



The Innkeeper's Story

Note to storytellers: The questions in this story are not rhetorical! When retelling, please encourage listeners to respond and take time to engage their ideas.



"Knock, knock!"

"Who's there?"

"Innkeeper."

"Innkeeper who?"

"Exactly."

Exactly! There is no innkeeper in the Bible story of Jesus' birth! I am nowhere to be found!

How does the story go again? Help me! "*While [Joseph and Mary] were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because...*" (Luke 2:6-7). Because?

Now, why was the baby placed in a feed trough? Do you remember? Yes, that's it! Mary laid the baby in a manger, "*...because there was no place for them in the inn*" (Luke 2:7).

There was an inn in the Bible story, so there must have been an innkeeper! But I have not been given a name, and a name is so important. Can you imagine what my name might be?

Hannah the Housekeeper? Ibrahim the Innkeeper?

Thank you, thank you. Now I have a name and a place in this marvellous story, the story of a baby's birth in a stable.

And that baby's name is so important, too. Can you remember all of the names people have given him? That's right: Jesus, which means God-will-save. Then there is the name Emmanuel; it means God-with-us. Those are amazing names for a little baby! They tell us that in Jesus, God was coming close enough to cuddle!

Now I have a name, the baby has a name, and we have a place in the story. So do you! For just as you can picture me at the door of my inn on that cold, starry night, you can picture yourself there, too. You are standing with me on the threshold of a story that will change our lives.

- When God reaches out to do something new, will you welcome it?
- When Good News comes close, will you be ready to hear it?
- When Love comes knocking, will you open the door?

Knock, knock!

Unwrapping the Innkeeper's Story

Placing ourselves in the story!

ACTIVITY 1: Nativity Scenes or Crèche Sets

Ages

All ages (especially Messy Church)

Supplies

Invite people to bring their crèches to display and share over Advent; pictures of different crèche sets; templates and supplies to make your own crèche or Nativity scene

Activity

a Invite each family/individual to display and share their crèches. (Alternatively, take photos of each set and create a PowerPoint presentation.) Share the story of each set: where did it come from and how long has it been in your family? Which piece is a favourite piece and why? If you could add pieces, what would they be? Is an innkeeper included in the scene?

b Display all crèches in the worship space during Advent, adding pieces each week. On Christmas Eve, add the Christ child to each set.

c Working together in small or family groups, create your own crèche set or Nativity scene. Search the Internet for ideas, e.g., "25 DIY Nativity Scenes" (www.babble.com/crafts-activities/25-diy-nativity-scenes/).

A crèche set that is especially fun to make is a set of felt finger puppets. There are several patterns available online. Remember to add an innkeeper puppet!

ACTIVITY 2: Make an Entrance**Ages**

All ages

Supplies

Decorations; innkeeper's costume

Activity

Keeping in mind our story of the innkeeper, take a look at the entrance to your church building or worship space. Imagine what this entrance looks like to newcomers. Does it look welcoming, attractive, and accessible? Decorate the entrance for Advent. Make the entrance look like the door of an inn or a stable for Christmas Eve. Invite one of your Christmas Eve greeters to dress up like an innkeeper!

ACTIVITY 3: Welcoming Those without Shelter**Ages**

All ages (especially 10+)

Supplies

Information about refugees and displaced and homeless people in Canada; access to Internet

Discuss

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)'s annual Global Trends Report: World at War, released on June 18, 2015, stated that the number of people forcibly displaced at the end of 2014 had risen to a staggering 59.5 million. The increase represents the biggest leap ever seen in a single year. Moreover, the report said the situation was likely to worsen. Globally, one in every 122 humans is now either a refugee, internally displaced, or seeking asylum.

Activity

Visit www.united-church.ca to find out what The United Church of Canada is doing and what you can do about:

- Refugees and Migration
- Poverty and Housing
- Right Relationships

ACTIVITY 4: Vote for Your Favourite Videos

Ages

All ages (especially 5+)

Supplies

Access to the Internet; supplies to create your own video

Activity

a Watch these two videos in which the Nativity story is told from the Innkeeper's point of view and vote on which of these videos is your favourite and why.

- "The Innkeeper (Nativity Factor 2011 – 3rd Place)" (<https://youtu.be/Qnr6En4tlDw>)
- "The Inn-Keeper's Tale (Nativity Factor 2011 shortlisted)" (<https://youtu.be/0CZl62Mtkm>)

b Create your own video, post it on YouTube, and share it on social media using hashtags #UCCan #AdventUnwrapped.

