

Illustrated Bible Life

Room at the Inn

Over the years, I've traveled many different routes to visit my family in Oregon during my summer vacations. Most of these routes are lonely stretches of road. The towns are often miles apart, and in between is hot desert and barren terrain.

Probably the loneliest of these roads go through Nevada. Nevada is sparsely populated; huge expanses of ranchland are interspersed with uninhabited terrain. One highway—Hwy 50—purports to be “the loneliest road in America.” About 400 miles from east to west across the state, there are only about half a dozen towns along the way.

I have been on what I think are even lonelier roads in Nevada. For instance, the so-called ET Hwy—ET for extraterrestrial—is about 100 miles of dust and tumbleweeds; it gets its name from the high incidence of “alien abduction” reports made in the area. I also once took a road south from Highway 50 to a turn-off that was about 10 miles of unpaved road culminating in the Berlin-Ichthyosaur State Park, which boasts the largest-known remains *in situ* of ichthyosaurs, a prehistoric marine reptile whose fossils have been found all over the world.

I enjoy traveling these long, lonely roads, but I do take precautions before embarking on these trips. I carry several gallons of water, and keep plenty of food in my cooler. I have flashlights, a first-aid kit, and a charged-up cell phone with me, along with an emergency kit for my car and, perhaps most comforting of all, a premier membership with AAA.

During this Christmas season, my latest summer trip behind me, I sit warm and comfortable inside, out of the cold winter weather, and reflect on the journey Joseph and Mary made so long ago. What a contrast to my easy hours of air-conditioned travel; music playing from my phone app; good food and motels just when I need them.

For Mary and Joseph, it must have been a difficult undertaking, with Mary's pregnancy and the long, lonely road that spanned nearly 100 miles and probably took close to a week for them to make. They made no side trips to see the local attractions; they had none of the amenities that I usually take with me on my trips. In fact, it's possible they spent their nights bedded down in the grass beside the road, as many travelers did in those days. All of this and then, arriving in Bethlehem only to find no room in the inn.

“While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them” (Luke 2:6-7). What grace they must have had, to pivot so easily into the stable, where Mary gave birth to the Savior of us all.