

The Innkeeper's Wife (Condensed version)

CHARACTERS: One female adult, 3 children

PROPS: Keep away object

COSTUMES: Biblical

SETTING: None specified

RUN TIME: 5 minutes

At rise. Children playing keep away with an object.

WIFE: *(Offstage voice of innkeeper's wife.)* Boys! Jehosheba! Stop that playing! You'll break something and Jehovah be praised we need every pot, jar, bowl and pitcher we have. *(Entering)* We haven't had this many customers since ... since the census 11 years ago. We're filled to overflowing. I won't have a moment's rest for the next week. Work, work and more work. But I'm not complaining. We need the business to keep you three fed and clothed. Have you done your chores?

Daniel, did you feed the animals?

DANIEL: Yes, helped father mend the gate.

WIFE: Jehosheba, Did you fill all the jars with water?

JEHOSHEBA: Yes, it took me over 50 trips to the well!

WIFE: Ehud? Did you clean the stable?

EHUD: Yes

WIFE: All of it this time?

EHUD: Yes, mother, all of it.

WIFE: Then off to bed. We had to give your room to a family from Jericho so the three of you will have to sleep in the stable.

ALL: *(Ad lib with groaning)* The stable! Not the stable.

EHUD: The stable smells.

WIFE: It smells does it? I thought you cleaned it. All of it?

EHUD: I did! It's just...

WIFE: That stable was good enough for a king to sleep in so it will do for the three of you.

JEHOSHEBA: Did a king really sleep there or did you and father just make that up?

WIFE: Your father and I are not making it up. A king really slept there. He was born there. On a night every

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bit as crowded as this one. Let me tell you, we were so busy I didn't sleep for a week. Thank God there is a Sabbath.

DANIEL: Tell us the story again, mother.

WIFE: (*Like they are making a ridiculous request*) Do you see all the work I have to do? Does it look like I have time for stories?

ALL: (*Adlibbing, pleading*) Please, please

WIFE: A story. Maybe I better sit down and tell you the story again. (*Raising a hand to heaven in a voice resigned to hard work*) Jehovah knows it might be the only rest I get for the next 3 days. If it weren't for the Sabbath I would work myself to death. (*Daniel gets a chair; mother sits on chair and children around her.*)

Eleven years ago, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. The Romans, they like to count everything. And everyone had to go to his own town to register.

So a man named Joseph came from the town of Nazareth in Galilee because he belonged to the house and line of David. He came to register with Mary, who was expecting a child. We told them we had no room. But Mary was about to give birth on our doorstep. What could I do? I would have given her our bed but it was already taken by a Roman centurion. Your father said they could stay in the stable.

In no time at all, the baby was born. I wouldn't have thought a lot about it, we were so busy with all the customers! The laundry! The cooking! The cleaning! I wouldn't have thought another thing about it except for the shepherds.

Your father and I were trying to rest, not sleep, just rest. Knocking on the door, in the middle of the night. Your father yelled "we're full. Go away" but they just kept knocking. If we hadn't been afraid it was Romans we would not have answered the door. But it wasn't the Romans. It was Eli and his sons and brother Uziah. They told us they had been watching their sheep when an angel of the Lord appeared to them and said, "Christ the Lord will be found as a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger in Bethlehem" So they went door to door and inn to inn looking for this baby. And he was here. In our stable. In our manger. Stop tugging, already. What?

JEHOSHEBA: Aunt Eunice says no king was ever born in a stable

WIFE: (*With mock outrage*) What does your Aunt Eunice know? She wasn't there. I was. You think a Jewish king born in a stable is unbelievable. What about the Romans? The Romans believe that Romulus and Remas, (*Sarcastically*) the founders of the mighty Roman Empire (may God deliver us soon from their iron hand) they believe that Romulus and Remas were raised by a she-wolf. (*Ehud begins tugging on her sleeve*) Which is harder to believe? A Jewish king born in a stable or a Roman emperor raised by wolves. Aunt Eunice wasn't there. I was. Ehud, what is it?

EHUD: But why would Jehovah want his son, the Messiah, a king of kings to sleep in a hay trough?

WIFE: Funny you should ask. Joseph asked himself that same question that night. He wondered why God chose him and Mary to raise his son. And not just a king, although raising a king would be a job. But the son of El Shaddai, the son of the living God? Jehovah could have picked any man in all of Israel. Why not a rabbi? Why not a priest? Why not the high priest himself? Why a carpenter from Nazareth?

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Your father may be an innkeeper, not a rabbi, but still he is a wise man. They talked about Moses. God chose a slave child to be raised in Pharaoh's palace so he would know how to lead. Perhaps God decided to have his son raised by poor people so he would know how to serve.

A servant, you may ask? The Messiah – a servant? Yes! The prophet Isaiah said he would be. "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.

Joseph was a humble man, a good man, an ordinary carpenter. He prayed that night. I could tell it was not the first time he prayed for wisdom to raise the baby they named Jesus. I would imagine it was not the last time either. Raising God's own son would require much prayer. God had chosen a simple man of trade and an ordinary girl. We don't ask why. We do the tasks God sets before us. (*Changing to a mother's voice of authority*) Speaking of tasks. There will be more work tomorrow with all these guests so you need your rest. Off to bed and no more complaining about sleeping in the stable.

ALL: Yes, mother, good night... (*Children exit*)

WIFE: (*With contemplation, to God*) Your plan, Oh God. This road to Bethlehem, a stable filled with hay, such a strange way to save the world.