

CHRISTMAS 2017 (children)

The crib replaces the advent wreath because Christmas has come and the time of preparation is over. Jesus was born in a stable where animals were housed in winter and was wrapped in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger. The manger was a feeding trough for animals. The reason why Jesus was born in a stable was because Mary and Joseph were turned away from the nearby inn which was full of guests on that particular night because people were in town for the census. We should thank God that we have a nice bed to sleep in every night where we can feel warm and safe. Many children don't.

But you don't find Joseph or Mary complaining when they saw the 'no vacancies' sign in the window of the inn. They were so thankful that Jesus was safe even if he had to make do with a stable. They say that God never closes one door but he opens another. The door of the inn may have been closed to Him but by His birth He opens the door of Heaven to all of us.

Strange as it may seem I think God wanted His Son Jesus to be born in a stable where there were no luxuries. The only heat in the stable, for instance, was the body heat from the animals which would have helped to keep Jesus warm.

Having lots of things, even presents, is not what makes us happy. The people in the stable love and care for each other. And when we are with people who love and care for us we are really happy too. Look at the people in the crib tonight. Mary loves Joseph and Joseph loves Mary and both of them love Jesus. The shepherds too were really happy when the angels appeared to them in the middle of the night and told them to go to Bethlehem. A lot of people didn't like the shepherds because they lived like nomads. People would steer clear of them. But when the angels appeared to them they must have felt ten foot tall. They, of all people, were the first to hear of

Jesus's birth. What does the gospel tell us: 'the first shall be last and the last, first'. The shepherds felt at home in the stable with Mary and Joseph and it didn't matter what kind of clothes they were wearing or how rough they looked. I'm sure there's a lesson there for all of us.

Christmas is about God's love for us and our love for God and one another. May the Holy Spirit fill our hearts with love and peace this Christmas and indeed beyond? On this holy night we re-echo the prayer of the angels; 'Glory to God in the highest heaven and peace to men and women of goodwill'.