

No Ordinary Town

By Gail Kennedy Keffer

This is a possible story of a group of men meeting the evening before Christ was born in the little town of Bethlehem and their conversation with each other and Joseph.

Scene: The town koffee klatch, and the lobby of the town inn.

Time: Late evening.

Cast: Titus, Timothy, Michael, Bartholomew, John – citizens of Bethlehem

McHamus: the Innkeeper

Joseph: the earthly father of Jesus Christ.

Scene I: Koffee klatch in Bethlehem.

Titus: I'm tired of this place. The town is boring and old. Time slides by slowly. Nothing ever happens here.

(Other men look at him and wonder why he is complaining. They all sort of groan.)

Titus: Today's just another dust filled day. Each day I lead my camel to Bethlehem's well. Each day I walk slower. There's nothing going on. I wonder if God even cares for my plight. Oh, yea, supposedly people are coming for a census. Big deal! All they do is muddy up the streets with all their camels and donkeys, etc. They crowd the market place and leave things in a mess when they leave.

Timothy: Why all the complaining. Did you have a bad dream last night?

Bartholomew: If you keep complaining, you're going to end up in Bethlehem's village rescue mission – Mr. Perfect.

Titus: Well, I never said I was perfect, but nothing important or fun will ever happen in Bethlehem.

Timothy: You don't know that, friend. Why something could happen today that would surprise the sandals off of you.

Titus: (Very dejectedly) Highly unlikely. It is so boring that even the shepherds looked bored as they headed for the hills. Even the sheep are sleeping.

John: Well, I must admit its pretty quiet around her, but the Roman census should perk things up. Things will happen when all the people get here. We could be living in Rome and under real persecution.

Titus: As I said before. All the visitors will do is leave a lot of clutter. I'm thinking of moving to Jerusalem. I heard there are lots of jobs in the big city. I'm tired of this town. Nothing ever happens here.

Michael: Well, if that's the way you feel, why don't you go? You're just making everyone else miserable with your attitude. I personally like the smallness of Bethlehem. I am proud of our small town. It's great place to live and raise a family.

Timothy: Titus. Quit complaining. You've had your morning coffee. You were able to sleep in a warm bed last night, and have a roof over your head. Think of those who did not have that privilege. Think of the shepherds out in the fields. They would be glad to change places with you.

(Joseph enters coffee klatch)

Joseph: Good day, Gentlemen. I just got into town for the census and need a room for the night. I had a long journey from Nazareth. Could you tell me where I could find one?

Titus: (under his breath) Here they come already.

Michael: We are about to be invaded with people from the family of King David. I know that rooms are really tight.

Joseph: Well, I'm from the family of David, and that is why I had to come to Bethlehem for the census.

Titus: (under his breath, but loud enough to be heard!) Big Deal! So are most of the people living here in this boring town.

Joseph: My wife, Mary, is about to have a baby and we really need a place in case she gives birth tonight.

Titus frowns again and groans.

John: You could check the inn owned by McHamus. He usually has a room or two he saves for the rich. It's always a possibility and it's just on the other side of a town, a short walk.

Joseph: Thank you for your help, sir. I'll be on my way. (Joseph leaves room)

Titus: Here they come. Not only do they come for the census. Now they are coming with a pregnant wife and demanding all the best accommodations. You people call that something happening in Bethlehem. I'll repeat what I said before – nothing ever happens here - at least nothing worthwhile.

Timothy: You know, Titus, I have always considered you a very good friend. I don't understand your pessimism. There are lots of good things going on every day. Sure the government is not the best, but I'm sure we are not alone in our suffering, and some of the people coming into Bethlehem tonight are just like the rest of us. Some are good. Some may be bad, but you can't judge everyone to be bad, just because you are in a bad mood.

Titus: Well, you'll have to prove it to me.

Michael: Well, I think things are getting interesting in Bethlehem. I'm willing to think some good can come to Bethlehem.

Titus: Well, so far we have a stranger who just walked into town with a pregnant wife and wants to have one of the few rooms left available in town. I'm out of here. It's time to go see what the wife wants from market.

Bartholomew: Have a good day, Titus.

(All men sort of shrug their shoulders and leave the koffee house.)

Sing "Oh, Little Town of Bethlehem"

Scene II: Lobby of the Inn

Joseph. Mr. McHamus, may I have a word with you. I have heard you are the best innkeeper in Bethlehem and . . .

McHamus: No!

Joseph: But you don't know what I want to ask!

McHamus: No!

Joseph: But. . .

McHamus: No!

Joseph: But. . . my wife is going to have a baby any minute. We are in Bethlehem all the way from Nazareth for the census. We have no place to stay.

McHamus: No!

Joseph: I will pay you good money. You will be blessed, I'm sure. You will be God's servant and, everyone will know you when we write our story in God's Book.

McHamus: No!

Joseph: I'm not asking for charity. I have money to pay.

McHamus: (showing sign of change in attitude at the mention of money) Wait a minute. Everyone will know my name? You're going to put my name in a book?

Joseph: Well, maybe they won't know the name McHamus, but they will know that an extremely kind Bethlehem innkeeper gave Mary and me a place to stay while our son, the Messiah, could be born into this world.

McHamus: (very proud – NOW – thinking aloud) My name, the local innkeeper, the kindest man in Bethlehem. It would look good in a book, and it wouldn't hurt the business either. People will say that we should go over to that inn and stay there when we are in Bethlehem. That's great marketing!

McHamus to Joseph: Well, I haven't much, but let me tell you what I have. It's just a place in the manger, but the hay is fresh, the animals will help break the cold, and the manger box could be used as a baby cradle. I'll bring fresh water and I'll only charge you . . . (pause) half price!

