

Innkeeper's Wife

CHARACTERS: One female adult, 3 children, ranging in age from 4-9

PROPS: Keep away object

COSTUMES: Biblical

SETTING: None specified

RUN TIME: 6 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 went 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 we had already given it to another family. 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! (*Loudly protesting all the work*) The laundry! The cooking! The cleaning! Good thing we have a Sabbath or I would have worn my fingers to the bone during the census. 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 shepherds. They told us they had been watching the sheep when an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, (*Changes to an "angel voice"*) "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

In case they didn't get it a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, (*Changes to shepherd voice*) "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." (*Jehosheba begins tugging on her sleeve*) 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. She says those shepherds might have had wine in their water.

WIFE: (*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,

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(*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. Which is harder to believe? A Jewish king born in a stable or a Roman emperor raised by wolves. Aunt Eunice wasn't there. Back to the story.

I was a little curious so I went out to the stable with them. Your father went too; he thought the story ... questionable. Unbelievable. Why announce the Messiah to a bunch of shepherds? Why not at the temple? But there was something about it ... I believed them about the angels, about the baby. Your father too. The shepherds told everyone in town. I don't know how many of the citizens of Bethlehem believed but most of them came by to see for themselves the next day. Cluttering up the courtyard, the stable, the entire street. I was never so busy. The inn was full and then all those extra people coming in and going out. The poor mother, Mary was her name, could get no rest. The comings! The goings! In our stable.

DANIEL: 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. We talked, mostly your father. He may be an innkeeper, not a rabbi, but still he is a wise man. We 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.

After the shepherds went back to their flocks we talked with this Joseph. He was a good man, a humble man. A carpenter. 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. Joseph did not know why God picked him. He 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? It is not up to us to question God. It is up to us to accept and do.

Joseph was a humble man. 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 lots of prayer and hard work. (*Thoughtfully, with wonder*) God had chosen a simple man of trade and an ordinary girl. We don't ask why. We do as we are told. (*Changing voice to one of motherly authority*) Speaking of which. You need your rest. There will be more work tomorrow with all these guests. Off to bed and no more complaining about sleeping in the stable.

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

WIFE (*Contemplating to God*) How could Joseph have seen this: this road to Bethlehem, a stable filled with hay, such a strange way to save the world?