

The INN

A Motel With NO Vacancies?

The Greek word *κατάλυμα* (*kataluma*) is flexible, and usage in the LXX and NT refers to a variety of places for lodging. Most likely Joseph and Mary sought lodging in the public accommodations in the city of Bethlehem, which would have been crude shelters for people and animals. However, it has been suggested by various scholars that Joseph and Mary were staying with relatives in Bethlehem. If that were true, the term would refer to the guestroom in their house, which would have been filled beyond capacity with all the other relatives who had to journey to Bethlehem for the census.

“There was no place for them in the inn.” There is no drama in how this is told. There is no search for a variety of places to stay or a heartless innkeeper. Bethlehem was not large and there was simply no other place to stay. The humble surroundings of the birth are ironic in view of the birth’s significance.

Normally mothers wrapped their newborn babies in wide strips of cloth to keep them warm. Traditionally Christians have believed that the manger, a feeding trough, in which Mary laid the baby Jesus was in a cave. But most homes in Israel had two parts, one for the family and another for the household animals. It is possible that this was the location of the manger. An inn (*kataluma*) could have been a guest room in a house or any place of lodging. This Greek word has a wider range of meanings than *pandocheion*, which refers specifically to an inn for travelers (Luke 10:34, the only use in the NT).

The writer’s contrast was between the royal birthplace that this Son of David deserved and the humble one He received. His exclusion from human society anticipated the rejection that He would continue to experience throughout His ministry.

Tom Constable, “Luke”