

# A Shout from the Innkeeper

In a small church in Wisconsin many years ago, the Sunday School superintendent was assigning speaking parts for the Christmas pageant to the children.

“But what part to give Wally?” she thought. Wally was a nice boy, big for his age because he had been held back a grade. His name probably would never appear on any school honor roll, but he was well-liked and tried hard to fit in with the other kids. Every other year, he had been relegated to being a shepherd, never saying anything, just kneeling in wonder at the manger. But this year ... well, the superintendent decided to take a risk. Wally would play the innkeeper.

“Now Wally,” she told him, “you only have two lines to remember. When Mary and Joseph come to your door, you open it and say: ‘The inn is full. Be gone!’”

The weeks of December passed. Every day, Wally would say to himself, “The inn is full. Be gone! ... The inn is full. Be gone!” Final rehearsal was a little crazy, but Wally got his lines just right.



Finally, the night for the pageant arrived. The church was packed full of people. The familiar story unfolded. Mary and Joseph traveled down the main aisle to Bethlehem, looking tired and worn – and arrived at the innkeeper’s door.

Joseph knocked and Wally opened the door to him, to Mary, and to a whole sea of faces watching him from the congregation. Wally froze.

“Please, sir,” Joseph said. “My wife is going to have a baby soon. Do you have a room for us to stay tonight?”

Seconds passed. Silence. The superintendent finally hissed from the side of the stage, “The inn is full. Be gone!”

More seconds. The boy Joseph repeated, “Please, sir, do you have a room for us to stay tonight?”

Then it came out, all in a rush: “The inn is full. Be gone! The inn is full. Be gone!”

Joseph put his arm around Mary and they began to walk away with their heads down.

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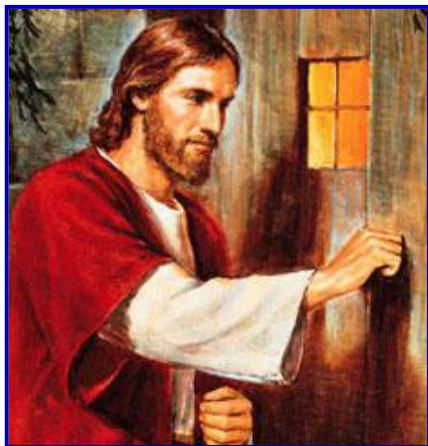
Maybe it was the music; maybe it was the candles; maybe it was because Joseph looked so dejected. Inside Wally, something clicked and he came to life. “Wait! Wait!” he called out in a loud voice. “Mary, Joseph, please come back. You can have my room!”

Everyone laughed. Everyone. Wally’s face burned. He had messed it all up. For the rest of the pageant, Wally’s eyes were glued to the carpet, his head down.

When it was all over and the congregation had finished singing *Silent Night*, Wally rushed toward the back of the church. He couldn’t wait to get out of there. Before he could make it to the narthex, the Sunday School superintendent caught his arm.

“I’m ... I’m sorry,” he stammered. “I just got it all wrong!”

“No,” she said. “No – you got it just right, Wally. Just right.”



Indeed. Wally might not have followed the script, but in his heart, he did get it right.

You see, you don’t have to be perfect to kneel at the manger, whether you are Wally, the innkeeper, or the president of Life Care Centers of America.

The Christmas story calls us to come ... to listen to the angels ... to go with the shepherds ... to share the stable ... to glimpse the star.

It’s my story. It’s your story. And Christ is still knocking, still looking for a room – in your heart.

Invite Him in. Just like Wally did.

– Beecher Hunter