is believing that he wasn’t just making stuff up. ... Hope situates us in the long trajectory into God’s future. God’s future and ours. The Christian vision of the human enterprise is a multi-dimensional vision in which past, present and future are deeply and richly interwoven. ... Life has more meaning when we have hope. Life has more meaning when we understand that **we** are the builders of something much larger than our own lives and concerns, if we know our place on the long trajectory into God’s future. Life has more meaning when we know we’re on God’s construction team—even if, rabble that we are, we don’t quite know what it is we’re building. Yes, we are rooted and grounded in the past; yes, we are rooted and grounded in this present moment; and because we are in Christ, we are rooted and grounded in God’s future.”<sup>4</sup>

Be present; be fully present, tonight, to your hopes and dreams. Feel the spirit of the Lord Most Holy filling your body and soul with love and delight. And, do not be afraid, for God is with us in the infant child and in the Holy Spirit, forever and ever. **Amen.**

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<sup>3</sup> Almquist, id.

<sup>4</sup> <http://ssje.org/ssje/2012/12/11/gods-rabble-br-mark-brown/> (December 23, 2015)