

***Luke 2. 6. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born,
7. and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger,
because there was no room for them in the inn.***

Because there was no room for them in the inn!

And all this time I was under the impression that the reason Mary and Joseph ended up in the stable was because the inn was full.

Isn't that what we sing in our Christmas carols – "In the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed?" This is certainly what we see in all the nativity plays across the country, even of our own childhood: "*There is no room -- the inn is full -- you can stay in the stable out back.*"

But, that's not what Luke says happened here, he doesn't say the inn was full -- he just says that there was no room "**for them**".

What does that mean? - "for them" - what was it that made the innkeeper turn them away I wonder on the most hopeful night of our year?

As we enter this holy season of Advent, like Mary and Joseph we are travelling with them on the dusty road to Bethlehem. Like them we are preparing for the birth of Christ once again in our hearts this Christmas. There are many in our world who face dangers on a journey to a place that they hope to call their home.

Mary and Joseph travel because the Emperor had decreed that they needed to in order to be registered in his Great Empire as citizens. I recall the humiliation, the anger and the hurt of many hundreds of people from Jamaica who in the 1980s were forced to register their right to be in the county that that they had been brought up to believe was their mother country, the country that had turned to them for help as it came out of the destruction of two world wars, a country that they had thought to belong and had put roots down and grown families and businesses as one island people amongst another.

This Advent many of us journey with Joseph and Mary but thank God for not having to face the dangers of that journey, and in thanking God know that for many others such a blessing has alluded them.

As we prepare to welcome the Christ child into our hearts this Christmas, maybe as clergy we can look anew at the blessings that we have received in the incredible privilege that is Christian ministry and see if we have room in our homes for those who have made the perilous journey to our own front door.

*Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown,
When Thou camest to earth for me;
But in Bethlehem's home was there found no room
For Thy holy nativity.
O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,
There is room in my heart for Thee.*

Emily Elizabeth Steele Elliott (1836-1897)