

Is There Room? A Welcoming Christmas Nativity Story

Sandra Sears

Sue Nirta, Illustrator

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This inclusive Christmas story focuses on a central message: the welcoming nature of the baby Jesus.

Is There Room?: A Welcoming Christmas Nativity Story is a rhyming picture book about the birth of Jesus authored and illustrated by two Sisters of the Anglican Church in Australia. Although the story is well known, the singsongy children's book adds depth by focusing on one central message—the welcoming and inclusive atmosphere of the manger as guests come to see the new “king.”

The biblical story is told in four-line rhyming stanzas that resemble song—no wonder, as its author, Sandra Sears, also writes hymns. *Is There Room?* begins with an innkeeper telling Mary and Joseph that he can only give them accommodation in his stable. Once Mary gives birth to Jesus, the book takes an untraditional turn, as not only shepherds and kings come to visit, but also talking animals and a child.

As the title indicates, each visitor asks Mary and Joseph if there is room for them to come and visit with Jesus, and each time, an italicized refrain emphasizes that, despite the growing crowd of well-wishers, there is always enough room.

Is There Room? stands to engage even the youngest of readers, as the refrain plays up “a cow that goes ‘Moo!’” alongside talking mice and chickens. Young readers and listeners will also be pulled into the story by the last nativity visitor, drawn as a young waving child and referred to as “Me” in the refrain.

Illustrations are brightly colored and move the story along with each new human or animal visitor at Jesus's side. The story ends with a two-page illustrated spread of the whole group of visitors—from angels to mice—gathered snugly in the manger.

Throughout, the tone of the text is casual, with word choices such as “tidied up,” “midnight or so,” and “Patches the Cat.” Other word choices rely heavily on a lexicon more common in Australia: “chocker block” for full; kelpie, a kind of sheep dog; and “lad” for boy. An Australian accent might even make some non-rhyming text, such as “Ralph” and “himself” and “purr” and “there,” sound more like near rhymes.

By focusing on the welcoming environment, *Is There Room?* transcends being just a religious children's picture book as mice line up next to kings and cows, all to get a glimpse of the new baby in the manger.

AMANDA MCCORQUODALE (March 14, 2016)

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