

CHRISTMAS 2018 (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 which was a feeding container 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 hordes of 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 worldwide 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 they had to make do with an out-building. The door of the inn may have been closed to Mary and Joseph but because of the birth of their son, the door of Heaven is opened for all of us. That door will always be ajar as long as we remain faithful to Him by doing what He asks.

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

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 to see the new baby. A lot of people didn't like the shepherds because they lived like drifters. 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. St Paul in 1 Corinthians tells us that 'those whom the world thinks common and contemptible are the ones that God has chosen'. 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. They say we should never judge a book by its cover. In the same way we should never judge a person by the way they look or the clothes they wear or how they speak.

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? 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 and children of goodwill'.