

No Room in the Inn? What a Blessing.

Luke 2:7 provides this simple statement:

And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

Over the years there have been many sermons preached about No Room, sometimes making the Innkeeper out to be a cruel or heartless person. Songs have been written emphasizing the No Room theme. Art galleries, especially those in Europe that I have seen, have a variety of artists' renditions of large buildings with Mary and Joseph standing before the main entrance or looking in a window.

What's wrong with that picture? The artists did not know what a Judean inn was like. And most modern preachers and songwriters have no idea what an ancient Judean inn was like.

An ancient Judean inn can best be described in modern terms as a primitive campground surrounded by a stone wall. The wall was for protection. The innkeeper provided water, feed for the animals and a place to pitch your tent if you had one. There was no privacy, and the usual people and animal noises that accompany such a campground would be distracting.

At the Bethlehem inn, people coming from short distances and arriving early would have had no problem finding space in the inn. Others may have stayed with close relatives. But Joseph and Mary came from Galilee, and because of Mary's condition the trip was slow, and their arrival late. The inn was full.

Bethlehem was a small village a short distance from Jerusalem. There were no large buildings to accommodate the families returning to their own city to be taxed. But God provided something better than the campground for Joseph and Mary.

Bethlehem sits on a hill of limestone, and in the hillsides are caves hewn out of the rock. Many were used for sheltering flocks and herds. The cave in which Joseph and Mary found shelter was new and had not yet been used for animals. It was clean, warm and private. There were no disturbances like those in the campground.

When the shepherds went to Bethlehem after receiving the announcement from the angels of the Savior's birth, they knew exactly where to go to find the babe lying in a manger.

Consider this. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, in a new cave hewn out of rock. When he died 33 years later, he was buried in a new tomb hewn out of rock less than ten miles from where he was born.

Most of the material about ancient Judean inns and the birthplace of Jesus was obtained first hand during a trip to Palestine in 1966. Our tour guide was knowledgeable of scripture relating to the life of Christ. He made the visit to the inn a significant time of presenting information that puts the Biblical account in proper perspective.

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