

Christmas Eve  
Year A

Isaiah 9:2-7  
Psalm 96  
Titus 2:11-14  
Luke 2:1-20

The holidays are a time to visit family and friends. It is estimated that over 100 million people will travel during this season this year. Many will fly, but the vast majority are expected to drive. Perhaps they are going to Grandma's house or to visit their children. Some may just be wanting to get away for a few days. But, visiting family and friends is the predominant reason for travel during the holidays.

When we are expecting visitors, we spend a lot of time getting the house ready, preparing special meals, and wrapping all of the presents. Unexpected guests throw us into panic mode. We discover we are not prepared to host these people. Think how Mary and Joseph felt on that first Christmas morning.

The trip they had taken was not easy. Trying to find a place to stay in a crowded town proved to be almost impossible. And, Mary was having a baby without any of our modern conveniences. As Mary and Joseph were just getting the baby settled down, a bunch of dirty, smelly shepherds showed up on the doorstep with an incredible story of being visited by angels and being told to come find this child.

Although they were unexpected and not the people we might invite into our homes, Mary and Joseph greeted these people and welcomed them. While the story the shepherds told was outside the normal, Mary and Joseph were getting used to visits by angels and, therefore, accepted this tale as a message from God. We don't know how long these visitors stayed, but we are told that Mary pondered what they said in her heart as the shepherds returned to their flocks.

Are we capable of being as welcoming to unexpected strangers arriving on our doorstep? How would we react? In our homes, we may not even answer the door to let these strangers in. But, how about here at church? Will we welcome anyone who shows up, no matter what they are wearing and if they had been unable to bathe before they came? We do a great job of welcoming people who appear to look and act like us. Are we as welcoming to the homeless on Sunday morning?

Jesus came into this world as a defenseless baby who was dependent on Mary and Joseph to feed and protect Him. Many people were drawn to Him by angels and other signs from God. They came to honor this child who was born into a poor family who was living in a shed because they knew this child was different from all the others. This child was the subject of angelic proclamations. So, they came and Mary and Joseph welcomed them.

People come to us for a variety of reasons. Perhaps they are seeking God, or friendship, or acceptance. May we be as welcoming to the unexpected visitors during this holiday season and

throughout the year to come. Scripture tells us the angels have been entertained unawares because they do not appear as we expect angels to be. We never know who it is who walks through our doors. Let us be as open and welcoming as Mary and Joseph were to their visitors.