

INNKEEPER

Innkeeper: Shalom! My name is Eleazar. I own this small inn, here on the edge of town. What town, you say? I am not surprised you did not know. This is Bethlehem. Many travelers miss it entirely. My inn is humble, but comfortable. We serve our guests well and care properly for their animals. My wife is busy with the travelers now. Even my daughters are helping.

Ah, you are so many, a large caravan. You must have your own tents, I suppose. That is why you just stop to water the animals. I wish you all could all stay a while in Bethlehem. But not all at once, and not today. Today we are full to overflowing. I cannot count the number we have turned away already. This is a small inn, and we are a small town. Small, but very beautiful... and very historic. We are King David's city, you know!

Of course, there is no king in Israel now. That is why we are subject to these aliens, these foreigners [spit]. And it is they who have called this accursed census. Of course it is good for my business, but for many, it is a great disruption and hardship! How can I be happy when so many suffer?

As I was saying, come to Bethlehem, but not now. Come in the spring, after the winter rains and before the summer heat. On these hills, (are they not lovely?) you can see the temple sheep, tended night and day around the year. These are the sheep that will be sacrificed by the priests at the Temple for the sins of the people.

So you see, we have great significance. The prophet Micah even wrote, many centuries ago, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

Of course, there is no prophet in Israel now either, no prophet and no king. Yet we hear many strange tidings. We hear because travelers will tell us much, if they find our lodgings comfortable and our fare satisfying... and if we ask the right questions at the right time.

Recently, we heard an amazing story of an old priest, Zechariah, I believe was his name. His wife was barren all her years. In her old age, she conceived, and when she did, her husband was struck dumb. Yet when she gave birth to a son, and Zechariah wrote the name of the boy, his voice returned.

That was remarkable enough, but then the priest prophesied about his son. Let me see if I recall what the traveler told me... "And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him."

Perhaps there will be a prophet and a king in our future. Then we will be rid of these oppressors, these foreigners, these Roman dogs... [listens]... Excuse my language. Here come my daughters.

[Daughters come in both talking at once about guests.]

Daughters, (2 echos 1): Aba, there is a young couple at the door.

Innkeeper: What, daughters? Travelers, at this hour?

Daughter 1: They look very tired.

Innkeeper: Did you tell them everything is full?

Daughter 2: She is on a donkey. She is with child.

Innkeeper: What is this you say? With child?

Daughter 1: She looks so miserable. Can't we do something?

Innkeeper: Curse this Roman census! [turning to the audience] A thousand pardons, I must tend to this matter. [turning back and walking towards the exit] But even our own room we have filled so that we must sit by the fire side tonight.

Daughter 2: Abba! The stable! It is very clean.

Innkeeper: [thinking] That is a good idea, if they are agreeable. Let us speak with them.

Daughter 1 : You always said that our stables are nicer than some people's houses, Abba!

Innkeeper [fading out as they walk away]: Perhaps that is true, but I never thought we would actually ask people to stay there.