ACTIVITY 5: Write a Song

Ages

All ages

Supplies

Access to Internet

Activity

a Listen to these songs written from the Innkeeper's perspective:

- "Lennie Gallant song 'The Innkeeper' with Karen Gallant Picture" (<https://youtu.be/3S1jsatf7q4>)
- "Rest (The Song of the InnKeeper- Official Lyric Video - Jason Gray)" (<https://youtu.be/w6OV7lLY2bs>)
- "I Have No Room – Christmas Song of the Innkeeper" (<https://youtu.be/vVVgbmFSqUE>)

b Write your own lyrics for an innkeeper's song and share them on social media using hashtags #UCCan #AdventUnwrapped.

Activity 6: Storytime

Ages

All ages

Supplies

Storybooks

Activity

Share and enjoy storybooks that help us imagine the birth of Jesus from different cultural viewpoints, e.g.:

- *The Night of Las Posadas* by Tomie dePaola (Latin American) This is the story of the procession of Las Posadas, the tradition in which Mary and Joseph go from door to door seeking shelter on Christmas Eve.
- *Red Parka Mary* by Peter Eyvindson (Canadian) An Aboriginal boy overcomes his fear of the elderly woman living next door, and they exchange Christmas gifts.
- *The Mummer's Song* by Bud Davidge (Canadian) This story celebrates Newfoundland's 200-year-old tradition of opening doors to strangers at Christmastime.
- *A Northern Nativity* by William Kurelek (Canadian) The Christ child is born to all kinds of parents in all kinds of places across Canada.

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Isaiah's Story



Shalom. My name is Isaiah ben Amoz. My writings—the beginning of the Book of Isaiah—are now a part of sacred scripture. But I never imagined they would be. I simply

had to write for love of the people. I wrote to bring good news in times of trouble, hope in times of despair, and faith in times of doubt.

You see, I lived about 800 years before Jesus' birth. At the time, my people were not living very faithfully. They were forgetting to care about God. It pained me to see many cared more about their own wealth than about justice. Some were obsessed with idols made of gold and silver. They feasted on the finest bread and drank wine by the bowl, even as widows and orphans were left hungry and foreigners living among us were oppressed.

We forgot that we once lived as foreigners in the land of Egypt, where we had prayed to God for freedom and justice. Now, we were the oppressors. My people thought they were faithful because they maintained beautiful temples, offered burnt sacrifices, and lit incense. But without love and justice, those actions were a sham.

The faithlessness of my people broke my heart. I have wept for the love of my people many a night.

In my frustration and sorrow, God purified my soul. When God asked, Whom shall I send to speak my truth? I said, here I am. Send me and I will keep the people in my heart. And God gave me the courage to speak, the poetry to express, and the oracles to warn the people.

I tried to tell them that we were sowing the seeds of destruction when we disobeyed God's commandments, and when we cared about no one else but ourselves. I tried to teach that being faithful means taking care of the least advantaged in the society.

Unfortunately, I did not witness how God eventually redeemed my people. God, however, chose two other writers to continue to write what I had begun. One wrote about my nation, having lost a war, living as exiles in a foreign land. The other wrote after our return.

My message to you is this. Please abide in God's radical love. Our God truly cares about all people, and about justice. Engage in a process of reflection, confession, and repentance. God will forgive, and God's love will surround you and redeem you. The Holy God will never abandon you. Thanks be to God.

Unwrapping Isaiah's Story

Isaiah and the other prophets teach us that we need to love as God loves. Who does God love? Is there anyone God does not love? Is there anything God does not care about?

ACTIVITY 1: My Picture: Here I Am, Lord

Ages

All

Supplies

Voices United

Optional: computer with Internet access

Colouring supplies

Blank paper

Activity

- Sing, or read, "I, the Lord of Sea and Sky" (*Voices United* 509). This song was inspired in part by Isaiah.
- If you have Internet access, you could also listen to this song online. Search YouTube and choose a favourite version.
- On a blank sheet of paper, write (or get someone to write for you) a line or phrase that speaks to you.
- Now, draw a picture inspired by that line/phrase.

ACTIVITY 2: My Prayer: A Prophetic Voice

Ages

6+

Supplies

Writing supplies

Activity

- Name an issue in your community, province, or country that makes you sad. Describe it in a grieving tone. (If you feel like it, use poetic words!)
- Now consider, what might God say to comfort the people? What might provide hope?
- Write a short prayer in response.