

Well, here we are. It is Christmas Eve and I am in Bethlehem for the big event.

Because you are here, too, here with me tonight, I expect that you know what's taking place right here in this stable. Presumably, like me, you've got a reservation in the inn right over there, next door.

I sure hope you have a reservation, because the hay in this stable would make a very poor bed. Besides, it's bound to get very noisy here in just a bit, not just from the animals, but a baby is about to be born and birthing is very noisy business. Or so I'm told.

The innkeeper who showed me to my room warned me that I would have company there tonight, with so many visitors in town for the census—not to mention us nativity tourists.

Well, no matter, because we'll be here awhile. Not only are we awaiting the baby's birth, but we also want to hear his parents Mary and Joseph call him "Jesus," as we know they are planning to do. PLUS, we want to see Mary and Joseph's reactions when the shepherds come and worship the baby. I'll bet they will be astounded.

I know; I know. Shepherds are, well, uncouth. And yes, they smell of sheep, unwashed sheep. But we know that the shepherds were visited by angels earlier tonight, angels who told them about this baby's birth and then sang in joy. After the shepherds got done being afraid, they decided to come to this very place and see the child for themselves, just like we are doing.

But I want to see the shepherds. Plus, I hope that we will hear the angels sing, like they did with the shepherd, or maybe we will just hear the shepherds sing. Angel songs can be very compelling, you know. There is something very heartwarming and joyful about angel songs, especially the ones about this baby being born tonight. I also want to hear what the shepherds tell Joseph and Mary about why they decided to come see the child.

Speaking of Mary, SHE seems to be quieter tonight than when I last visited her, the day she sang to her cousin Elizabeth about the great things that God has promised to do through this child who is about to be born tonight. I'll never forget these words:

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, *
and has lifted up the lowly.



He has filled the hungry with good things, *
and the rich he has sent away empty.

I cannot wait for this prophecy to come to pass, can you?

Well, back to the shepherds. I hope they don't bring their sheep; THAT would be quite noisy and messy.

As I wait here in the warmth, waiting for Christ Jesus to make his appearance "in the flesh," so to speak, I wonder WHY I made this trip to Bethlehem. I mean, I know the story. This child was born here almost 2,000 years ago, two millennia before our time!

Did you know that this child being born here tonight will eventually stir people up so much that he will be crucified before he is even 40 years old? I'm planning to visit Jesus' Crucifixion this year and to hang around his tomb until his Resurrection. I want to see for myself what happened that night.

At any rate, this year on my visit to the stable in Bethlehem I brought the baby a gift. I know that there are people coming from the East with really expensive gifts. However, what I brought is some diapers—diapers from our church in our time. I know it's supposed to be forbidden, to bring things from our time on these "history trips." However, "swaddling clothes" and "bands of cloth" are just so very messy! I brought food, too, food from the pantry back home, food for Mary and Joseph since it will be quite a while before a "corner mom and pop store" is invented. I can't wait to tell everyone who gives those diapers that their gifts are being used by the Christ Child, and to tell those who run the pantry that they are feeding the holy family.

I don't know why I didn't think of bringing gifts before. I guess I was so involved as a spectator of this history-changing event that I never thought about involving myself in the events that happened so long ago. In fact, this event seemed so frozen in time, before. But I'm glad I brought these gifts because I met a lot of people who are hungry on the way to Bethlehem this year, people telling of very high food prices and huge new taxes coming in the new year after this census is complete.

I also heard that something new has been invented, the ability to be a tourist of the future. I wonder if this child Jesus is still remembered then. Even now, many people in our time seem to live only for themselves. It seems like so many get ahead by scamming or defrauding others, or by begging. Children starve to death and no one weeps. No one, that is, except those of us who follow what this baby will teach us:

- To love God above all else and love all others as much as we love ourselves;
- To put others first; and
- To share what we have.

That's not so hard, is it?

I wonder—and I want your opinion about this—I wonder what would happen in our future if we did what these shepherds did: Tell everyone about what happened on this night, not just the facts of the event, but how this event and this baby changes everything throughout time, changes us.

I mean, I am so drawn to this child, this Jesus, that I want to worship him. I want to learn more about what he teaches and to live for others, as he did. I wonder what would happen in our time and in every time if we recognize and honor the Christ-child in absolutely everyone we meet.

Some of you know me well, so you know that I always end these travel reports in this way:

Unto us a child is born!

O come, let us adore him.