

Pastor Jamie's Sermon

**Good Shepherd Church, December 24, 2023 – 6PM Service
“How Does a Weary World Rejoice? We Make Room”**

The Message

There are many lessons in the Christmas story. We can, and often do, preach on these verses in the Gospel of Luke every year at Christmas, and each year, we could say something different about it.

This year, I want to talk about hospitality.

For those of you who have not been to our Advent services, we have been addressing the question, “How does a weary world rejoice.”

The first week of Advent we talked about acknowledging our weariness. After that, we talked about finding joy in connection, and then allowing ourselves to be amazed.

This morning, we talked about singing stories of hope.

And tonight, we're going to talk about making room.

Opening ourselves to the presence of God and welcoming Jesus into our hearts.

We've read Chapter 1 of the Gospel Luke in its entirety, and we've heard the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth and the miraculous conception of John the Baptist.

We've heard the story of Mary, an unmarried virgin, who becomes pregnant by the Holy Spirit.

Through both of these stories, we have heard about the radical hospitality that these people demonstrated.

Elizabeth and Zechariah made room in their hearts for a child – a child they believed impossible.

They had closed their hearts and their minds to the possibility of ever having children. Their hearts had hardened, they'd built walls to protect themselves and to try to overcome their shame and their guilt.

But as soon as they learned that they would be blessed with a pregnancy, those walls around their hearts began to crumble and they made room for their son.

They also made room for each other – they shared their joy and their grief over the years that they waited in shame and frustration and sadness.

Meanwhile, Mary, unmarried but engaged to Joseph, was given the news that she would conceive miraculously through the Holy Spirit.

Without hesitation, she made room in her heart for the movement of the Holy Spirit, for her new son, and for all the challenges this miraculous virgin birth would bring for her.

Likewise, Joseph - a man engaged to a woman who becomes pregnant before their wedding and without him - could easily have decided to cast Mary and her baby aside.

But he did not. He demonstrated tremendous love and trust for Mary and her son, and he made room in his heart, which must have been hurting at least a little bit.

And then today, we hear how room was made on a bed of hay for Mary to give birth and for the baby Jesus to lie his head.

We also heard how quickly the shepherds made room in their busy lives dedicated to their flocks to go and see the new baby that the angel told them about.

You see, this entire story is a story of hospitality and making room.

Despite their weariness, their shame, their guilt, their busy-ness, or the walls they'd built in their hearts, all of these people made room for the Son of God.

This story then begs the question: do we make room in our own hearts? In our own lives?

We are called to make room for the lonely. The hungry. The poor. The downtrodden.

We are called to make room in our hearts for the stranger sitting next to us. The stranger on the street corner. The exasperated mother at the grocery store or the family next door that is struggling to make ends meet.

We are called to make room for the Son of God in our hearts, our homes, and our lives.

We are called to make room even when it's inconvenient for us, when we have our own troubles and our own worries.

We are called to hospitality, and these stories remind us that we are better able to make room in our hearts when we do these things in community with others.

We are not on our own.

The beauty of a church community is that we are surrounded by people who care about us, who love us, and who regularly make room for us.

And, within that community, we love and support and lift each other up in and for Jesus Christ.

Tonight, we celebrate the birth of Jesus. And in doing so, we invite hospitality and we make room in our hearts.

As we turn down the lights and sing Silent Night at the end of the candlelight service tonight, I invite you to think about how you can make room in your own hearts so that, through your own weariness, you are able to rejoice.

How does a weary world rejoice?

We acknowledge our weariness, find joy in connection, allow ourselves to be amazed, sing our stories of hope, and we make room.

Make room for love, make room for light, make room for your neighbors, your family, and your friends.

Make room for each other. Make room for the ones who cannot be here with us tonight. Make room for those who feel they have no choice to but to do it all on their own.

And make room for Jesus. He is the light of the world, and we can rejoice through our weariness knowing that He was born because so many people made room for Him. And He always makes room for us. Amen.

Jesus, thank you for being our light in the darkness. Thank you for showing us how to make room in our hearts.

Thank you for making the sacrifices you made for us. Help us to share our hospitality and make room for others in our church, in our homes, in our lives, and in our hearts.

Teach us radical hospitality and help us to live by your example.

Help us share our light with the world, and make room for the light of others in our own hearts.

Tonight, we are grateful for the reminder of the story of your birth. We are excited to make room for you in our hearts.

We are ready to light our candles and raise them in your honor as we prepare room in our hearts and our homes for you and for others. Amen.