

Christ is born – let us rejoice! Christ is born – let us celebrate all those people who were a part of that Christmas event! The shepherds, the angels, the animals and the wise men; Mary, Joseph, the innkeeper...there are so many people that had a significant part in the Christmas story. But you know...I am wondering about someone who we often forget about in the Christmas narrative. Have you ever thought about the innkeeper's wife? I mean, the innkeeper was the one who pretty much was responsible for Jesus being born in a stable.

I wonder how the innkeeper's wife felt about that? I wonder what her experience was like. And so I have found a story, written by Nina Wallestad, that is written from the perspective of the innkeeper's wife. It moved me deeply and so I would like to share it with you now:

I'm here this morning to set the record straight. People who have heard the story have begun to talk. They say my husband was cruel and unfeeling. But they don't know the whole story.

I'm sure you've heard bits and pieces of it. A weary man knocks on the door of an inn, his young wife -- his young, pregnant wife -- perched on top of a donkey. Inexplicably, inexcusably, he turns them away in their deepest hour of need. "There's no room in the inn," he grumbles as he closes his door in their faces.

That much is true. But there's more to the innkeeper's story. You won't hear it in any of the accounts that are circulating today. Still, there is more to be told. I know. I am his wife.

Now, I'm not saying that his actions were right or justified. But, when you know the whole truth, I think you'll understand my husband, even pity him.

Where to begin? On that cold, clear night, my husband, Benjamin, and I had just celebrated 20 years of marriage. Our inn was full with many travelers who had come to Bethlehem, the city of David, to register for Caesar's tax. And, the more crowded our inn became with families from every corner of Israel, the more hollow our hearts seemed.

You see, in our 20 years of marriage, God had never blessed us with a child. The walls of our house had never heard the cries of a newborn, the giggles of a toddler, the curious questions of a child. Benjamin and I were barren.

Now, I know we aren't the first couple to suffer this grief, and I'm sure we won't be the last. But, think of the shame and disappointment barrenness meant to a couple in Bethlehem. Everyone knew that God's promised Messiah, the Savior, would be born in Bethlehem. Men of God had prophesied this long ago.

In Bethlehem, when news spread that a woman was with child, the anticipation was doubled. Would this child be the Messiah, the promised deliverer our entire nation longed for? Every pregnancy in our town was greeted with awe and wonder.

And, every sight of a pregnant woman reminded Benjamin -- and me -- of the barrenness of our lives. We knew that the Messiah would never be born under our roof. My husband is a quiet and humble man, a man of deep feeling and compassion. But the sight of a pregnant woman was too much for him to take, much less invite into our home.

So, when the knock on the door came that night, I wasn't surprised to hear him turn the couple away. He had done the same on other occasions without remorse. There were other places of lodging in our town.

But this night was different. We both knew Bethlehem was bursting at the seams with travelers. We knew it would be impossible for that couple to find rest and shelter anywhere in town. And, judging by the look of anguish on that

young girl's face, I knew she only had moments to spare before her baby came.

Benjamin collapsed against the closed door. The anguish on his face was a sight more unbearable than the anguished face of that pregnant girl. Her anguish would soon be over; my husband would take his to his grave. "There's room in the stable," he whispered. "Do what you can to make them comfortable."

I kissed his tear-stained cheeks and hurried out the door, frantic that the couple might have gotten away. I need not have worried. They had not moved. They seemed frozen in exhaustion, yet their faces were filled with a holy expectancy. "Come," I said. "Follow me. There's room in our stable."

I led them around the house to the place where we stabled our guests' beasts. It was more of a cave, actually, with small stalls dug out of the hillside. I was astonished, and thankful, to discover that one of the stalls was unoccupied and freshly cleaned. I saw Benjamin's cloak hanging on a peg and knew he had been here just moments earlier, preparing a place for the impending birth.

"It's not the place you imagined for the birth of your child," I told the young woman as her husband and I helped her down from the donkey. "I'm sorry I can't offer you more." She smiled her gratitude.

As we lowered her into the straw, she clenched my arm so tightly that I thought it might break. "Stay. Help me," she groaned.

I now understood how Benjamin had felt when he turned them away from our door. How could I -- a barren woman, long past hope of ever birthing a child -- bear to watch another woman bring her longed-for child into the world. I wanted to refuse, to run sobbing with self-pity into my warm house. But, the young husband's face stopped me. There I saw the same look of anguish that had etched deep lines into my own husband's face.

I stayed. The three of us labored together for what seemed an eternity. I felt this young woman's every pain in my mind, soul and body. Just when the pain and anticipation seemed unbearable, the baby finally came.

Instantly, the new parents forgot me, caught up instead with adoring the child. "He's here, Joseph," the young woman whispered. "The Messiah has been born!" Quickly yet gently, Joseph wrapped the baby in linen and held Him up to examine Him in the torchlight. "Yes, Mary, He is here. Immanuel. God is with us."

I sat in stunned quiet silence. The Messiah? God's promised deliverer? Born in our stable, born under our roof! Could this be? I knew instantly in my heart that it was true. The baby's lusty cry masked the sound of my own tears. This time, I cried tears not of envy or disappointment, but of joy and hope and new life.

I knew I had to share this joy with Benjamin. I stood to my feet and, before I could turn around, a warm, familiar hand -- Benjamin's hand -- touched my shoulder. One look at his face and I knew. The lines of hopeless anguish were gone, replaced with the soft sweetness he had long ago abandoned.

He had witnessed this miraculous birth in secret. He had heard the Good News. Of all the homes and families in Bethlehem, ours had been chosen to welcome the birth of the Messiah! Our quiet tears turned to boisterous laughter as we embraced and glorified God.