



Sermon, December 25, 2016  
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Coburg and Junction City United Methodist Churches

## **Make Room! The Innkeeper's Defense**

### **Scripture: Luke 2:1-7**

**2** In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. **2** This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. **3** All went to their own towns to be registered. **4** Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. **5** He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. **6** While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. **7** And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

### **Host:**

Christmas is perhaps the biggest annual show in our culture. Most of the trappings of Christmas have little to do with the original reason and meaning of the holiday, but even that story is one of the biggest shows around. The Christmas storyline – the one dealing with the birth of Jesus the son of Joseph and Mary of Nazareth, that is – is filled with adventure, intrigue and mystery. It features other-worldly visitors, murderous tyrant, seekers and practitioners of occult wisdom, rustic ruffians, a young family on the run, a birth in desperate circumstances. It is a drama through and through. The story has been so thoroughly rehearsed and replayed for us that we rarely pause to consider who the people might be in this story. For the last two Sundays in Advent, we prepared for Christmas by getting to know some of the key players in greater depth through a series of “interviews.” The first Sunday, we met the Archangel Gabriel and heard about his encounter with Zechariah of Jerusalem and Mary of Nazareth. Last Sunday we met Mary and discovered the significance of the names we call Jesus. Today, we will meet someone who actually isn't mentioned in the Biblical stories, but who must have

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been there - someone who usually gets a bad rap - the one who said, "there's no room" - please welcome the Innkeeper!

*(Innkeeper enters, dressed in common clothes, perhaps a cook's apron, or barkeep apron. Sits.)*

Welcome to our show this morning. I'm sure that people are very curious to get your side of the story concerning incidents that occurred in Bethlehem 2000 years ago.

Innkeeper

Well, I'll do my best. I'm presuming you are referring to a birth in the stable cave out back of my inn. Funny, you know, I'll walk into a room and not know why I went in there, but I can remember that incident quite clearly.

Host

Great. So, to refresh our memories, Judea was a province of the Roman Empire, and Caesar had issued orders that a census be taken of the empire, isn't that correct?

Innkeeper

Sure, that's what kings and emperors do. They want to know how many ducks and chickens you've got so they can take the feathers to make their pillows. I don't understand the traveling thing, though.

Host:

Traveling thing?

Innkeeper:

You know, why people had to travel to some ancestral home to register. Never made sense to me. I mean, the government wants to know where you live now because they want to know where to find you to get your money. All I know is there were a bunch of people in town. It was a madhouse. People were arriving looking for places to stay, food to eat, places to put up their animals. You know the roads weren't safe, so people would travel in big groups, almost like a

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caravan. One or two caravans at a time I can handle, but not so many.

Host

But weren't you set up to handle guests?

Innkeeper

Do I look like Howard Johnson? Listen, I basically modified and enlarged my own house a little. I inherited a nice-sized house that had a few extra rooms, and decided, hey, why not take in guests and bring in a little extra money. My wife, she's a good cook, my brother he makes beer, it all came together, you know what I mean? I pay taxes to the Romans, a little to the Temple in Jerusalem, support the local synagogue, and my wife, she doesn't have to dress shabby, okay?

Host

So, what could you tell us about that couple that arrived that night, on a donkey, ready to give birth according to the stories?

Innkeeper

Yeah, like I said, I remember them. A tough case. It was late, and all my rooms were completely full. I brought out extra mats for people to sleep on. I had people sleeping in the dining room, for crying out loud. Like I said, why they had to travel to do this census thing is beyond me, but let me tell you, most things Roman are beyond me. Me? I just try to stick to myself, do my own business, not get in anybody's way. But wham! The emperor says do this, and before you know it, thousands of miles away from Rome, in little Bethlehem, we get all these travelers. What are you to do, you know what I mean?

Host

According to my recollection, you couldn't make room for them, is that right? But wasn't it obvious the woman was really ready to give

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birth at any time? Couldn't you have asked someone else to change rooms?

Innkeeper

Would you judge me harshly? Remember, there were all these new people in town. Respectable people as well as riff raff. For weeks my place was full of grumpy customers, no one wants to be here, you know what I mean? They are here because they have to be. It was constantly "Innkeeper get me this. Innkeeper my room is missing this, innkeeper my room is crowded, innkeeper this wine tastes sour, innkeeper the bread is cold." I'm running day and night up and down the stairs, out to the store room, my wife she is working her fingers down to the bone – the very bone I tell you – fixing meals, she even hires out a girl to help. Day and night it goes on. All because of Rome. No one likes the tax. In fact, there's talk of mounting a revolt against Rome. I say, don't let me know, keep me out of it. If you're successful, great, one less brick on my back, you know what I mean? But everyone's grumpy. Why not, huh? And now this bedraggled Galilean duo from Nazareth.

Host

So, into this mess, Mary and Joseph came. What were your thoughts when they came to your door and you saw them standing there?

Innkeeper

My thoughts? Well, I listened to their story – a real tale of woe, let me tell you. I thought to myself, Why he drug her along on that long journey on donkeyback just to come here and register is beyond me. And she being ready to deliver. What husband in his right mind would do that? I have no room for them, my inn is filled with nasty, surly sweaty paying guests as it is. I felt for 'em, you know? But if there's no room, there's no room, right?

Host

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But you didn't completely turn them out, did you?

Innkeeper

Of course not. My wife comes along, she sees the situation, she takes me aside, she reminds me about the cave out back. So, "Fine," I said, "I have a stable out back. It's a little cave, built right into the hill, next to the house, but it's off the road. It's clean, you can make a warm bed in the straw, here are some blankets. And don't worry, it's on me. No charge.

Host

No charge?

Innkeeper

Who do you think I am, of course no charge. It's not a real room. The guy, the husband, says, thank you very much, they'll never forget me. I mumbled to myself, "I'll never forget this myself."

Host

And tell us about the baby.

Innkeeper

Oh yeah, well, that's why I'll never forget it. So, it's getting late, I'm bushed, my wife is bushed, and another knock comes on the door, and it's the husband again, only this time he's like panicked. "My wife is having a baby! Can you help?" He's like desperate, pleading with me. Do I look like a midwife? But my wife is there, she comes to the rescue. She says, "My sister is a midwife. I'll go get her." So, she goes, and she helps her sister. Later that night, a baby boy comes out, kicking and screaming. The mother had brought the cloths to swaddle the baby in. We put some hay in the feedbox to keep the child warm, put a blanket on him, hung some blankets in the doorway to keep out the draft.

Host

And what was the baby like?

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Innkeeper

A baby is a baby, you know what I mean? He was cute, though. I mean, all babies are cute, especially when they're asleep. But I did find myself just standing there looking at that family, thinking to myself, "What's in store for them now? After all this travel, it couldn't have been easy. Now with this precious little child, where do they go from here? Times are hard. There's unrest in the streets, the highways aren't safe." I really felt for the father, you know what I mean? And what of the baby? Who will he grow up to be? Such humble beginnings - where will he end up?

Host

Who would have known back then? Who ever knows what will happen to anyone we encounter?

Innkeeper

Here's the thing: we all have a part to play, that's what I say. The question we all have to answer is this: "When it comes time for your part, what are you going to do?" Me - my part came that night. I didn't have room, but I made room. I made room. (To the audience) What about you? When the babe of Bethlehem comes knocking on your door, will you make him room?

*(brief pause)*

Host

Thank you for coming.