

### **304 Stable + inn + manger? Wrong, try again!**

I have a friend who, like me, loves to challenge our preconceived ideas, but ONLY if it helps us – and, more importantly, those who don't yet know Jesus' love – to draw closer to the One who loves us all to the point of death. She sent me a link<sup>1</sup> about the nativity.

Classic FM has us voting for 'the nation's favourite carol', and there can be no-one, surely, of the older generation who can't associate the words, 'inn', 'stable' and 'manger'. I'm not sure about the younger generation (Radio 1?), but unless and until nativities are banned from schools, those three words are welded into our cultural understanding.

The lone voice my friend found says we've misunderstood the culture of Palestine 2000 years ago, and have mistranslated the NT Greek words: (1) houses had a main room for people *and* animals, and some also had a small spare room, a 'nin'; (2) hospitality was so encultured that Bethlehem visitors would have been given room – at all costs; (3) the 'nin' was full of guests already, so Joseph and Mary were *brought into* the main room – and *especially* so because she was pregnant. Totally *unthinkable* to do otherwise!

So bang go all those carol-service sermons about 'make room for Jesus in your heart'.

Whether this chap is right or not, can you see how totally *impossible* it would be to get people to see the nativity in that way? An absolutely massive mountain to move: films, novels, poems, songs, carols, plus centuries of art; not to mention people's own personal romantic, emotional, and family associations – no chance!

Thankfully, it's not that fundamental a distinction.

In my articles, I try always to be positive, but I believe we do have an absolutely massive mountain to move, one which is *fundamentally* important. But it's equally firmly rooted – if not more so. The positive is what I alluded to last time,<sup>[303]</sup> how Mary's 'yes' initiated God's move to bring the domain of heaven to earth; then Jesus, supremely, brought 'the kingdom of heaven' to earth; we are then tasked with bringing heaven into everyday lives on earth; and ultimately (Advent allusion) God will bring heaven to a totally restored earth.

And the absolutely massive mountain? The Christian faith has transmuted into a way in which a few ('chosen'?) people will be allowed to escape the mess of earth, away to a lovely 'heaven'; and for the rest, the prospects are not good. So our fundamental job, as Christians, is to persuade people that they too need to climb into the life raft, to escape the sinking ship (try Googling: sermon life raft).

Tom Wright (along with Desmond Tutu<sup>[302]</sup> and others) is trying to get us back to a biblical view: as a follower of Christ the King we have to be fully committed to 'thy kingdom come, thy will be done *on earth*'! And I guess that Jesus would agree with Tom and Desmond.

Paul Bev. 18.12.23

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.psephizo.com/biblical-studies/jesus-wasnt-born-in-a-stable-and-that-makes-all-the-difference/>