

*“The Inn that Missed Its Chance”*

*A narration by Amos R. Wells with*

*Introduction by the Rev. Dr. Brian R. Bodt, Pastor*

*Luke 2:1-20*

*Mary Taylor Memorial United Methodist Church, Milford, Connecticut*

*Christmas Eve, 2013*

*“I would love to have been there.”*

How often do we hear that said? How often do we say it ourselves? In response to some event that we have missed—a great concert or theatre performance or sports event—or in response to some exciting encounter between people—a wonderful birthday or anniversary party, a family reunion, a reconciliation between estranged people—we say *“I would love to have been there.”*

Have we ever said it, or thought it, about that first Christmas? I have. I wonder what it might have been like to be there to, as the shepherds said *“see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.”*

As an elementary school student I was an avid reader of a series of books entitled *“You Were There.”* To this day I think my love of history is a result of those books, which used author’s license to place young people as eyewitnesses to great and not-so-great moments in American history—battles of the Civil War, the adoption of the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and so forth.

Tonight, the author Amos R. Wells invites us to such an experience with his narration, *“The Inn that Missed Its Chance.”* He tells the story of Jesus’ birth from the view of the innkeeper in Bethlehem: the one who, we imagine, told Mary and Joseph there was no room for them there.

The innkeeper tells his story much later: after Jesus grows up, and is preaching and teaching throughout the Holy Land. It is only then the innkeeper realizes what he’s missed. As you listen, some phrases may be unfamiliar, so here is a brief explanation of them:

“His Honor Marcus Lucius” does not appear to be a real historical person but represents the Roman authorities requiring the taxation which resulted in the journey to Bethlehem

“from farthest Galilee” is where Mary and Joseph came from, to Joseph’s ancestral home in Bethlehem

“in all our towns from Beersheba to Dan” describes the length of Israel. Beersheba is at the southern edge of Israel, near the Dead Sea and the Negeb desert; Dan, 140 air miles north, is at the northern border of Israel with Lebanon and Syria. Simply put, “from one end of the country to the other.”

“a second David” refers to the promise that the Messiah would come from the family line of King David.

“prithee,” in an old way of saying, “I pray thee” or “I ask or request of you.”

In the end, tonight offers us a choice. We can feel good in this candlelit service but go about our business as if everything is the same; or we can recognize that celebrating Messiah’s birth means that our lives, redeemed by God, can never be the same again. The innkeeper missed his chance. Will we?

### **The Inn that Missed It’s Chance**

The landlord speaks, A. D. 28

What could be done? The inn was full of folks:

His Honor Marcus Lucius, and his scribes  
who made the census; honorable men  
from farthest Galilee come hitherward  
to be enrolled; high ladies and their lords;  
the rich, the rabbis, such a noble throng  
as Bethlehem had never seen before  
and may not see again.

And there they were,  
close-herded with their servants, till the inn  
was like a hive at swarming time, and I

was fairly crazed among them.  
Could I know that they were so important?  
the two, no servants, just a workman sort of man,  
leading a donkey and his wife thereon,  
drooping and pale –  
I saw them not myself.  
My servants must have driven them away.  
but had I seen them, how was I to know  
were inns to welcome stragglers, up and down  
in all our towns from Beersheba to Dan,  
till he should come? and how were men to know?  
There was a sign, they say, a heavenly light  
resplendent; but I had no time for stars.  
and there were songs of angels in the air  
out on the hills; but how was I to hear  
amid the thousand clamors of an inn?  
of course, if I had known them, who they were,  
and who it was that should be born that night,  
and now I learn that they will make him king.  
a second David who will ransom us  
from these Philistine Romans– who but he  
that feeds an army with a loaf of bread  
and if a soldier falls he touches him  
and up he leaps uninjured.  
Had I known,  
I would have turned the whole inn upside down,  
his honor, Marcus Lucius, and the rest,  
and sent them all to stables.  
so you have seen him, stranger, and perhaps  
again may see him? prithee, say for me  
I did not know;  
And if he comes again,  
as surely he will come, with retinue,  
and banners, and an army– tell him, my lord,  
that all my inn is his to make amends.  
alas! alas! to miss a chance like that!  
this inn that might be chief among them all–  
the birthplace of the Messiah — had I known!

AMOS R. WELLS