

No Room in the Inn: The Innkeeper's Wife Reflects

We felt so sorry for them, my husband and I,
when they knocked at the door of our inn.
The young husband was clearly at his wits' end.
He'd joined a caravan on the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem
and was looking after his pretty, pregnant wife
as best he could, as she rode patiently on the family donkey.
The closer they got to Bethlehem, the greater the crowds making the journey.
By the time they reached the edge of the town,
Hundreds and hundreds of people were milling round the narrow streets.
Some had planned to stay with friends or relatives,
others simply settled down under blankets at the side of the road;
and, of course, many arrived at our inn
which soon filled up. Well, after all -
we weren't used to catering for so large a crowd in Bethlehem.
And we didn't have a census every day!

But that young girl - she couldn't have been more than seventeen or so -
so sweet, so quiet, quite bewildered by all the noise and confusion.
God love her! I couldn't turn her away.
I'm a mother myself, and her baby was clearly due at any moment.
'What about the cave round the back?' I asked my husband.
'We could put some clean straw down:
it's dry and sheltered,
and I'm sure the animals wouldn't disturb them.'
And her young man heaved a visible sigh of relief,
and clasped me warmly by the hand in thanks.
He led their mule, still bearing his wife,
Round to the rear of the inn.

The moon seemed unusually clear and bright
almost highlighting the cave entrance.
The Plains of Bethlehem stretched below
and the faint sound of sheep bleating
wafted into the still night air.
The oxen shifted slightly as we showed the couple in,
but they made no sound.
My husband followed us in, clutching two bales of fresh straw
which he promptly scattered in a vacant manger
(‘You can lay the baby there,’ he told the young man.)
and on the floor.
Gently, we helped the young woman off the mule

and eased her on to the straw,
I beckoned to my husband, the Innkeeper, to leave.
I'll get some water and some towels,' I told the man, and hurried back into the inn.
Poor girl! I thought. So young and tender.
I hope the baby's all right after that awful journey.
I picked up some old cloths -
(They'll need them to wrap the child in, I thought).

As I opened the inn door.....

.....I heard a baby cry.
Surely not! So soon! Sweet heaven!
I quickened my step and arrived at the cave entrance.
Praise be to God!
What a lovely sight!
A bouncing, healthy, baby boy.
Naked and wrinkled,
cradled in his teenage mother's arms,
while her happy husband watched over them both.

The moon seemed even brighter now,
the air even stiller.
the night was strangely silent,
and holy.....

Tasks

1. Who is the Innkeeper talking about?
2. Who was the baby that was born that night?
3. Explain in detail what was special about him.
4. Why was he different from all other babies on earth?
5. Imagine you were a journalist in Bethlehem that night.
Write an article for your newspaper. You may use the Gospels to help you describe the event.