

CHRISTMAS EVE

When I moved from Clinton County to Jackson County Missouri last year, I neglected to inform the county assessor. I did not receive a bill for my personal property tax this year. If I don't pay that tax I cannot update the license plates for my car, which expire next month. So last week I dropped everything and went to the county courthouse, where, as I expected, I had to wait my turn at one window while the line at the cashier's window got longer and longer.

My inconvenience was slight when you think about Joseph going from place to place trying to find room for Mary to give birth to her firstborn son. One of the saddest lines in the nativity story is, "There was no room for them in the inn." Mary was at her moment of greatest need, but other travelers reached the inn ahead of her. Joseph improvised. He found a place where animals lodged. The inn didn't have room, but the animals did. So the Son of God was born in a field and placed inside a feeding trough.

We all know the feeling of being told "We have no room" or "You have to stand in line." You may think you deserve special treatment. But if others got there ahead of you, you may spend a lot of time holding the phone, looking for a parking space, or waiting to pay a bill.

We understand all of that. What's hard to understand is when someone could take care of us, but they don't. They may not like the way we look or the way we speak. Or they may be too stressed to help one more person. It makes us angry if someone says, "There is no room in the inn," when we know that there is.

Many of us are guilty of giving this message to others: "I have no room in my house for a guest, no room in my day for you, no room in my family for that kind of person, no room in my church if I don't like what you've done, no room in my budget to give to charity, no room in my heart for what God asks."

When I reached the window at the Jackson County Courthouse, the lady who handed me my bill looked at the next window where I could go pay it. She improvised. She said, "You can stand in line, or I can give you an envelope, and you can put your check in the mail." She found room. I took the envelope. Sometimes it doesn't take much for us to help another person. All they need is a new idea, a few minutes of time, or a smile. We may not have much room, much money, much time or much energy. But who knows? When we share what little we have with someone else, we may discover that right there, right under our nose, Jesus Christ is born.