

The Road Less Traveled – December 14, 2018

What if Jesus wasn't born in a stable after all?

That is the question we wrestled with Wednesday evening at our *Dialogos* Bible study. What if we have been wrong all along? What if all of our nativity pageants and our image of Jesus being born in the squalor of a stable because no one would take in his family are incorrect?

Actually it's not as heretical as it sounds. Our class on Wednesday came about because of a journal article that my son Andrew shared with me a week or so ago. You can view the article [here](#).

If you peruse it you will find that the author isn't trying to debunk what the Bible says about Jesus' birth, but rather our assumptions about what it means. It's pretty dense, but basically the argument is that the Greek word that we translate as "inn" (as in no room for them at the inn) doesn't refer to a place of lodging for hire, but rather a household space that would have been reserved for family members. Further, the author argues that most modest families in the first century did not have a separate barn to house their animals, but rather brought them each night into the house, where troughs in the floor were filled with hay for their feed. Finally, he asserts that, as a descendent of the House of David, Joseph certainly would have had much in the way of family in Bethlehem, and it would have been an insult to said family for him not to seek lodging with them. And it would have been a breach of honor for any of those families to have turned him away.

What I liked about the article and our discussion on Wednesday is the "what if" factor. What if Jesus was not born in a stable, surrounded only by his overwhelmed parents, but rather in the warmth and love of extended family? What if Jesus was born not as an outcast, but surrounded by the same care and joy as the rest of us? Does that make Jesus more approachable to us? Is it easier to see Jesus as truly human, one of us? And if Jesus is more approachable, more relatable to us, does it make it easier for us to follow Him?

On Wednesday there were no quick answers, and there still aren't. But it's the kind of Bible study that really feeds me. Because it reminds me of how much I don't fully understand about the Bible and how many gaps I fill in with my own assumptions. And it compelled me to really dig into a story that I thought I knew backwards and forwards.

I believe the best Bible studies are those that reinforce the mystery of Scripture and the unknowable aspect of God's work in our world. Because once I admit that I don't really know, then I am forced to turn to God. And in the end, I believe that is the real purpose of Scripture. Not to give us answers to the unknowable, but to ultimately direct us to God and to Christ. For that is the real answer.

See you Sunday.