**THE INNKEEPER**

**A Monologue**

*(The innkeeper sits at a table, drinking.)*

Ahhh, there they are again, those disapproving glances and judgemental stares. What gives? Is it because you don't like my drinking-not very becoming I must admit. Call it a professional hazard. Or is it because I am the infamous innkeeper?

I should be used to it by now, since for over 2000 years I have been misjudged as a person. But I tell you, folks, it is not getting any better, especially at this time of the year; my feelings are hurt to the point of being depressed. Oh, if only I had not phrased it that way, if only I had used words different from "No room in the inn." Those words, spoken in a moment of frustration, have found their way into this revered book of yours called the Bible. I dare say, I'm the most misunderstood and misrepresented character in the scriptures, the mean spirited guy of the Christmas story, the innkeeper.

To my horror and disgust, every Christmas, all over the world, in Christian churches large and small, the story is read and acted out. Children are encouraged to participate in Christmas pageants, and boys are vying for the role of the innkeeper so they can shout out, "No room in the inn," and slam the door in ]oseph's face.

Well, I tell you, people, this it not the way it was, and if you have a few minutes, I would like to set the record straight. (*gets up from table*)

Imagine the scene...It is bedlam in Bethlehem. The taking of the census decreed by Emperor Augustus is in my opinion not worth the trouble. Mind you, it is good for business, especially for merchants and innkeepers, but nevertheless, trouble. Half the population have been travelling for days, in this the coldest season possible. If you have no relatives in town, you are very hard-pressed to

find accommodations. Look at my inn: it is full to the rafters, no doubt about it, especially since it is one of the less expensive inns in town. My establishment has no private rooms for rent. The inn is one large hall with a gallery all around, and all along the walls are cubicles with carpets and curtains where you put your belongings and go to sleep. The middle part is filled with tables, cushions, and mats to sit on, where guests eat, talk, drink, swear, dance, gamble, sing, and make

music. The inn, being full to overflowing on this evening-of Christmas-is noisy, smelly, filthy, with dancers sitting on drunkards' laps. My family and servants run around with trays of food and drink, and we have to climb over our guests. Here am I trying to keep order in this sea of humanity and merry-making.

Despite the fact that I posted a "No vacancy" sign outside, there is the knock on the door. It is already dusk. I open the door, and there stands ]oseph, holding his donkey by the reins, laden with all his belongings and what looks like a female figure. He is not a man of many words. Soft-spoken, he pleads to be admitted. Frustrated as I am with all the commotion inside, I say something like, "Didn't you read the sign?" He then points to his wife, who only now I realize must be due

any moment, and I shake my head again and state regretfully but firmly, "There is no room in the inn." How could I admit this couple? There is not an inch of privacy, and she should give birth in this chaos, in this whirlpool of humanity? There is a limit to what a good innkeeper can allow considering the responsibility he has toward his guests and his enterprise.

But Joseph looks so dejected, and his wife so tired. I take pity on them. I'm thinking fast, all sorts of possibilities go through my head. All the other inns are just as booked. My sister has her house full with her in-laws, and my friends and neighbours are equally burdened by houseguests. But hey, there is my family's stable at the edge of town. It is clean enough, has a good roof, and has plenty of straw to keep them warm. It is also quiet there.

I draw a quick sketch in the dust, explaining to Joseph how to find the stable, and off they trot with grateful smiles. *(Innkeeper sits down again)*

Little do I know that she will give birth to the most famous baby on earth, and that I become part of the Christmas legend (Luke 2, verse 7). Mind you, even if l had known, I would not have acted differently, except for that hastily spoken sentence, "No room in the inn." It is like taking a phrase out of context and making a media sensation out of it. Some clergy encourage their parishioners to believe that my actions were spiteful, careless, and mean, lumping me in with the bad guys the likes of Herod. I really did the best I could under difficult circumstances, and I never felt guilty about my decision, nor did I lose

any sleep over it. But I do feel harshly judged by biblical history with its misguided interpretations, and I can only hope that you find it in your heart to reconsider my story.

Am I really this mean spirited guy, or am I the practical and caring innkeeper? Wow, I feel better now having gotten it off my chest. I should have done this years ago. I thank you for having given me of your time, and I wish you many more merry Christmases and a happy New Year.

As we reflect on the experience of the innkeeper, in what ways might we relate to his experience? It would have been a challenging and oppressive time to be an innkeeper. Bethlehem at the time would have been part of the Roman Occupation and one would have to be very careful about who they interacted with. An innkeeper would have been especially on guard. Any suspicion of welcoming people who were critical of the Romans or authorities in power, would have been met with severe punishment.

It was a busy night. By the time the young couple appeared, it was probably very late. Mary and Joseph would have been moving very slowly with Mary being so pregnant. The innkeeper was probably exhausted when they arrived at his door. So in his exasperation he was curt, short, and maybe even a bit rude. In that moment, he could not find it in his heart to welcome anymore guests. But then he has a second thought, the stable, it would be better than nothing. He finds room in his heart to open it up to them.

On this night, in these days, in our time, we could ask ourselves, who are the ones that we might be quick to turn away who need room – literal room, or room in our hearts for love and acceptance? As we reflect on the atrocities of Aleppo we have been hearing about this past month, how do we make room for those in need of a new home? How might we welcome and make room for those who are already here? Who else needs room? Who else feels marginalized and excluded in our time, in our communities?

Jesus comes as a child, breaking into our lives in unexpected ways. He broke into the life of the innkeeper in an unexpected way. I am sure he heard the stories about the visitors to the stable that night and wondered what had transpired there. He may have even been moved to be glad he found them room. The Christ breaks into our lives offering love and hope, compassion and peace. He is Emmanuel, God-with-us. On this night we receive the message that we are not alone, regardless of what we go through. Whether we are the ones who need room, who need love who, need grace, or the ones who can offer room, God is with us. Jesus comes, that we may have hope and peace, in the midst of turmoil, despair, fear and hate. May we embrace that message this night and every day of our lives that we may open our hearts and our rooms to those in need that others may see the Christ in us, that we might see the Christ in others, knowing that we are not alone. The one who we celebrate is born in us this night, that we may know love, challenge fear, bring hope, work for peace, that all may know joy. Amen.