

## HOMILY for CHRISTMAS – Year C

Tonight/Today we'll take a treacherous trip to Bethlehem and visit the Holy Family and Baby Jesus in the manger who came down to earth to bring us all the Heavenly blessings. Reflecting on this trip, I'm reminded of this cute story I'd like to share with you.

A teenager was telling his pastor about their church youth minister, who was refusing to allow the boy to join in any future camping trips.

"Why not?" the pastor asked. "What happened?"

"I think he is mad because I lost our compass when we waded through a creek," the boy replied.

"He's that mad," the pastor asked, "because a little compass got lost?"

"Well, it wasn't just the compass," the teen responded. "We all got lost!"

Anyway, I'd be afraid to let that boy join me in any future camping trip as well! He's a haven of mishaps! We do not want to get lost & have to spend the night out in the middle of nowhere. That would not be fun at all as we'll have to deal with the elements and other interesting things in the wild. Once I went on a camping trip without a sleeping bag, & let me tell you, it was the longest night of my life as I had to sleep with only a thin jacket. The reason I talk with you about all of those uncomfortable things is because they have a lot to do with the Christmas story. Here is how Luke Gospel tells us about it: "In those days, Caesar Augustus published a decree ordering a census of the whole world. This first census took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria. Everyone went to register, each to his own town. And so Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to David's town of Bethlehem – because he was of the house & lineage of David – to register with Mary, his espoused wife, who was with child. While they were there, the days of her confinement were completed. She gave birth to her first-born son & wrapped him in swaddling clothes & laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the place where travelers lodged."

If you've ever traveled afar, you surely could relate to the Holy Family & their misfortune. Evidently they had to travel away from home to fulfill the required paperwork by the authority. Their destination was miles away from home; & apparently they knew no one in the area. Unfortunately, all the local inns were booked; & the Holy Family had no place to stay. But, that was not the only challenge that the Holy Family had to face. We were told that Mary had to go into labor & needed a place to give birth to her Baby Jesus. I don't know if you have ever had to deal with a difficult situation like the Holy Family did or not. I used to travel with friends a lot in school; & sometimes we went on a long trip without booking ahead for our overnight stay. I remember, on a particular trip out west, my friends & I decided to travel to this unknown town without making a reservation at a local hotel. When we arrived at the town, we saw lots of "NO VACANCY" signs flashing on the motels. We drove around from one motel to another looking for a room and were turned away. We kidded with one another that we felt like the Holy Family in Bethlehem. As we were worrying about having to spend the night in the car, thankfully we found an old motel looking like a dump & yet had to settle there for a hefty price.

The reason I shared with you that "NO VACANCY" experience of mine is to help us sympathize & relate to the Holy Family a little better. They were far away from home & found no place to spend the night. Worst yet, Mary was about to give birth. There was no hospital

nearby for her to check in. What were they going to do? Thankfully God found the only place left for them to spend the night and for Mary to give birth was in a smelly Manger of the town where all the animals were kept. I don't know about you, but I have often wondered what might have happened if a generous hotel manager or a kind guest would have offered the Holy Family a room at an inn to stay.

First, they instead of the shepherds would be able to meet the Holy Family & Savior of the world. They instead of the animals in the Manger would hear the angels sing & see the Heavenly glory. Second, the Holy Family would be so grateful for that thoughtful & kind act that they would ask God to reward him/her with all sorts of Heavenly blessings. Finally, they would get to know all the wonderful things that the Holy Family would bring them & tell the whole inn and town of Bethlehem about it. A big crowd would come to check out Baby Jesus every day; & their business would boom with many new visitors. In fact, there would be a long pilgrimage of visitors to their town; & Bethlehem would receive would receive all sorts of benefits and blessings from the Holy Family & Baby Jesus.

Unfortunately, all the inns chose to shut their doors on the face of the Holy Family & Baby Jesus. For all they cared about was themselves & their selfish benefits. Because of their selfish nature & close-mindedness, they could not see the Heavenly glory & let God help them grow to their potentials & receive all the divine blessings. Likewise, the little town of Bethlehem remained the same with all of its daily fights and squabbles because it did not roll out the red carpet to welcome a divine figure like Baby Jesus. It missed out on a great opportunity to spot the greatest treasure that God sent to the world & make good use of it to bring all kinds of blessings to the people of the town.

Two thousand years later, we do not want to make the same mistake like those inns and the town of Bethlehem by closing our hearts and homes to God. We should not focus on material benefits or selfish gain and turn away from God. We must not put "NO VACANCY" signs at the doors of our homes or cities & tell the immigrants & the misfortunate to go some place else like a smelly manger & fend for themselves. For God often takes on the form of the lowly; & we might turn away the Holy Family & Baby Jesus like those inns & the town of Bethlehem did. We might also turn down a great opportunity to let God bring us & people around us all the wonderful blessings from above. Worst yet, we might miss out on a chance of the lifetime to see God with our own eyes the poor & the social outcast that God might send our way.

My dear brothers & sisters, the town of Bethlehem has remained little & continued its petty fights & squabbles to this day because it did not recognize Baby Jesus & invite Him to make His home there. Those inns have kept on struggling with their business because they did not see Baby Jesus & welcome Him to stay with them. Our world will keep on fighting & hurting one another if we do not recognize Baby Jesus in our daily lives & invite Him to make His home in our midst & stay with us. Our country will remain divided & not grow to its potential if we cannot see Jesus in the poor & the misfortunate & let God work through them to bring us all kinds of blessings from above.