

Isaiah 9:2-7; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-20
Christmas Eve 9 p.m. – Year B – December 24, 2017

The Rev. Linda Spiers
Trinity Episcopal Church

I welcome you on this most holy night. Amid the joy and wonder of a baby boy's birth, we gather in thanksgiving to God for loving us beyond measure or imagination and for putting on human skin. This baby Jesus came to change the world and continues to arrive in our hearts to change us and to change the world.

The image on tonight's bulletin reminds us of the way this baby came into the world. Mary and Joseph were traveling to Bethlehem to be registered. People from all over were flocking to towns and cities to register. Mary and Joseph knocked on doors looking for a place to sleep and couldn't find room. It wasn't that innkeepers were rude or short with them. There simply was no room in homes or in inns until they reached an innkeeper who offered a lowly stable. The image on the bulletin was created by Gari Melchers, and the original is on display at his art studio in Belmont, downtown Fredericksburg, Virginia. The fine arts building at Mary Washington University is named after Melchers. This image powerfully depicts what life might have been like for Mary and Joseph and their little baby Jesus—the light of Jesus shined forth in the darkness of nowhere to lay their weary heads.

There is an amazing story in today's *Hartford Courant* about some Puerto Rican families finding sanctuary in Hartford. There **has been** room at the inn for many evacuees since September at the Red Roof Inn in downtown Hartford and all

around our state—a total of 116 hotels are participating in a relief program to house evacuees. Hurricane Maria ravaged the island of Puerto Rico and left many stranded and without anything. More than 1,000 have sought help in Hartford alone. Hearts and FEMA have reached out to make hotel rooms a home for these families who are homeless and looking for a way to get back on their feet. Many want to stay and some want to return to their island home. There is room at the inn and yet FEMA’s Transitional Shelter Assistance resources are not endless.

Of these families Hartford City Councilwoman Wildaliz Bermudez said, “They are not looking for a handout. They are simply trying to start a new life after having lost everything; some are nurses, others teachers. While here they have faced discrimination and have had many doors closed for simply being Puerto Rican.”¹ These families are separated from loved ones and are far from their homeland. We pray for them this night as we hear the story about Mary and Joseph returning to Joseph’s homeland to be registered and finding no doors open except in a stable. It was enough for them, just as volunteers and others are helping to make these Puerto Rican families have enough.

There is a powerful picture in the Narthex sent to me last week by a friend who writes passionately about the Middle East. It a photo of a Syrian woman with a newborn baby asleep in a milk crate. They live in a refugee camp in Greece. Amidst the horror of living in a camp, there is utter joy on her face as her eyes gaze

¹ Vinny Vella, “Room at the Inn,” *Hartford Courant*, December 24, 2017, A6.

of her new little one. One can look at this and see a modern day Madonna. The raw and immediate sense of joy is on this woman's face as I can only imagine was on Mary's face.

The Holy family can be seen around us as we think about the many and varied ways that Jesus breaks into the world to comfort the sorrowful and to bring hope to a world that cries out for hope. This Christmas Eve is all about love—love so great that we can't explain it rationally and yet know that it is truth. We have been awaiting this baby Jesus whose path has been made straight. This baby grew into love beyond understanding and calls us to love—this tiny vulnerable little child has the power to love and to show us love—love that can change the world.

Presiding Bishop Michael Curry shared a favorite Howard Thurman poem in his Christmas message to us all. It was included in the 4 p.m. service bulletin.

When the song of the angels is stilled

When the star in the sky is gone,

When the kings and princes are home,

When the shepherds are back with their flocks,

Then the work of Christmas begins:

To find the lost,

To heal the broken,

To feed the hungry,

To release the prisoner,

To rebuild the nations,

To bring peace to others,

And alas, to make music in the heart.

This child enters the world in ordinary circumstances with extraordinary power. There is enormous power in the love that is given to us in Jesus Christ—power that gets renewed every time we gather at this table. May you go out this night knowing the power of love in you to make music in the world.