

Amid the fun of our 4Advent and Christmas celebration yesterday, for a brief moment I got to embody the innkeeper. You know, that forever nameless person in Bethlehem all those years ago who will be forever known for saying “No” to God.



Think about it. Literally forever, ever since God made humans—well, ever since we got ourselves thrown out of that perfect world God had made, out of Eden into THIS place—we humans have been crying to our creator to “Come down, come back, walk with us again, restore harmony in creation, be with us, help us, fix this MESS you made” because (as we heard in our lessons a couple weeks ago) “Yes, we have sinned, but that’s all YOUR fault, God, you left us alone for too long, come back put things right, make US right.”



And then, when God FINALLY acted, finally did what we had pleaded and pleaded, demanded and demanded, God to do and came back to us here in this world, God came to MY DOOR, knocked on MY DOOR and asked if he could come in—and I told him “NO.” I said, “No, sorry, there’s no room here. I’m all filled up. NO place for you here, I’m too busy. Can’t you see I’ve got a full house here? Can’t you see I’m busy making money? Can’t you see how ridiculous you look, God, disguised as you are as a baby not yet even born to a teenaged girl and her perplexed fiancée? And they had some Alt-Fact tale about a virgin birth, of all things; she must think I was born yesterday! AND a supposed visit by an angel, even. THAT takes the cake! Bethlehem is too full of people (and donkeys, donkeys everywhere) for angels to be among us.

At any rate, I’m the one who told God, “No, you can’t be born here. You can’t come in. No room in the inn.” You know about me, I bet, if not my name, you know that about my life.

But I’m not completely heartless. I let them rent space in the barn (for only slightly above the going room rate; I could see they didn’t have much money, or even food). With all the donkeys in town I could have gotten a pretty drachma for that space, let me tell you!

I don’t know why history has been so hard on me. I was just providing for my family. I was just stating the obvious: There was no room inside for this family to come in, unless I shared MY bed. HA; as if!



Why are you looking at me that way? Haven't YOU ever said "No" to God when he came knocking on YOUR door? I'll bet he wasn't so cleverly disguised at YOUR door. At MINE, the Messiah, the creator of all that is, was hidden inside a pregnant teenager, a pregnant homeless unwed child.

I've told MY story thousands upon thousands of time in the millennia since I turned away the Christ Child. And other people have shared about the disguises the Messiah has used on THEM: a prisoner, a street person, an addict, you name the unlikely appearance. I've heard that he's taken in YOUR day to disguising himself as politicians. You'll see what I mean!

God himself, when he came to MY door, just didn't look like the supreme ruler of the universe. God forgive me—literally—I turned him away. Sent him to the barn! Well, I sent his mother and her fiancé to the barn, along with the donkey she rode in on.

Something called to me, though, gnawed at me all night long. I kept watch. Maybe the bright star shining down over my barn kept me awake. We didn't have street lights, you know, so this star was something special. I'd seen this star for a while, but now the thing seemed to have stopped right overhead. I expected the animals to be upset by the star, but they seemed to all be drawn to the barn, as if there were something supernatural going on in there. It was supernaturally calm; I was amazed, and a bit afraid.

Then I saw shepherds appear. I thought they were going to have the nerve to ask to stay in the inn. I wouldn't have let them, even if there had been room. Shepherds smell of, well, sheep. And they're not

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such great people, shepherds. You’d have to be desperate for cash and food to take a job like that, just one step above swineherding. But the shepherds went straight into the barn as if they were on a mission. And I swear I heard joyous singing, the likes of which you’ve never heard. It was as if there were a whole heavenly host of angels singing, right there over my barn.

All right, I SAW a whole host of angels. Don’t tell anyone; they will think I’ve got dementia and put me away. When I asked the shepherds what had brought them to my barn, they told me. They told me all about this family, all about this child, all about this barn, all about ME (about me saying “no” to God). So they came to see for themselves and to worship the child.

Then the most amazing thing happened. These smelly shepherds told ME, “Fear not, this child loves you.” This child had just been born, but the shepherds said, “This child says he has plenty of room for YOU in his eternal kingdom. He says he will prepare a mansion for each of us there.”

So (and I’ll bet you didn’t know THIS) I have followed this child, from Bethlehem to Egypt to Nazareth to Jerusalem to Capernaum to Gethsemane and beyond. All so that I can tell you this today, “this baby that is born today will return again. And, at this coming, everyone will recognize him. May he find in us a mansion prepared for him to dwell in, rather than a sign that reads, ‘No room in THIS in.’”