

“Absolutely No Room. . .”

Luke 2: 1-20

Dr. Anne M. Cameron

December 13, 2009

Today we consider how the gospel of Luke tells the story of the advent of Jesus Christ¹. Luke’s is the longest gospel. As such, Luke provides many details surrounding the birth of the baby Jesus. Luke gives us the wonderful Magnificat---Mary’s song-like response to the angel’s announcement. Luke tells us of her cousin Elizabeth’s unlikely pregnancy, her husband Zechariah’s muteness, and Zechariah’s song after the baby John is born.

Luke is full of details and setting, and he spends time informing us of the historical setting of Jesus’ birth (during a census), the spiritual setting of Jesus’ birth (amid angel announcements), and the social setting of Jesus’ birth (among lowly shepherds). Luke is known to have particular concern for the oppressed, and it is no accident that he makes sure we understand the Messiah is first visited and known by men who were outcasts. Luke’s story moves from the high of Caesar Augustus, the harbinger of peace, to the low of vagabond shepherds.

And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

The young girl slumped into the molded plastic seat. Her face was mottled, her hair pulled back in a rough knot. Her ragged navy pea coat could only be buttoned part way down, pregnant as she was. Every single seat was taken. Some sprawled on the floor with their belongings. Others leaned against a wall. There was barely room to move around.

¹ We have been looking at all the gospels. As it turns out, we have looked at the gospels in the order in which they were most likely written: first Mark, then Matthew, and today, Luke. Luke’s was probably written around 85 AD.

Men, their ties askew, quarreled over an electrical outlet. “Excuse me, this isn’t your personal office, you know.” “You’ve been plugged in for two hours. Give someone else a chance!”

A storm raged just outside huge glass windows. The snow fell so heavily you could only see huge shadows outside, giant mammoths swathed in white. Everything was cancelled, coming and going.

Executive platinum club members quickly disappeared through the elegant doors of the Executive Lounge. Those who were lucky enough to have friends or family nearby called or texted to see if they could crash for the night. Savvy travelers with expense accounts nabbed every single hotel room within 20 miles. There was absolutely nowhere to stay.

To add insult to injury, airport concessions were running out of food. No way they could have anticipated this overflow crowd slamming them long after the dinner specials sold out. Rumors were swirling that even highways were being shut down.

The frail young woman sat sullen, alone in the midst of the crowd. She glanced up when a young man with a backpack spoke softly to her. He had a bruised banana and a package of Cheetos in his hand.

“Sorry, it’s all I could find. I called my old roommate, but his number was no longer in service. How are you feeling now?”

“Ok, I guess. Still queasy.”

Suddenly a look of pain crossed her face. She grimaced as she touched her distended belly. Then her look of pain turned to one of fright.

She thought she was close but this was her first baby, so she couldn’t be sure.

There was nowhere to go. No room to lie down. No spot of privacy. Even if there had been a hotel somewhere, they only had about \$50. What would they do if now was the time?

*No room at the hostel.
No room for the poor.
No place for the indigent.*

*No bread for the hungry.
No drink for the thirsty.
No healthcare for the children.
No jobs for the uneducated.*

*No space for the immigrants.
No place for the down and out.
No maternity ward for the traveler.
No safety net for the alien.*

*No place at the table.
No way out for the hopeless.
No escape for the prisoner.
No relief for the suffering.*

*No comfort for the lonely.
No warm bed for the children.
No future for the mentally ill.
No family for the orphans.*

The night wore on. Some dozed. Others stared blankly at video screens. The girl did not sleep. She broke out in a sweat as the contractions grew more intense. People seated nearby began fidgeting. Some abandoned their precious seats, leaving a bubble of space around the couple. The young man began pacing. A rather nondescript middle aged woman had been eyeing them for some time. She strode over, plopped down next to the girl, and gazed into her face.

“How many weeks?”

“I don’t know exactly. They said the baby was due in a few more weeks.”

“First baby?”

“Yes.”

“How far apart are the contractions?”

There was no time to hesitate. She was a midwife, she said, as she glanced at her wristwatch. She encouraged the young woman to breathe and then she began barking orders in the direction of the young man, her voice crisp but calm.

“I want you to get hold of security. Find out if there is a doctor in this crowd. We are going to need towels and disinfectant and some privacy. See what you can do. Now!”

With that he switched into high gear, as did several nearby travelers who were still awake.

“I’ve got a tent in my backpack!”

“I’ve got a blanket!”

“Does she need some water?”

People began digging in their carry-ons. Someone actually had a box of sterile rubber gloves! There was a pillow, and a clean pillow case. A young mother offered a baby blanket, some wipes, and a few diapers.

Word spread throughout the terminal, in hushed tones and then in growing murmurs. “There’s going to be a baby born here! Tonight! Can you believe it? Here in the AIRPORT!” A dignified looking gentleman began passing a hat. These three would need money, that was for sure, once they got out of here.

A doctor was located. A retired OB-GYN. Can you believe it? Only he was a cancer doctor. He hadn’t delivered a baby in decades, but he was willing to help. The tent was put up in a corner, just enough room for the young girl and her husband. Was it her husband?

Some were still snoring in their seats, oblivious to the activity. All that ended with the blood-curdling screams. Then a faint sound of a newborn cry, a faint sound that soon gathered itself into a full blown wail. The midwife emerged from the tent, beaming. “It’s a boy! A baby boy!” And a cheer erupted in the crowd, a cheer that lingered in the air, a cheer that bounced off glistening cheeks. A cheer that would not long be forgotten, as people were

wide awake that night, awake in a way they rarely ever were. They had witnessed something incredible, this birth. There was absolutely no doubt in their mind. They had been a part of it, a part of

*Room being made
Food being given
Space offered*

They had been a part of:

*A maternity ward in an airport
A safety net for a couple with no place
A way out, relief, and solace
Comfort for the lonely
A warm bed for a baby*

They had been a part of giving it, and in the giving, they received it, too.

The cheer died down to a murmur, as people continued to marvel at what had happened that night.

On the intercom you could just pick out the strains of “Hark the Herald Angels Sing”.