

Christmas Homily 2009
St. Luke Catholic Church
Rev. Noah Casey

Whewee.....what a day! You know being a hotel bellhop isn't as easy as some folks would make it out to be. I've been working here at this Inn on the road to Jericho for a long time. I've learned that the chores are rather predictable. It's the surprises that really get you.

This is a nice little place. It belongs to another Jewish guy named Jacob. He's a good man to work for...fair, honest and really cares about the guests. Actually, Jacob owns three Inns. It's a little chain. The original business started over in Bethlehem with Jacob's father, Ruben. I think you heard about Ruben last year about this time. Anyway, Jacob took over the business, did real well and now he owns three inns: the old place in Bethlehem, this place near Jericho and one over in Emmaus about seven miles from Jerusalem.

We've been real busy lately. It's keeps me hoppin'; that' for sure. Reminds me of the time years ago when the Emperor decided to have a huge census. All the men had to go their hometowns and register. Some even brought their families with them. The inn over at Bethlehem was packed. There wasn't a clean pile of straw left in the whole place. Well, one night, just as Ruben is putting the big door in place, a couple shows up looking for a room for the night. Ruben told them he didn't have any rooms left. The man looked really anxious; the woman looked really worn out. Ruben felt very sorry for them, but what was he supposed to do? But here's the kicker: the woman is pregnant; very pregnant. The man who introduced himself as Joseph begged Ruben to give them just a little corner someplace out of the cold night air. To make a long story

short, Ruben offers them a place out back in the stable. It's not much, kind of smelly with some animals, but hey it's off the road and with some fresh straw it might work at least for the night. The couple looked so relieved. That was the beginning of an amazing night. Jacob was just a little kid at the time, but he remembers this story because his father, Ruben, loved to tell it.

During that night, the woman, whose name was Mary, gave birth to a baby boy. Ruben and wife were awakened by what sounded like some kind of choir singing. That's when they noticed a bright light shining out back in the stable. By the time Ruben got down to the stable, some shepherds from the nearby fields showed up. How did they know about this? It was amazing, but there they were.

That little family ended up staying for a few days until the little lady could gain her strength, and gave Joseph a chance to register for the census.

Now that may sound like the end of a cute little story. NOT! There's more. You know, when you're working in the hospitality industry, you pick up a lot of information from guests coming and going. Turns out that years later, this little baby grows up and hits the road as a preacher man. He's pretty good at it, too. One of his stories was about a Samaritan dude helping out a Jew who got beat up and left for dead. That's right; a Samaritan and a Jew. How's that for an unlikely story? But that's how this preacher man talked. He likes to tell familiar stories but they always had a surprising twist.....loving your enemies, helping down and out folks even lepers. Definitely not lepers. Anytime a leper came near we were all supposed to use this special hand sanitizer in a

little pump bottle. Boy, why didn't I invent that stuff, you know what I'm saying? Anyway, the preacher man's story included the Samaritan taking this poor Jew from the ditch to our inn! He pays Jacob to take care of the guy, and even offers to pay Jacob more on his return trip. Now, isn't that somethin'. Don't run into that every day. But let me tell you, it was great for our business. Lots of folks that heard the preacher's story stopped by to look at the place. We started having lunch specials to cater to the crowd. Jacob always wanted to thank the preacher man, but never met him at least not until recently.

As I mentioned, Jacob also owns the inn over at Emmaus. So, one evening, three guys show up to get a room and spend the night. It's suppertime, and they ordered supper. Jacob over hears these guys talking and turns out that one of the three is the preacher man. Ok, so it's a coincidence. But what threw Jacob for a loop....and still gives me chills to tell it....the preacher man supposedly was put to death by the Romans just a few days before over near Jerusalem. This didn't make sense. How does a dead guy show up for supper?

As Jacob served them supper, he was recalling everything that he had heard about this preacher man. Oh by the way, the man's name was Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth. Jacob recalled hearing about what a great speaker this guy was, about miracles and cures he worked and how some folks even thought he might be the Messiah! While he was thinking about all this, Jacob noticed that their supper had taken a bit of a turn; they seemed very intent and like they were praying together. The man, Jesus, took some of the bread, said a blessing and they shared it. Did the same thing with a cup of wine. It was a simple little ritual of

some kind, but there was something captivating about it. Jacob told me later it sort of reminded him of the Passover. The three men seemed totally focused on the bread and wine. Jacob slipped away to get more wine, and when he came back, the man Jesus was gone. Where did he go? Then, the other two guys suddenly said they had to leave and head back to Jerusalem immediately. They paid for everything, and blew out of the inn like a hot wind. I told you: in this business, you've got to be ready for surprises.

As the months passed by, this Jesus was showing up all over the place, and his students were really excited about his teaching. They kept repeating that little ritual with the bread and wine. I heard one of them say, that when they did this, they knew Jesus was really with them whether they saw him or not.

We've had some of Jesus' friends stop by the inn. They're an interesting group. If they stay long, they always ask to use a special room we have for meetings. I've overheard them telling stories about this Jesus. They share what he taught them. And they always end with that little ritual with the bread and wine. It's really kind of beautiful. I was thinking about all this the other day, and this special bread. It suddenly struck me that the name "Bethlehem" means "House of Bread". Neat, huh? They're a nice group of folks. You can see clearly how they love one another. One thing for sure; these folks are convinced that this Jesus is the Son of God.

You know, I finally figured out that one thing all three of our inns have in common is this Jesus. Isn't that something? But like I said before, you've got to be ready for surprises in this business. You just

never know who's going to show up. So, I always welcome everyone. A baby, a preacher man, a pregnant woman and her husband. You just never know. Could be someone important. Might even be God!

Well, hey. Nice visiting with you, but I got to get back to work. The Jesus people are stopping by today. Last time they were here, they said, "Hey, Noah....that's my name...Noah, the Bellhop....why don't you join us for our gathering?" I'm thinking about joining their group. I want to see if I get to know Jesus when they break the bread and share the cup.