

For there was no room for them in the inn.

In 2001 I visited Italy for the first time, just after the beginning of the Third Millennium! And in my travels I happened upon San Zeno, a Millennial church built in the year 1000, so at that point this church was already 1000 years old...it is in the city of Verona. And on the outside of the grand entrance doors, in stone relief is the life of Jesus carved from one side to the other. And as I walked up to the door one of the first images catches my eye. The Nativity scene of Jesus Birth. It is not like the one we are used to seeing, where Mary and Joseph either stand and kneel on either side of the manger in prayer and adoration. NO it is a scene, where Mary is laying on her back holding her belly and Joseph is sitting, obviously exhausted, head propped up by his hand. Jesus is in the back of the scene, in the manger being tended to by the ox and the donkey.

I. There is a knock at midnight. Joseph, speaking on behalf of both Mary and Jesus (who is in her womb still), seeks entrance to the homes and lodgings of those in Bethlehem. Although the Jewish people in those days placed a high obligation upon the duty of hospitality to the stranger and passerby, the answer repeatedly given is, "No room here." Mary's obviously advanced pregnancy and the imminence of delivery seem to make little difference.

It is indeed a cold night, not so much in terms of the air temperature, but in terms of the hearts of the people. Surely *someone* could make room for a pregnant woman! But no; no room at the inn.

Yes, it is a cold night. The only warmth to be found is amongst the animals. An old Latin antiphon for Christmas says, *O magnum mysterium et admirabile sacramentum, ut animalia viderent Dominum natum iacentem in praesepio* (O great mystery and stunning sacrament, that animals would see the newborn Lord lying in a manger). Here in the manger, warmth will be found, among the animals. It is sometimes said that man can be brutish, but the reality is that we can seem to sink even *beneath* the beasts, doing things to ourselves and to one another that even animals do not.

Scripture says,

The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know me, my people do not understand ... They have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him (Is 1:3-4).

There was a knock at midnight. The animals received Him and gave warmth, yet we, His own people, knowing Him not received Him not. But in this midnight darkness and cold, the light and warmth of God's love will shine forth. *The people who walk in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone (Is 9:1).*

II. The Stooping – Surely God stoops low to come from light of heaven to our war-torn, hungry, dark and cold world. As He stoops, He stoops to the lowest place, being born not in a palace or even in a comfortable home. He stoops to a manger. **God will defeat Satan's pride with humility.** All who will find Him this night must also stoop.

Those who want to find our God must stoop low. Even to this day, when one visits Bethlehem and wants to see the place of Jesus' birth, one must first enter the church through what is called the "Door of Humility." One must stoop greatly to enter through it. Yes, we must stoop low to find our God to humble ourselves to realize that God dwells among us.

God hates pride. He just can't stand it because He sees what it does to us. He comes to break prides back, not with clubs and swords or by overpowering, but with humility. Darkness cannot defeat darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot defeat hate; only love can do that. Pride cannot defeat pride; only humility can do that. So God stoops.

Tonight, God calls us with this same humility. He could have ridden down from Heaven on a lightning bolt and stunned us into fearful submission. Instead He goes to the lowest place. He comes quietly, non-violently, without threat, as an infant. Even in this lowly way, though, He is still calling.

So there is a knock at midnight. Scripture says, *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me* (Rev 3:20).

III. The Saddest Thing – When human history is complete and the last books are written, one of the saddest lines in all of that history will be this one: *For there was no room for them in the inn.* No room, no room. How strange and sad for this world that God simply doesn't fit. He doesn't fit our agendas, our schedules, our priorities. No room; He just doesn't fit.

Again, we the faithful, are challenged to live anew on this Christmas eve/morn and to invite him in. To be humble enough to allow him to enter.

What keeps you from recognizing Jesus and opening the door wide when He comes?

I pray you will make room in your hearts and lives and will receive the gift of Him tonight. I promise you total victory and transformation in Christ Jesus. There will come to you the increasing gift of transformation into the very likeness of God. **Tonight is a night of gifts and Jesus stoops low to give us a priceless gift: the power to become children of God. Is there room in the "inn" of your heart?**