

21T20b Christmas Myths- the Inn

Hello my friends. Thank you for joining me today @ the PUNLA Coffee Table for the Christmas Myth of the Inn.

I love the Christmas season with all the traditions and gatherings of family and friends. It is truly a beautiful time of year. I love to see all the lights and decorations. But often we forget there is a reason for the season. That reason is Jesus. The birth of Jesus to be exact. For Christians we have lots of traditions about Christmas; the Nativity, the Star, the Wisemen but did you know that many parts of our traditional Nativity story are not actually in the Bible. These are the Christmas Myths.

So, What do you remember about the Christmas story? Do you remember learning about the Inn? How those mean Innkeepers kept turning Mary and Joseph away over and over again. Until a final grumpy old innkeeper said they could use the barn or stable. Some versions of this story even talk about it being a cave. Does this sound like something you have heard or believe? Have you ever wondered why none of Joseph or Mary's relatives are in this story? This was their hometown; they must have had many relatives in the area. And in fact, the Bible story in Luke Chapter 1 talks about one of Mary's cousins Elizabeth who was to be the mother of John the Baptist. While they may not have been required to go to Bethlehem for the census, but it speaks to the fact Mary and Joseph had relatives and most likely brothers & sisters, aunts & uncles, and cousins.

Let's read this portion of the story together from the gospel of Luke. *And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. (Luke 2:1-8 NKJV)*

Wait a second, did you see an innkeeper or multiple stops at other inns in the Bible story. Your right it's not in there. But of course, if there was an inn then there must have been an innkeeper and surely Joseph tried several places before settling on the stable for Mary. That is great logic and undoubtedly that is how this story developed over the years. But let us be clear, those details are not in the story captured by Luke in the Bible.

NIV version says, *"because there was no guest room available for them."*

NLT version says, *"because there was no lodging available for them."*

Let's look at the Gospel of Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus. Oops no inn is discussed. Neither the Gospel of Mark nor the Gospel of John include the story of the birth of Jesus.

The first time I really studied these scriptures I was very disappointed that the details I loved in this story were simply not in the Bible. But I could imagine it was true. Just because it does not say so, does not mean it is not true. Or is there more to this story than we see.

I used the BlueLetterBible search and looked for occurrences of the word "Inn" in Luke & Acts. Surprisingly there are only two occurrences, Luke 2:7 the birth of Jesus and Luke 10:34 the parable of the Good Samaritan. But when I looked at the Greek for clarity things got more confusing. Luke uses the Greek word "katalumati" (kat-al'-oo-mah-ti) which means a lodging place or accommodation. But Luke uses a different word in Luke 10:34 for the parable of the Good Samaritan. Luke uses the Greek word pandocheion (pan-dokk-i'-on) which literally means an inn, khan, hotel. I was surprised and this peaked my interest why did Luke use two different words for Inn?

I decided to search for both Greek words in Luke & Acts. I found no other used of the word pandocheion (pan-dokk-i'-on) but one other occurrence of a form of katalumati" (kat-al'-oo-mah-ti) the word katályma (kat-al'-i'-mah) meaning accommodation or place of lodging. This occurrence was Luke 22:11 which is the Last Supper story. Here the disciples are sent to prepare the Passover Meal. Jesus instructs them ask the owner of a house for the guest chamber or guestroom or some translations use the term upper room. This is not an Inn or hotel but a house with a guestroom.

This is the only other use of this Greek word in the new testament.

Surely, if it was an Inn then Luke would have used the correct word. The word he chose to use means guestroom or accommodation not an Inn. Although it could mean Inn, it is more likely Luke would be consistent with his word usage. Therefore, the accommodation is probably more along the lines of the Last Supper story rather than the Good Samaritan.

We need to understand some extra biblical information as well as a couple biblical facts if we are to understand what Luke was trying to tell us.

Let us think about what we know about Bible history. Joseph was from Bethlehem; this is His ancestral home being in the lineage of King David. So, I want you to think about this for moment. Joseph's family was from Bethlehem. The Roman empire was requiring everyone to return to their home city to be counted by the census. Most scholars estimate that the population of Bethlehem was probably less than one thousand at the time of Jesus.

I grew up in a town about this same size. My hometown population has fluctuated between 700-900 during my lifetime. Most of my life there was one or no hotels or

motels in my hometown. When family comes home, they stay with family. Now, think about a family reunion in a small town. When I was a kid, if a family was having a reunion, other families would allow them to stay with them because there was not enough room in the family home for everyone.

