

I watch them as they walk wearily across the square to the church – she heavily pregnant and leaning on him - his hand on the small of her back, easing the pressure.

Yet another house and he asks for the umpteenth time, “Please we are desperate – we must have a room for the night”. It’s cold; we’re hungry and the time is near. We are oh so very tired – we’ve travelled many miles over the past few days. Our journey has been arduous – we couldn’t take the quick route – it would have been too hazardous. Yet we had to be in Bethlehem by the appointed day. “

But of course they’re only two amongst many thousands here tonight in the “City of David”. All here for the same purpose. But there’s no hospital nearby and Christmas Eve in Bethlehem is so busy – thousands of pilgrims come to worship – traffic is almost at a standstill.

And once again the landlord shakes his head – we’re full – sorry ...

But the woman knows there can be no more waiting – her time has now arrived – the baby’s on its way. She pleads and the landlord relents – “Well we do have an outhouse it’s far from ideal but it’s sheltered and dry.” His wife offers to boil some water and be on standby if needed ..

The new-born baby cries –

Congratulations you have a healthy son

He has a lusty voice – a good pair of lungs, as they say

It’s cold – it’s December and the night sky is clear – the stars are shining but one – much brighter than the others appears (somewhat eerily) to rest here – right over the bell tower. A star is born – a very special one indeed.

A boy is born in Bethlehem – the church bells ring – but not for his safe delivery – no, only to please the Christmas tourists – those visitors come to celebrate the baby’s birthday – to remember with rejoicing that God’s son was born that first Christmas night.

And what of the baby born in Bethlehem at Christmas 2010. No hospital bed - they couldn’t get his mother there in time because of the road block & heavy traffic. This baby is a refugee – an unplanned birth – to a teenage mother. He will be reared in simplicity and poverty in a home shared with other families but he will be much loved – a very precious gift.

This child will live to cry out against injustice – his father’s land has been taken, his home has been demolished – his mother doesn’t know from day to day if she will have enough food to feed her growing family. This baby will become a young man fighting for equality and fairness because he too is a child of God in whose sight we are all loved and equal.

I sit in Manger Square outside the church of the Nativity and wonder what have we learned in 2000 years? We can still find the Holy family here - mother, father and child – poor and vulnerable. As we celebrate Advent 2010 and prepare to welcome the Christ-child into our lives it’s almost the same scene – except now we know better, don’t we?