

# **Christmas Eve 2005**

## **Trouble at the Inn**

*Luke 2:1-7*

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# Trouble at the Inn

## Scripture

This is the account of what happened when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, as it is recorded in Luke 2:1-7:

**<sup>1</sup> In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. <sup>2</sup> (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup> And everyone went to his own town to register.**

**<sup>4</sup> So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. <sup>5</sup> He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup> While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, <sup>7</sup> 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. (Luke 2:1-7)**

## Lesson

Dina Donohue wrote a story called “Trouble at the Inn.”<sup>1</sup> It is a well-known story, and I would like to read it to you:

For years now whenever Christmas pageants are talked about in a certain little town in the Midwest, someone is sure to mention the name of Wallace Purling. Wally’s performance in one annual production of the Nativity play has slipped into the realm of legend. But the old timers who were in the audience that night never tire of recalling exactly what happened.

Wally was nine that year and in the second grade, though he should have been in the fourth. Most people in town knew that he had difficulty in keeping up. He was big and clumsy, slow in movement and mind. Still, Wally was well liked by the other children in his class, all of whom were smaller than he, though the boys had trouble

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<sup>1</sup> This article by Dina Donohue is reprinted from the *Baptist Herald* (Dec. 15, 1968).

hiding their irritation if the uncoordinated Wally asked to play ball with them.

Most often they'd find a way to keep him off the field, but Wally would hang around anyway—not sulking, just hoping. He was always a helpful boy, a willing and smiling one, and the natural protector, paradoxically, of the underdog. Sometimes if the older boys chased the younger ones away, it would always be Wally who'd say, "Can't they stay? They're no bother."

Wally fancied the idea of being a shepherd with a flute in the Christmas pageant that year, but the play's director, Miss Lumbard, assigned him to a more important role. After all, she reasoned, the Innkeeper did not have too many lines, and Wally's size would make his refusal of lodging to Joseph more forceful.

And so it happened that the usual large, partisan audience gathered for the town's Yuletide extravaganza of the staffs and crèches, of beards, crowns, halos and a whole stage full of squeaky voices. No one on stage or off was more caught up in the magic of the night than Wallace Purling. They said later that he stood in the wings and watched the performance with such fascination that from time to time Miss Lumbard had to make sure he didn't wander onstage before his cue.

Then the time came when Joseph appeared, slowly, tenderly guiding Mary to the door of the inn. Joseph knocked hard on the wooden door set into the painted backdrop. Wally the Innkeeper was there, waiting. "What do you want?" Wally said, swinging the door open with a brusque gesture.

"We seek lodging."

"Seek it elsewhere." Wally looked straight ahead but spoke vigorously. "The inn is filled."

"Sir, we have asked everywhere in vain. We have traveled far and are very weary."

"There is no room in this inn for you." Wally looked properly stern.

"Please, good innkeeper, this is my wife, Mary. She is heavy with child and needs a place to rest. Surely you must have some small corner for her. She is so tired."

Now, for the first time, the Innkeeper relaxed his stiff stance and looked down at Mary. With that, there was a long pause, long enough to make the audience a bit tense with embarrassment.

"No! Be gone!" the prompter whispered from the wings.

“No!” Wally repeated automatically. “Be gone!”

Joseph sadly placed his arm around Mary, and Mary laid her head upon his shoulder, and the two of them started to move away. The Innkeeper did not return inside his inn, however. Wally stood there in the doorway, watching the forlorn couple. His mouth was open, his brow creased with concern, his eyes filling unmistakably with tears.

“Don’t go, Joseph,” Wally called out. “Bring Mary back.” And Wallace Purling’s face grew into a bright smile. “You can have *my* room.”

Some people in town thought that the pageant had been ruined. Yet there were others—many others—who considered it the most Christmas of all Christmas pageants they had ever seen.

I don’t think that the Innkeeper in Jesus’ day was mean-spirited or hard-hearted toward Joseph and Mary. There simply was **“no room for them in the inn.”** And perhaps, there may have been a bit of Wally Purling in him as he took pity on Mary and Joseph, and so he offered them some shelter in the stable where Jesus was born.

But this account is far more than merely sentimental. The apostle John tells us that Jesus “came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him” (John 1:11). In one sense, the inability of Joseph and Mary to find a place for the birth of Jesus is a picture of the rejection of sinful men and women toward the Lord Jesus Christ. And “yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12).

Christmas is the time of the year when we should especially remember why Jesus came to this world. We have so commercialized Christmas that its meaning is almost lost.

We should remember that Jesus came into this world to save us from our sins. Luke tells us that “salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Jesus himself said, “I am the

way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

Jesus came into this world so that we might receive him into our lives, believe in his name, and become the children of God.

### **Conclusion**

If you are a Christian tonight on this Christmas Eve, rejoice and give thanks to God for sending Jesus into the world, for receiving him into your life, for believing in his name, and for becoming a child of God.

But if you are not a Christian tonight on this Christmas Eve, receive Jesus into your life. You do that by believing that Jesus is the only way to God, by believing that he is the only Savior of the world, by believing that he paid the penalty for your sin so that you might become a child of God.

None of us know whether we will spend another Christmas on this earth.

Receive the Lord Jesus Christ into the room of your heart by asking God that he be born there tonight. Amen.



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*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and **membership** in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,  
equip them for their **ministry** in the church  
and life **mission** in the world,  
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons)
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