

No Room In The Inn

One of the most berated people in the Christmas narrative of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem is the innkeeper, and he is not even mentioned in the scripture. No matter, people will take off on a tangent at the drop of a hat, never needing fact to get in the way.

What is true is that there were so many people there that there was no room in the inn. It was census time, and people had to travel to the place of their ancestors to register.

Ironically, the houses and inns of Bethlehem were filled with thousands of Jesus' family, but they had no room for him that day. I'm sure they were lining up to invite them after the birth, particularly when they heard about the angels, the shepherds, and all the hoopla which was going around Bethlehem at that time.

What I would like to posit is that no room in the inn put an exclamation point on the humility of Jesus and his family. If he had been born in a palace, with all the attendants and royalty, it would have been quite a different beginning.

If Joseph and Mary had been recorded as arguing with the innkeeper, or forcing their way into more "suitable" accommodations, the humility angle would have been blown out of the water. And our manger scenes would not be sitting in the place where they are today in our homes.

You do have one out, don't you? You are getting ready for the arrival of Jesus in the midst of the hustle, bustle, and jingle of the secular Christmas rush? You have been to church recently? You have read devotionals which speak of Mary and Joseph, Angels and Shepherds, and peace on earth, good will to men with whom God is pleased?

That room is the one God wants to talk about today. Is there room in your heart for Jesus? Does he walk with you in difficulty? Is he the light in your darkness, the joy in your life?

If we miss inviting Jesus in this Christmas, we may miss out on many other things God has in mind for us. The notion of housing a stranger Jesus amplified with the story of the good Samaritan. People have picked up on the giving to

others, the alternative to traditional gift-giving which involves giving to those in dire need instead of giving each other things we don't even need.

Bethlehem, Pennsylvania is a great place to have letters postmarked for spiritual meaning at Christmastime. I imagine the post office there is overloaded this time of year with requests for such letters to be sent to special people.

Years ago, a young newly wed couple decided to go on their honeymoon to the beautiful Poconos in Pennsylvania. The town nearest the Poconos is Bethlehem, PA. They called to reserve a room but were told that the only hotel in Bethlehem, PA was full for a convention and the only other place close to the Poconos was way over in Nazareth, PA. The new husband had to give his wife the disappointing news that there was no room in the Bethlehem Inn.

Now the point is not the sad news for the young couple of America, but the fact that there were so many Christians in Pennsylvania that many towns have such significant names to Christians as Bethlehem, the place where Jesus was born, and Nazareth, the place where he grew up.

O that we were making statements like that in our geography and daily life today. Bethlehem USA was founded in the very act of sharing the gospel with others.

On Christmas Eve in 1741, David Nitschmann and Count Nicolaus von Zinzendorf, leading a small group of Moravians, founded the mission community of Bethlehem along the banks of the Monocacy Creek by the Lehigh River in the colony of Pennsylvania. They came to set up missionary communities among the Native Americans and unchurched German-speaking Christians. They named the settlement after the Biblical town Bethlehem of Judea, the birthplace of Jesus. "Zinzendorf said, 'Brothers, how more fittingly could we call our new home than to name it in honor of the spot where the event we now commemorate took place. We will call this place Bethlehem.' And so was Bethlehem named after the birthplace of the Man of Peace." (from a letter by Gordon Dent to Mr. T. Donald Bain March 3, 1965 quoting from "Story of Bethlehem Steel" by Arundel Cotter)

So not only do we need to find room in the inn for Jesus this Christmas. We need to found and grow Christian communities dedicating to telling people about the baby born in Bethlehem who grew up to be their savior.

Knowing Jesus is one thing. Letting people know that there is room in today's "Bethlehems" as well as in heaven for all who come to know Jesus as Savior.

And naming new communities of faith, places where even the innkeeper is welcome, is a challenge for us all!