

This is Lieutenant Roger McCort from The Salvation Army in Eureka with today's Community Comment.

There are a lot of misconceptions about Christmas which drive me crazy. As a pastor, or as one of my friends calls it, a professional Christian, you'd think this would be my holiday. But there are so many things which drag this season away from the ideas and persons it is supposed to be set aside to represent, that I tend to walk through most of December with my teeth grinding, reminding myself that many people don't know better.

Not you, though! I'm going to clue you in to something everyone should know about the mythology around Christmas.

No mistake is more egregious, no error more fundamental, than the false accusation that some nameless innkeeper saw a woman in labor at his door, then turned her out to deliver a baby in some cold stable, surrounded by

livestock. Those of you who have Bibles may wish to consult them to see that this piece of mythology isn't part of the story. It comes from a combination of a late Second Century novella, a 500-year-old mistranslation of a single word, and a piece of modern conceit.

In about the year 180, give or take a decade, a piece of popular fiction began to circulate which purported to tell the backstory of the birth of Jesus. It included such fanciful ideas as Mary being raised as a Vestal Virgin in the Temple at Jerusalem – Which was never a thing. It also describes her and Joseph travelling towards Bethlehem when her labor grew too great, so he left her alone in a cave while he went to look for a midwife. Jesus then delivered himself. Again, there is no history here, but it makes for a fun Christmas story.

Much later, when the Bible was translated into English, one of the translators seems to have misinterpreted what one

word meant. Where this old English translation of a Christian gospel refers to there being no room at an inn, modern translations note that this phrase actually says there was no space in the guest room. How this mistake was made is uncertain, as the word is used properly in the other places it shows up. Why no room for the expectant mother? The guest room was a place of honor, and it could be that it was already inhabited by an older relative or honored guest. Moving them would not have been considered acceptable. Having the baby on the main level, in the room shared by the family, would have been fine.

Which brings up our conceit. The idea of a manger. Away in a manger, no crib for a bed, we sing to one another every Christmastime. But that's just not true. Using a manger as a crib was and even still is today a common practice. Once you wipe it out and put in some fresh hay and

a warm blanket, it's as good or better than the fanciest pack-n-play on the market.

Something else we tend to forget is that ancient peoples loved and revered babies and always made a place for them. It was a hard world, infant mortality ran high, and it was considered an honor to help with the birth of a child. They were just as smart back then as you and I are now, even without fancy hospitals and expensive medical care. They didn't do dumb things, like turn a woman in labor away or send her to an animal barn.

So where does that leave our traditional Christmas story? It gives us a baby, born in ordinary circumstances, to parents trying to do the best they could with what they had. What a beautiful place to begin the amazing Christmas story.

Grace and peace to you. This has been Lt. Roger McCort with today's KINS Community Comment.

**Lt. McCort has spent the better part of 35 years as a theologian and Biblical historian, but his wife accuses him of ruining the Christmas story every year when he takes all the pieces out of the Creche and puts them in their historical positions instead of just leaving them be.*