Joseph: (Quickly) I'll take it! Will you show me where it is?

The two men shake hands and leave the scene.

Sing "First Noel"

Scene III: Koffee klatch (the next morning)

All the men return to the koffee house except Titus.

(Men mumbling among themselves.)

Michael: That was really something last night.

Bartholomew: I am really glad you asked me to go with you last night. I wouldn't have wanted to miss talking with the shepherds for all the world. I did a lot of thinking when I went home last night. A lot of what we had learned in the temple as a teen came back to me.

John: So did I Bartholomew. I believe it was for real. I believe the baby is the new Messiah we have been waiting for. I remembered that in Micah, the prophet says something about Bethlehem, and calls it David's country, the little one, the runt of the litter. He also said that this leader would rule over Israel, that his family tree would be ancient and distinguished. And if this Joseph and Mary are from the lineage of David, that would make sense. Micah also promises that we will have a good and safe home and the whole world will hold this Messiah in respect and call him the Peacemaker of the World. I'm convinced.

Michael: I also recalled that Isaiah told about a child being born that would be called Wonderful, Counselor, Almighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. And he said that his kingdom would never end. (Questioning pause). Yes, I think the time has come. I believe. I also did a lot of thinking last night – and not much sleeping.

Timothy: You guys are making me think. I remember learning as a teen-ager in the temple that Isaiah had said the Savior would come from the lineage of David. You know we live here and take so much for granted. I believe we saw the words of Isaiah being fulfilled last night.

(Titus walks in a rather dejected way.)

Timothy: (very up-beat) Well, Titus, what about last night. Good news travels fast! Now, does anything ever happen in Bethlehem? I guess it does.

Titus: Well. . .

John: Well, nothing! From what we are hearing, the greatest thing on earth just happened. A king was born in Bethlehem. Forget the government problems. We are going to be o.k.

Titus: Well . . .

Michael: Titus, wake up. We were told that even old man McHamus was willing to give up part of his place and help with the lodging so the couple had a clean place to have their baby. Surely that has to account for something. Granted it was in a stable, that even that is good for old man McHamus.

Bartholomew: Even the angels sang, and the shepherds came in from their fields because the angels told them about a king being born in Bethlehem. What does it take to make you believe?

Titus: Well . . .

John: Well, what

Titus: Well . . . McHamus had told me it was part of his stable, and he even charged half price for it. That takes chutzpa.

Timothy: You know Titus; you are like so many people. You're just never satisfied. There is so much good, and all you can see is the negative. Give old man McHamus credit. You didn't offer your home when Joseph came and talked with us! Neither did any of us. Perhaps we should have. He took in a complete stranger who was willing to pay to have his child born in a stable and from what we are being told by the shepherds, this baby is a King.

Titus: I don't know.

Michael: What do you mean you don't know? Did the angels speak to you? No! Did they come to me? No! They chose to go to the lowly shepherds in the field because we were too busy being negative to listen.

Timothy: Well, Bartholomew, Michael and I talked with the shepherds last evening because we were curious as to why they were here. They don't usually leave their fields to come into town. I believe their story. They said they heard angels singing, and the angels gave them a message to leave their sheep and come into this town where nothing ever happens and seek out a young couple that was going to give us a King. You don't make up a story like that without being afraid that people would either tie you up in a white coat or stone you for being a heretic.

Michael: I heard people say that the shepherds were not quiet. The people who saw them in the street said they "returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them." They said that they were told to spread the word.

Bartholomew: And, they told us last night that an angel said to them. "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." I wrote it down. I couldn't believe what they said. I wanted to have it to remember forever. I believe them. Why would it ever have been written in The Good Book if it were not so. Isaiah and other prophets told us it was going to happen, but we were too wrapped up in our own little world.

John: I'm convinced. I do think something wonderful happened here last night.

Titus: You're all taken in by this. How do you know it was for real? O.K. So the prophets said it was going to happen. Are you sure they knew about the little town of Bethlehem when they predicted this? Did they realize that we were just a small town with a bunch of poor people?

Michael: Yes, because God revealed it to even the lowest of the low – the shepherds. If God had wanted only the rich to know, he would have revealed it to them. But, he wanted everyone to know, regardless of their rank in society. Yes, we're poor, but in God's eyes, we are just as important as the rich.

Titus: Well, did you know anything about that man who came in here yesterday. . . whatever his name was.

John: His name was Joseph.

Titus: Well, anyway. Joseph not only paid McHamus good money, but told him his generosity would be written in a book that was going to be published. McHamus is a shrewd business man. I don't think he thought he was giving up a part of the stable for a king. He just saw money and notoriety. I don't think he thought for a minute that the baby was a King.

Timothy: Titus, I worry about you. A king is sent to light a way for the Jews and the Gentiles and you doubt. My God is an awesome God. I believe he brought us a Heavenly king in a most unusual way, but I do believe God did it.

John: Titus, because you were so negative and wouldn't even talk with people, you missed out on the greatest event in history of the world, let alone in little Bethlehem. All your belly-aching hasn't changed a thing. You can say that nothing important ever happens here, but it did. A king was born here last night.

Titus: Well, I guess I believe it too, but I don't know why he did it that way. Why didn't one of us offer to take that young man and his wife to our home? Now I feel guilty. What is our part in this whole story? Yes, I believe something great did happen in Bethlehem last night. Now the monkey is on our back. We have to go and tell the whole world. What a responsibility.

Timothy: May God bless you, Titus. Blessed are those who did not see, but still believe. And may he bless us all as we tell the world that the greatest moment in all history happened here in little Bethlehem last night. The King was born. I want to shout it from the mountain tops. I want my world to know. The Lord of Love has come to me. I want to pass it on to everyone.

Sing "Go Tell It on the Mountain"

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