

Innkeepers

Isaiah 9:6-7

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD, Almighty will accomplish this.”

The role of the Innkeeper in our Walk established the fact there is “No Room” in the Inn and Mary and Joseph have been relegated to a stable on the far side of town.

YOUR BIBLE REFERENCE: *While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born 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.* (NIV Luke 2:6-7)

BACKGROUND: Inns, or *khans*, were usually quite crude affairs. They consisted of a series of thatched rooms built around a central courtyard. Often they were no more than covered porches. The travelers brought their own food for man and beast. They brought the pot in which to cook it on an open fire in the yard. They brought their bedding, and often their firewood. They looked to the innkeeper for water and shelter.

The lone inn of Bethlehem was a shabby sort of place. It blended with its surroundings. Both had seen better days. The inn was extremely old. It may have been the one built by Chimham, who was one of David’s favorites (2 Sam 19:37). If so, Jeremiah tells us it was the place where the murderers of Gedaliah rested on their flight to Egypt (Jer 41:17). For many centuries there was an inn built on land which belonged to the family of David. It was widely known as “The Inn of Chimham”. Legend said it occupied the exact site of the house where David was born. If that old story is true, it throws

new light on the events we are considering, and gives added significance to some of them.

When Mary and Joseph reached Bethlehem, no one took any notice of them. They were lost in a milling crowd of nameless ones. None of them had wanted to come. Some of them decided to make the best of their compulsory vacation. They had not tasted the good rich wine of Bethlehem for a long time and there was plenty on hand. They were too busy with their conviviality to pay any attention to stragglers and strangers. Like most of the men, Joseph wore crude sandals which were made of castoff rope. They were the badge of the poor. Mary was barefooted...The innkeeper took one look at them and when he said, “No Room!” he meant it.

Tid-Bit Information: Bethlehem is a small village, 5-6 miles south of Jerusalem. Land is hilly—with lots of rocks. Temperature can be 25 to 75 degrees. May through October no rain and December through March is the rainy season. On the road to Bethlehem you would see scrubby trees—oak, cedar, olive, and myrtle are some. Most people walk to Bethlehem from Jerusalem on a narrow winding road. One could possibly travel 15 miles on a good day. They would never travel on the Sabbath. Roads from Jericho to Jerusalem were very treacherous, steep, narrow, and lots of places for robbers to hide. In Bethlehem you could find many beggars too. Just east of Bethlehem you can see the white and chalky wilderness of Judea.

CENSUS: the Romans started the census system shortly before Jesus’ birth. They require registration every 14 years. People were required to return to the place of their birth to get their property registered so Rome would know how much tax would be charged. The Roman soldiers would be intolerant of the fanatical Jews—but tolerant of the quiet Jew. They can compel anyone to carry their burden for one mile. **Jewish Marketplace:** Narrow streets, noisy, aggressive sellers, smelly. Bartering is the way to buy—don’t walk up and pay the first price. Food in the marketplace comes in from local areas. Spices and citrus fruit are shipped in and more expensive. Have olive oil for

lamps, cooking, and medicine, bread, vegetables, and fruit. No corn around in the 1st century.

CUSTOMS: Business as property transfers, marriages, etc. was transacted at the village gate. The Elders sat on benches there. The SYNAGOGUE is a place of learning. Scribes are experts of law and instruct in the synagogue. Priests serve in the Temples ONLY—there was no Temple in Bethlehem. Women didn't have equal rights—only in work. They worked in the fields alongside men. Women and girls were not forbidden in synagogue but were held to the back. Houses were small but always had a guest room—even tents had guest rooms. Animals often housed under or near houses—often goats and sheep come into the city at night. A farm would be the size of 4-6 acres. Most families kept a goat or two to milk, a few sheep for wool, and one or two donkeys or oxen as draft animals. Chickens or other fowl were in the courtyard. **COINS OF THE TIMES:** Roman coins—silver **denarius** (plural is denarii) was wages for 1 day of common labor. Greek coins—**drachma** is about the same as a denarius. Double drachma was used for paying the Temple tax. (No temple in Bethlehem) so this is why they would need money changers. Jewish coin—**lepta** (translated the same as mite) is small in value (fraction of a penny) It would take about 80 lepta to equal 1 denarius. **Shekel** is an Old Testament term and it is possible to be used as a weight of silver or gold (4-5 oz). Herod had his own coins too. In Old Testament times people bought either by exchanging goods or by paying an agreed weight of silver or gold, for instance, a shekel is a weight, not a unit of currency. **Talent** was equal to 3,000 shekels.

INTERACTION WITH ALL GUIDES AND GUESTS: No matter which way the Innkeeper is perceived—brash and uncaring or gentle and compassionate—his part of the Christmas story tells us he turned away Mary and Joseph that Holy Night. This is significant in “setting” the Holy Scene at the manger.

This is one place, especially, that Guides are encouraged to promote children's participation in the Walk. They will tell the

children to all get in front and perhaps someone would like to knock on the door—in the pretense in the Innkeeper sees all the children he will take pity on the family and find room. Consider this when you open the door. We don't want them “scared to death”. You may have to be patient till they get their nerve up. The GUIDE will intervene if no one speaks up.

This is usually a brief stop. You can ask questions—Where? Who?—How many? Concerning the family, but in the end you have NO ROOM! Guides will persist and then you MUST suggest the stables on the other side of town. BE SURE TO MENTION you just sent a young couple over there---and that she was great with child.

Also you can say that the Roman soldiers patrol the area and will not allow too many people to stay because they will block the road.