

CHRISTMAS 2023 (Children)

There is a story about a schoolboy in a nativity play who had his heart set on being Joseph but was assigned as he innkeeper. At the crucial moment instead of slamming the door behind the retreating figures of Mary and Joseph he ran after them shouting: 'It's alright you can have my room.'

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 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 throngs 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 are not so lucky.

But you don't find Joseph or Mary complaining when they saw the 'no vacancies' sign in the window of the inn. They had to make do with a stable. 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 him very cosy as well. The door of the inn may have been closed to Mary and Joseph but thanks to Jesus, the door of Heaven is opened for who try to live a good life.

Getting lots of presents from those who love us at Christmas is great but it's not the whole story. The people in the stable at Bethlehem love and care for each other. And when we are with people who love and care for us we are really happy and thankful too. Look at the people in the crib tonight. Mary and Joseph love each other and they both 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 where the newly born baby was. 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 were first in the queue to hear of Jesus's birth. 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 rugged 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. God loves everyone.

Christmas is about God's love for us and our love for God and one another. We pray that the Holy Spirit fill our hearts with love and peace this Christmas? On this special evening 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'. A happy and blessed Christmas to you all