

December 24th 2020 - Christmas Eve Luke 2:1-14

A Messy Christmas

Christmas was stinky, loud and messy. But more about this later.

Do you remember the times when we spent some time each year in hotels? Do you remember what that was like? Were you a beach hotel person or a city trip traveler?

The city trip folks among you might know this scene: you spend a full day touring the city, walking miles and miles because by the time you figured out how the public transport works, you were already at your destination, if you walked there. After a full day, you go to a nice restaurant, return to our hotel dead-tired and you just want to sleep so that you can get up early the next day. Yaaaaawn... You close your eyes and are just about to fall asleep when... your neighbours start shouting, screaming at each other. The walls are so thin, after two minutes you know their names and half of their story and after three minutes you know enough to take sides in this argument.

The next morning, half the hotel is lining up at reception asking for a refund, including the arguing couple because of a lack of privacy.

Now think of that poor Inn keeper!

There is this man with a probably (according to the customs of the time) 14-year-old girl, unmarried, she pregnant. If they weren't predestined to argue half the night or—worse—she would give birth. The Inn keeper could probably see in his mind how all the refunds would go over the counter the next day.

He had thirty seconds to make a decision and he decided that the Inn was booked out, but he, not a man without heart, offered the stables.

In that time that would have been a natural cave in which animals were kept, so approximately the standard of an average Motel today. There they could be noisy as they wished and the animals wouldn't ask for a refund.

Who can blame the Inn keeper?

Christmas was not silent night. Christmas was loud, there was screaming, it was stinky, the animals didn't help to make that better and over the whole mess, the angels thought it was a good idea to sing *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*, allegedly in Latin which no one present understood anyway.

Well, that was the real Christmas. And you know what, this year's Christmas is even worse. This year, we are the Inn keepers and we have to decide whether we let this feast in, a Christmas without extended families, a Christmas when many people are lonely, sad and at the end of their strength to cope with the world and these wicked angels still sing in form of our radios in Latin, English or Feliz Navidad in Spanish.

Will you let Christmas in or send it to your stable? I wouldn't blame you, if you did the latter.

Some people, especially some churches, are highly excited. Finally, they won their battle against the "modern" Christmas that is allegedly all about presents and they declare this Christmas this year as the one and real Christmas. The thing is that many, so busy with their crusade against the "modern" Christmas, forgot the real message of Christmas and think that a Christmas spent in reflective solitude was the one and only real thing.

But from the beginning, Christmas was all about relationships.

What happened in that messy, loud and stinky cave was that God the Creator of heaven and earth bridged that gap between the Divine and creation by giving the Divine Word to be born in a human being. God became human to re-establish the relationship with God in a completely new way. God became one of us so that in Jesus the Christ, God could walk among us and teach this new unbreakable relationship and this unconditional Divine Love. And it was a woman giving birth under terrible outer circumstances.

This event was of such power that the shepherds on the fields and even the wise men far in the East were drawn to this cave.

Christmas is not about the presents, all right, but Christmas isn't about silent reflection in solitude either. Christmas is about relationships with God and our fellow human beings in whom we encounter Christ. That is why this Christmas is difficult for many and I fully understand.

If you are lonely this Christmas or not able to celebrate with your family, I can only encourage you not to lock out Christmas this year. You are the Inn keeper. It might not look like it but God is always good for surprises and God has always found ways to be close to the lonely and weary. If you need help, reach out.

This year, with my family so far, I wanted to cancel our Christmas but didn't and I want to keep my door open for God's surprise, for God's gentle touch that gives us comfort in our solitude. Maybe God will find ways to turn this reflective Christmas into a loud, stinky and messy one and help us to feel connected to our loved ones in unexpected ways. A Messy Christmas to you all.