

## Let's go Back to Bethlehem

The little town of Bethlehem is invisible. A sprawling city has replaced it. What little remains of the ancient village is covered with churches and the marketplace.

But what of the spirit of the ancient village?

I cannot help but think of the innkeeper on the night of the birth of Jesus. History has treated him poorly. He has been accused of being without pity when the opposite is probably the truth. He looked out of his door on that night and saw a very difficult problem. The couple would probably give birth during the night. He looked back at his crowded, one room inn and knew it would be a terrible night for them. Could he possibly find a place for a young girl to have a baby? Would she give birth in the same room as so many travelers? Young Mary was about to have a horrible experience, giving birth in front of dozens of strangers. On the other hand, how could he refuse them a place. To turn them away would probably mean the death of both mother and child.

The innkeeper had a wonderful idea. The stable was closed and secure. It would keep out the cold air, the wild animals and curious glances. It would also keep the cries of a young girl giving birth away from his other guests. It could be fairly clean and warm. It was the best solution he could think of.

Sometimes extraordinary circumstances allow us to find out what we are really capable of doing. I was involved in an automobile accident a number of years ago. I was injured and bleeding but my father was in danger of death. I rushed to the nearest house and asked for a rag or a blanket that I needed to treat him for shock. They looked at me, bleeding, and seemed to think that I would get their stuff dirty. They were disgusted by what they saw. They refused!

Jesus himself taught about a similar situation. You probably remember the parable of the good Samaritan. I suppose the innkeeper was like that good man. He did what he could to help.

Today, Bethlehem is a small city, controlled by the Palestinian Authority. Most good tour groups take you shopping in one of the stores that specialize in things tourists love to take home. The prices are usually fairly good and you may get a discount. But what of that spirit we've been thinking about? Let's face it, Bethlehem may not be the best place to think of spending the night in an inn. Maybe next year? That shouldn't stop you from having the same kind of courage, flexibility and compassion the innkeeper displayed. Actually, you might be able to improve on his example.

You know folks who are in need. You may not have much yourself. It could be that you have huge problems and great needs. Does your own need keep you from giving aid to those you can help? To me, the spirit of Bethlehem is an attitude of compassion. The Bible tells us that Jesus was full of compassion and often went to great lengths to help people. I like that! I wish I were that kind of man.