Now back to the Bible story. A town the size of Bethlehem would probably not have had an Inn especially since it was so close to Jerusalem. But if we can reconcile that there may have been an Inn or Inns in Bethlehem, were do you think Joseph would have stayed when he returned to his hometown? In fact, he would have most likely not had the money to stay at an Inn. In Israel of Bible times, hospitality to fellow Jews was part of the culture. Especially under these extreme circumstances. Of course, he would have planned to stay with family or friends or relied on the culture of hospitality to find a place to stay.

But we also have to understand that everyone with family roots in this very small town of Bethlehem were required to come home to be counted. Relatives from all over would have descended on this small town. The statement of “there was no room” or other translations say, “no place for them”. This is conveying the space was full.

This made me wonder, what were homes like in Bethlehem when Jesus was born. What I discovered was most homes were built with an upper room where the family lived which was a big open room used for pretty much everything including sleeping, and lower room, which was often more of a storehouse, during cold months the family would keep the animals in this area to shelter them from the cold. This was not really a barn or stable, but part of the house. And for some parts of the year, it would be where the family kept the animals at night to protect them from the cold.

The Bible speaks of a guestroom or accommodation not an Inn and no Innkeepers. In fact, it was more likely a family home or relative’s home. It may have been full due to the census with so many returning home at the same time. So, the Bible says, there was no room in the upper room for them. Which more likely means they had to sleep in the lower room which in winter would house the family’s animals. Super spoiler alert, despite what all our Nativity Scenes show, it is extremely unlikely there were any animals in the lower room with Mary and Joseph.

Remember Jesus was probably not born on December 25th, Church tradition says Emperor Constantine formally had the church in Rome start celebrating the “Christ” “mass” on December 25th in the year 336 AD. The Roman Church wanted to align this celebration with the Winter Solstice celebrations. Most scholars contend it is more likely Jesus was born in June or July. If they are correct, then the animals would not have been in the lower room during the birth of Jesus. There is even support for this in the Christmas story itself. The Shepherds were tending their flocks in the fields by night. This means it was not the cold time of year and the animals were most likely all in the field or at least outside. Even the visual we have of the manger is probably not true. Like most of you I visualize a rickety old dirty manger with hay in it. Donkey snot and slobber everywhere and mooing cows. But none of this is probably true. It is true that

Jesus was laid in a manger, but it was probably not being used to feed animals at the time Jesus was born. Beautiful image but most likely a myth also.

I do not wish to offend anyone but no matter how nice or sweet the myth is, it is still not true. No one likes being told their fond childhood memories are based on myths. Well, I'm sorry but if it's not in the Bible version of the Christmas story it is a myth.

You are probably asking why do I care? Well, my simple answer is it is not true if it is not in the Bible. But I think the bigger issue is, new Christians often learn these traditions and whole heartedly believe them. It becomes an integral part of their belief in Christ. But, then they find out it is not true and it can cause them to question everything they believe in.

A sweet-nice story is great but not if it causes someone to stumble in their relationship with Jesus. If this, is you, stay with me it gets better.

Truth is still truth and there is only one version of the truth.

For me I always hear the last words of Jesus in Revelation, *“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”* (Revelation 22:18-19 NKJV)

I know this doesn't apply to the Christmas story necessarily but for me truth is truth. I do not think it is wise to embellish or change the word of God, even if we think it makes the story cute or it might be true.

So let me summarize what we talked about today. We discussed a few Christmas Nativity Myths. First, it is very unlikely Joseph stopped at an Inn, the words used in the original language of the Bible actual seems to mean more of an accommodation rather than an Inn. The accommodation was most likely at a relative's home. Best evidence for this is the when the Magi visit Jesus in a house. Second, the lower-room where Jesus was most likely born was not really a stable but more likely the lower part of the house. Maybe not super clean and cozy but still part of the house. And third, probably no animals at the birth of Jesus since the most likely time of year for Jesus' birth would mean the animals would have been kept outside.

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Now, none of this diminishes the beauty or significance of the birth of Jesus. The birth of Jesus still satisfies all the prophecies about the messiah without any of these sweet

little embellishments. These embellishments and miss-translations over the centuries are typical of family traditions. But, I contend truth is still better than fiction. I actually like the concept of baby Jesus coming into the world in a loving family home surrounded by family rather than animals. Still the humblest of entries into the world. The Shepherds still came to see baby Jesus. I hope you can see the warmth and beauty of the Christmas story without the hype or embellishments.

I hope you will join me for our next episode of Christmas Myths as we look at the greatest story ever told and the amazing truths which are far better than the myths.

Let's Pray

Father God.

I pray these things in your name Lord Jesus, Amen

As always if you liked the message click like, you can leave comments here or our website or email me. And please subscribe, if you want to be notified when we post new videos, click the notification bell.

See you next time @ the PUNLA Coffee Table. God bless.