

## HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 12/25/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

***ONE AT ONE*** – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, December 26 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray all who celebrate the birth of JESUS. Ask that faith may grow in every heart so that believers may be drawn closer to GOD who came to live as one of us.*

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John Stevenson explains biblical housing arrangements that can help us to better visualize what might have been happening for Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem at the time JESUS was born. Luke 2:6-7 records: *While they were there, the time came for the BABY to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped HIM in cloths and placed HIM in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.* I suppose many of us imagine Joseph and Mary arriving in Bethlehem, full of people who had come to register for the census commanded by Emperor Ceseas Augustus. We see them coming to an inn, only to find that all the rooms have been taken, so they are either offered or simply find a stable out back where Mary can give birth—the two of them alone and somewhat forgotten until the angels send the shepherds.

The word that is translated in many Bibles as “inn” is not what Luke is describing. The term that Luke uses here for “inn” is “kataluma.” In the story of the Good Samaritan, Luke uses “pandocheion” which means “a place for everyone to stay.” This is the “inn” where the injured man is taken by the Samaritan who helps him. “Kataluma” is better rendered as a “guest room” and some translations of the Bible say this instead of “inn.” “Kataluma” is the same word that Luke uses to refer to the room where JESUS sent HIS disciples to prepare what we call “the Last Supper,” an upper room in the house of John Mark’s mother. So, it might be better to envision a home with an extra room that, again, because of the census, is full of guests with no place to accommodate anyone else.

Also, Luke does not say that they were alone. In the culture of the time, one did not give birth in isolation. Joseph and Mary had come to Bethlehem because they were both descendants of King David and this was the town that his offspring counted as their ancestral home. Now, in the thousand years that separated the birth of David and the birth of JESUS, you can imagine how many were born in those nineteen generations. There would have been lots of extended family members living in Bethlehem. Though the guest room was full, there still likely were many relatives around who could help with the birth and care for their needs.

In the time of JESUS, a portion of a family home was designated for the animals that were kept indoors. Usually, this was part of the front room in which that family also prepared and ate meals. It is more likely that, though there was no “bedroom” space for this couple, they were able to stay in this front room area, probably with the animals shooed out. In this area, you would also have a place to feed the animals, called a manger. Placing a baby in the animal feed trough would be unusual, but not out of the question. And it was this BABY in a manger that served as a sign to the shepherds that they had found the CHILD of which the angels had spoken.

We like the imagery of a lonely couple by themselves, perhaps with a few animals around, giving birth to a BABY. Except for the isolation, this is not that far from what probably happened. Just outside of Bethlehem, some caves are shown as the traditional (not historic, as in we know for a fact this is the place) location where JESUS was born. They exist near where shepherds would keep their sheep, so this could also be a place that would fit with Luke’s description. It also would have been more remote, but again, less likely because of the family connection to many in Bethlehem as well as the cultural priority on hospitality. In any case, whether in a house, a cave, or a shed out back, JESUS came in a much humbler way than would normally take place. And it was in this humble setting that GOD came into our world.

In CHRIST's love,  
Pastor Jeffrey