

HOUSEHOLDER BOOKS

**THE
FACES OF
CHRISTMAS**

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...there was no room or place for
them in the inn.

— LUKE 2:7 | AMPC

08

THE INN KEEPER

“Sorry, we’re closed.”

The people in line groaned. Some muttered about having to go stay with some nosy relatives they were hoping to avoid.

The keeper of the inn rubbed his eyes, holding in a yawn. It had been a long day with checking in all these visitors that came from towns near and far. They had been coming in all week, none wanting to be far from their hometown when Caesar’s deadline arrived. Everyone under Rome’s jurisdiction had to return to their hometowns to be registered, per the imperial order.

They would need a place to stay, and that meant big business for people like him. He had even cleared the storage rooms to make more bedding space. Bethlehem

had not seen this large a crowd in years, Now, he was surprised by how many claimed the town as theirs. Now, the last of the spaces had been taken, and even the lobby was full of people lying on their robes on the bare floor.

It had been a good day for business. He called for his servant as he prepared to close for the day.

Suddenly a young man bustled in, frantically scanning faces. His gaze fell on the Innkeeper. “Sir, please, we need a room,” he pleaded.

“You and every other person,” someone yelled.

“You don’t understand—“

“Sorry, we’re closed,” the innkeeper chimed in. “All the rooms are taken—“





“No, no, wait.” The young man tried to get his words out as he panicked. “It’s m-my wife, she’s with child. She’ll soon be in labor.” His accent sounded like that of a northerner, most likely a Galilean. The innkeeper had gotten used to distinguishing these accents over the past few days.

He looked out over the filled room. This young man was creating an unwelcome ruckus that was already drawing curious stares, some of which were not too pleased. He leaned in to whisper. “I wish I could help you, sir, but there’s no more space. Not even on the floor.”

“What about the roof?” the young man asked in anguish.

“Like I said, there is no space. Don’t you have family in town you could lodge with?”

The desperate husband shook his head, glaring. “They weren’t ... ready to take us in.”

Now this was interesting. The innkeeper surmised that this pregnancy could have been out of wedlock, especially if the family were unwilling to take them in at such a crucial stage. But it was none of his business, and as long as he would get money out of the deal, he could not afford to have an opinion. However, there was really nothing he could think of to do to help at the moment.

“You could try other inns,” he offered. “I could get Oved to help you find a good one.” Oved, his servant,

hurried over. The lad had been working all day and his eyes were already red from accumulated stress. As soon as some of these guests registered with the government tomorrow, they would leave, more space would be available and work would continue. The sooner they got rid of people like this desperate Galilean, the better.

The Galilean stared back out the doorway. “The other inns were closed. You’re my only hope right now. I’ll pay anything.” He was already reaching into his bag.

“Hey!” one of the visitors called out. “Are you hard of hearing? The man said there’s no more room!”

Oved stepped in before the frantic father-to-be could respond. “Perhaps we should discuss this outside,” he said. He also knew there was nothing he could do to help, but he needed to at least let him down easy. He stole a glance at his master as he tried to lead the Galilean toward the door.

“Please help us,” the Galilean insisted. “I’ll do anything you want—”

A cry rang out from outside, drawing stares. The Galilean hurried out the door, Oved tailing not far behind. The innkeeper was closing his desk when his servant peeked in at him through the doorway, concern etched on his face. The innkeeper sighed as he stomped over, making a mental note to remind Oved that this was a business, not a charity.

Sure enough, the Galilean sat holding his young wife by the doorway as she moaned. Oved still stared at his master with pleading eyes, but the innkeeper refused to budge.

“She needs help!” the Galilean cried.

“Sir?” Oved’s voice broke in. “What about the stable?”

The innkeeper had not thought of that. “There’s no way they’ll want to use that—“

“We’ll take it!” the Galilean said. “A stable would be fine.”

So they were desperate, he mused, and were willing to deliver her of this baby just a feet away from the cow dung and sheep dip. No matter, he thought to himself, Desperation was good for business. In fact, This was the part where he usually negotiated prices, but while he was a businessman he was no monster. He shrugged. “Oved, you handle this. I’m turning in.”

And with that he went in and took the stairs.

What a day. A good night’s rest was what he needed.

Making his way past the lying bodies, he walked into his room on the corner of the roof where it always had been. His bed still sat in the middle, stately and rough. If Kezia were still around it would have been neater and he would have eaten a decent meal.

Kezia. Anytime he turned in for the night, the mostly empty room reminded him of her death last summer.

He fell onto his bed and groaned. A thought of how this would have been a perfect place for a woman in labor to give birth popped in his head.

He swiftly and forcefully shoved the thought out of his mind as he plunged into dreamland. He had just about enough space for others and he had rented it out, but this was his room. His only lasting memory of her. There was no way he was going to lease it to some strangers.

This was their space. His space.

Yet it felt so empty.

Loved it?

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