

Words from the Innkeeper
Christmas Eve, 2015
Sardis Baptist Church
Luke 2:1-20

It's about ten o'clock in the evening, and I just received a knock on my door from a young family seeking shelter. I recognize these faces: Joseph is one of my distant kin, and his young wife Mary is expecting a child. Joseph and Mary aren't the first relatives to make this request. Already, a dozen other family members are staying with us. The emperor has declared that everyone must register for the census. It being a tiny little town, travelers must rely on the hospitality of friends and family. In fact, when we have to go each year to the annual festivals in Jerusalem, my family often makes the same request of our distant kinspeople. And with communication being so difficult, we too have found ourselves arriving late in the evening, and without the benefit of advanced notice.

Our home is meager, and my wife and I have had to be creative to find space for our visitors. We have but one main sleeping area, as well as a little backroom called an inn – in your time you would call it a guestroom. But already, we have eight people crammed into this tiny little room – there's just not enough space to fit another family.

Not to mention the fact that Mary is pregnant, and honestly, she may even deliver this evening. She needs rest and a quiet space.

But my wife knows just what to do. There's a nice space in the adjoining barn. We place fresh hay and blankets in the warmest corner, the one that shares a wall with the main room. My wife thinks of everything. With a designer's touch, she places straw in a stone manger, and drapes the manger with strips of red and green cloth to soften its look. It's not much, but it's clean, and it's dry, and it's safe. And here, in this space, Mary will have her privacy.

Once our guests are settled, we serve them some bread, and stew that's more broth than contents. We hear about their journey, and news of relatives we have not seen. And Mary and Joseph share news of what's happened in their life. A child, who is to be our Messiah. It's almost impossible to comprehend.

God has chosen to work through these two simple people, in this small little corner of the world. The Messiah is coming!!!

The One who comes tonight, he is the One who will proclaim God's declaration to be part of this world. Always.

The children of Hagar and Sarah wander the lands, searching for peace and security. The One who comes tonight, he is the One who will offer an invitation of love: "Come to me, for my yolk is easy and my burden is light."

The children of Jochebed cry out in slavery, "Lord, hear us!" The One who comes tonight will respond: "I have come to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Hannah and Samuel long for a leader who will help Israel keep its covenant with YHWH. The One who comes tonight will offer wise counsel: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and all your strength AND love your neighbor as yourself.

Mary and Elizabeth, sit in each other's company, and they wonder, "What kind of world will our children live in? Is there hope, for those who seem forgotten?" The One who comes tonight will proclaim hope for the marginalized: Blessed are those who are poor, blessed are those who are hungry, Blessed are those who weep, who are reviled, who cannot find room in the inn...for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Friends, the One who comes tonight proclaims, "God is our future – and that future lives here and now with us. Emanuel has come!"

I am anxious to meet this child. I wish that I could offer more. A lavish greeting: A room. A bed. Fine silk sheets and scented oils.

But since I cannot offer these lavish things, I'll offer him something else: I'll offer him room in my heart. For in this space, there is room for a God of limitless possibilities.

Sardis Baptist Church, is there room in your heart for this same God? Amen.

Words of Unity: Christmas Eve

Hagar: God granted me a son, Ishmael. I wondered, what will his future hold?

Sarah: God, granted me a son as well, Isaac. And I too, wondered, what will his future hold?

Hagar: Will he know peace?

Sarah: Will he find acceptance?

Hagar: Will he know God's love?

Congregation: For unto us a child is born, and he shall be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Jochebed: Our people cried out in Egypt, and God heard us. I gave my son Moses to an Egyptian woman in hopes that he would have a future.

Miriam: I watched my brother from afar, and I wondered, "Will my brother have a future?"

Pharaoh's Daughter: I made this boy my own, and I too wondered, "What will his future hold?"

Congregation: Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; For he is coming. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth.

Hannah: I prayed to God, "Give me a son, and I will give him back to you." God answered my prayers, but still I wonder, "God, what kind of future will there be for my son, Samuel?"

Samuel: I grew strong, and I have lived to serve God and to serve Israel. But still I wonder, "What will our future hold?"

Congregation: But you, O Bethlehem, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.

Elizabeth: A prophet stirs inside my womb. His name is John. What will his future hold?

Mary: Like my cousin, I too am to bear a son of great significance. But I am anxious. What will his future hold?

Congregation: And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Mothers: What will the future hold?

All: Emmanuel. God with us! This day and every day!!! The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it. Thanks be to God.