

“A Night with the Inn Keeper”
Providence United Methodist Church

Luke 2:1-20
Dec. 24th, 2011

Christmas Eve Service
Rev. John Fitzgerald

Normally at this point in the service I would preach a sermon. But on Christmas Eve I think that it is enough to remember and to wonder what it might have been like on this night so long ago. In order to do so, I invite you to pull up a pew and spend a night with the Inn Keeper. Let us pray:

Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

(knock, knock)

A knock on the door awoke the old gent.
A knock by the sign which read “Rooms for Rent”.
“I’m coming. I’m coming!” said the keeper of the Inn,
as the jingle of keys could be heard from within.
“Come in my friend. Come in from the wind.
You’ll find it much warmer by the fire in my den.

By the light of the flame I can now see your face.
It’s not often a gentile will stay in my place.
How can I help you? Pray tell me what is it?
You’ve come to the Bethlehem Inn for a visit?
It’s not so exquisite, but then again tis it,
something more that you seek with your look so inquisit?”

A question, you say, you’ve been longing to ask,
concerning a night which long since has past?
Remember? My word! What soul could forget,
that night in my stable when the heavens were lit.
Small was my bit, I have to admit,
but the story I tell is true, I submit.

Sit down at my table. I’ll go lock the door.
Make yourself comfort and I’ll tell you more.
More of a night when the angels did sing.
More of a night when the praises did ring.
I saw this great thing, the Spirit did bring,
To a world longing so – the birth of a King!

(Making the motions of locking the door)

There now, that's better – we won't be disturbed.
There will be no interruptions, I give you my word.
I've told this strange story to many of my guests.
Some think I'm senile – others smile at best.
But there is warmth in your eyes, and so I surmise,
That you'll hear my tale out and know it's not lies.

How long ago was it that *your* Caesar Augustus,
decreed that a census be taken amongst us?
Each man, woman, and child was counted by law.
They counted the people – the livestock and all.
From all over earth, to the place of their birth,
came travelers to be counted – to be taxed for their worth.

Well, business was brisk that season, you see.
Oh, stacking up coins a many were we.
We had guests on the roof and children on the floor.
Never had it been so crowded before.
We couldn't hold more – what ere the reason for.
We were packed to the walls with patrons galore.

Then came this young couple asking; 'Rooms left – are any?'
What more could I do? We had turned away many.
Oh, the lad muddled something about being in a bind.
But my Inn was so busy that I paid them no mind.
I wasn't unkind. I simply had not the time.
And I felt that for sure another room they would find.

Then my wife Leah (so meek and so mild),
she noticed the young maiden as expecting a child.
It was Leah's idea to use the stable out back.
'Why not?' I agreed, and I helped them unpack.
'Tonight it's for free. But perhaps it could be,
that if business keeps up we could charge a small fee.

Then I returned to my Inn and the chores of the day.
I kept myself busy until the sun gave way.
We fed our guests supper and I retired to my den,
made entries in my ledger and balanced it again.
Leah swept the floors and I locked all the doors,
and we tucked in the children to the sound of their snores.

Then I blew out the lamps and banked the fire's coals,
Thinking about profits and next years goals.
I laid down by Leah and we talked for a while.
She couldn't stop thinking about the woman with child.
'She's sleeping outside!' she did softly confide,
'Tis no place fitting for an expecting mother to abide.'

'There may be wild beasts in the Judean hills.
And the wind from Samaria brings shivers and chills.
What if the wild dogs of Gilboa are near?
And the bandits of Jericho come this time of year!'
I said to her, 'Dear, there is no need to fear.
If anything happens they'll know were right here.'

Then late in the night – or was it the morn?
Leah shook me from sleep saying a child would be born.
'Come quickly Ben Hadad, and help if you can!
Bring Linens and sheets,' she said as she ran.
Any other night, I'd have put up a fight,
But something within me wanted to see this grand sight.

So, I wrapped myself up in the tunic I wore,
scuttled down the ladder and stepped out the door.
Then out in the courtyard I felt my skin curled.
It was as if I had stepped into another world.
Starlight was hurled, as the heavens unfurled,
and my humble stable glowed like a radiant pearl.

There was a silence in the air – nothing could be heard.
Not even the sound of a dog or a bird.
A silence so thick that it made the ears throb –
Not even the sound of an infant babe's sob.
Through the white misty haze, I stood there and gazed,
at a sight I'll remember for all of my days.

There was my Leah, the village mid-wife.
She had delivered a babe, brought it into this life.
'Come quickly, Ben Hadad, and bring me the cloth!'
I stumbled and fell like an old drunken sloth.
'Here!' was my plea. 'Take care of the child's need!'
For somehow I knew that this night was God's deed.

I stood there and watched as Leah gracefully managed,
to wrap the babe tight in soft linen and bandage.
Then carefully, tenderly, taking her time.
she handed the babe to the mother so kind.
Oh, I know I'll not find a scene more sublime,
search though I may through the whole land of Zion.

Then one by one the Bedouins came.
The shepherds of Bethlehem, they're one and the same.
They came to my stable from the Judean hills,
Where by night they had watched o're their flocks in the fields.
By the manger they kneeled, where the babe was concealed,
And they spoke of God's glory, and of angels revealed.

'This night', they said, 'on holy ground we've trod!'
We've come to see the infant Son of God.
The angels have sent us to see what the Lord's brought.
This child is the Messiah, whom the world has long sought.
Tonight a Savior is born to a world forlorn,
Wrapped in swaddling clothes and God's glory adorn.'

Then I walked out alone in the still of the dawn:
to ponder it all and to think hard and long.
I said to myself; 'Could this really be?
That God has intervened in human history?
In my stable, no less, mankind has been blest,
with the birth of a Savior while the world was at rest.'

Oh, I know that it's much for the mind to take in.
But it comes not from the mind, rather it comes from within.
I tell you I felt God's Spirit so near,
it set my heart pounding with joy and with fear.
To the truth of that night, I've committed my life,
and lived faithfully to it, both me and my wife.

Ah, but listen to me. I've been bending your ear.
Not even knowing the reason why you're here.
Tell me your name. What is it you do?
Why has my story so captivated you?
It must be more that you've come here for,
than to hear an old man ramble – or, have you heard of this before?

A physician, you say, and *Luke* is your name?
And a book that you're writing is the reason you came?
Well, now I understand. Now it's all clear!
The Saviors story must be told and so you've come here!
Tis by God's grace that you've come to my place,
And I pray, Luke, that you'll tell the whole human race.

Tell them, Luke, of that night in my stable.
Tell them of the angels and God's glory, if you're able.
Tell them how the Lord has descended from above,
in the form of a child full of mercy and love.
Tell it to all these things that I saw that night in my lowly cattle stall.

By the shadows I see that my fire now burns low.
Spend the night here Luke, there's no reason to go.
We have plenty of rooms and beds to spare.
There's no need to go out in the chilly night air.
Stay here tonight. It only seems right.
You can leave in the morning at first dawn's light.

No? Well, leave if you must, and I wish you God's speed.
This book that you're writing, I know there's great need.
May God bless you, Luke, as he has blessed me.
To tell this great story to whomever you see."
For the task, said he, forever shall be,
To tell the Good News throughout all eternity.

Merry Christmas