

## Christmas Message

The Rev. Dr. Anita Farber-Robertson

Ann Fields was my friend and mentor as a Director of Religious Education many years ago. One year she told this true story about a Sunday School and the little boy named Robbie who was developmentally delayed.

The decision was made to have a Christmas pageant that year and tell the Christmas story as part of the worship service, like we did here tonight (at the early service). But in this pageant, the children would have parts and lines to say all assigned ahead of time so they could practice.

When the parents were planning the program, they thought that they had better not give Robbie a part, because he would not be likely to really understand it, or carry it through, and they didn't want the pageant ruined.

When the children heard this, they were very upset. Robbie had always been included in everything they'd done as a church school.

So, the parents decided to include Robbie, and gave him the part of the innkeeper. His part was to stand behind the door, and when Mary and

Joseph came knocking, he was to open it up, look at them and say, **“No, there is no room for you here at the inn.” and slam the door.**

Robbie took this part very seriously. He practiced and practiced for weeks, saying his line and slamming doors all around the house. He had it down. They had rehearsals, and Robbie knew his part and his lines. Open the door. Look at the couple and say “No, there is no room for you here at the inn,” and slam the door.

The night of the pageant came. Everyone was excited, including Robbie. They had worked hard for this day.

The pageant went on. The couple came trudging, tired and worn, Mary with her huge belly, and with sad and pleading faces, they stood and knocked on the door. Robbie opened the door, looked into their tired eyes and said loudly and clearly, “No. There is no room for you here at the inn,” and slammed the door. **Slowly the weary couple turned and began to walk away. The door creaked open. Robbie’s face peered out.**

**“Wait,” he said. “You can sleep in my room.”**

Some people thought the pageant was ruined. But for some, their hearts broke open. As Robbie’s did, and as the birth we celebrate was meant to

do.

I wonder if it is not we who are developmentally delayed, we who still do not know that the right response when need knocks at our door, is to find the way to make enough out of what seemed less.

The needful couple, alone and afraid, walk the streets still. The baby born into a world that does not know how to cherish its arrival, calls out in every town and city. The powerful who stalk the vulnerable, as they once stalked the holy family, walk our halls of power, still.

And they have not been able to quiet the haunting judgment and piercing beauty of the promise born in Jesus that desolate morn. The message breaks our hearts and we are called to love and light again.

For...

Each night a child is born is a holy night-

Time for singing,

A time for wondering,

A time for worshipping.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sophia Lyon Fahs