Christmas reflection

Christmas Service Reflection- An Open Door

Good morning/evening everyone.

As we approach Christmas, many of us are familiar with the nativity story. We picture angels and shepherds, wise men and stars. We imagine the stable, the manger, and baby Jesus lying in the straw.

But today, I want us to pause at a moment in that story that can easily pass us by. Mary and Joseph arriving in Bethlehem.
Tired.
Worried.
Unsure.
And finding no room for them.

Luke tells us simply:
"She gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them." (Luke 2:7)

It's such a familiar verse that we can miss the human reality behind it.
Imagine Mary.
Nine months pregnant.
Far from home.
Travel-weary from the long journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem.
Perhaps feeling the first signs that labour was not far away.
Imagine Joseph.
Responsible for keeping Mary safe.
Trying to provide.
Trying to find somewhere suitable for them to stay.

nocking on door after door.
Hearing the same answer.
"No room."
"No vacancy."
"Sorry, we're full."

As a husband and future father, Joseph must have felt helpless. He couldn't change the situation. He couldn't create a room where none existed. All he could do was keep searching and hope that someone would show compassion.

And Mary?
I wonder what she was feeling.
Perhaps she was exhausted.
Perhaps frightened.
Perhaps overwhelmed.
After all, this was not how she imagined the birth of her child.
This was the child God had promised.
The Messiah.
The Saviour of the world.
Yet there was no grand arrival. No royal welcome.
Instead, there was uncertainty, discomfort, and rejection.
The Son of God entered the world not through an open palace gate, but through a closed door.

And isn't that often true of life?
Many people know what it feels like to stand where Mary and Joseph stood.
To feel overlooked.
Unwanted.
Unseen.
To knock on a door and find it closed.
Some children feel that way at school.
Some families feel that way in their communities.
Some parents feel that way when they are struggling and don't know where to turn.
Some people walk into a church wondering if they will be accepted, wondering if they will belong.

The Christmas story reminds us that Jesus understands those feelings.
Because before he could speak a word, before he could perform a miracle, before he could teach a crowd, he experienced exclusion.
His family experienced being turned away.

The gospel begins with a family searching for a welcome.
And yet, remarkably, God still works through that difficult moment.
The closed doors of Bethlehem did not stop God's plan.
The stable became a holy place.
The manger became a throne.
The place nobody wanted became the place where heaven touched earth.
That's the wonderful hope of Christmas: God meets people exactly where they are.
Not only in the comfortable places.
Not only in the successful places.
But in the places of struggle, loneliness and disappointment.

And so the Christmas story asks us a question.
If there was no room then, is there room now?
Is there room in our hearts?
Is there room in our churches?
Is there room in our communities?

Hospitality is one of the great Christian virtues.
Throughout scripture, God's people are called to welcome the stranger, care for the vulnerable and make space for those on the margins.
Because every act of welcome reflects the welcome we ourselves have received from Christ.
The church should be the place where nobody hears, "There is no room for you here."
Instead, people should hear:
"You matter."
"You belong."
"You are welcome."
"You are loved."

That welcome doesn't begin with a building.
It begins with a person.
It begins with every one of us.
A smile.
A conversation.
An invitation.
A willingness to notice someone standing alone.
An openness to hear another person's story.
Small acts can become open doors.

And this is why we're supporting the work of Spurgeons this Christmas.
Every day, through its services, Spurgeons seeks to offer the kind of welcome that Mary and Joseph were searching for.

When children are struggling with their mental health.
When families are facing challenges.
When young people feel isolated.
When parents don't know where to turn.

Spurgeons is there with an open door.
An open door to support.
An open door to hope.
An open door to practical help.
An open door to compassionate listening.

In many ways, the heart of Spurgeons' work reflects the heart of the Christmas story.

Making room.
Making space.
Seeing people who might otherwise be overlooked.
Walking alongside those facing difficult journeys.
Offering dignity, care and belonging.
Every family welcomed, every child supported, every parent listened to is a reminder that Christ's love is still reaching people today.
And perhaps that's something we can all be part of.
Through our giving this Christmas and through how we live.

Who around us needs a welcome?
Who feels unseen?
Who might be carrying fears and worries that nobody else knows about?
Who, like Mary and Joseph, is quietly searching for a door that will open?
This Christmas, perhaps God is calling us to be that open door.
To create room where others see none.
To extend kindness where others pass by.
To offer hope where hope seems scarce.
Because every act of welcome points to the God who welcomed us first.
The God who came into our world as a vulnerable child.
The God who understands rejection and loneliness.
The God whose love always has room for one more.

As we reflect on the stable in Bethlehem, may we remember that the greatest gift we can offer others is the gift of welcome.
May our homes be places of welcome.
May our churches be places of welcome.
May our communities be places of welcome.
And as we partner with Spurgeons this Christmas may they continue to be a place where children, young people and families encounter an open door, a listening ear and the transforming love of Christ.

Amen.