

Welcome to “J-Talk”

Sunnyside Road Church of Christ

September 18, 2022

Bedlam House



Photo by SLaMNHSFT, Wikipedia

In 1274 A.D. a hospital called “St. Mary of Bethlehem” was established in England. Two centuries later the hospital was converted into an insane asylum. In those days, care of the mentally ill was cruel and closely akin to prison. All day long the screams and shouts and pleas poured out of the doors and windows. It was a sad place of chaos and confusion and the name “Bethlehem” — the house of peace — was corrupted into “Bedlam” and a new word found its way into the English language.

Jan and I found ourselves in Arizona the day after Thanksgiving — on “Black Friday.” Because of the time difference, we were wide-awake at 4:00 A.M. and decided to go to the mall and see what all the shopping fuss was all about. It was cold, raining and pitch black, but still we had trouble finding a place

to park. Some people had camped out on the sidewalk the night before just to be there for the race to the discounted television sets! Insanity ruled as crass consumerism ran unbridled through the mall. Wrong size? Just throw it on the floor and keep excavating. Coupons filled the air. Christmas carols blared and tempers flared.

We sat back and watched the show. There were the scientific shoppers who knew what they wanted and had carefully scouted the terrain the day before. There were team players as mom guarded the shopping cart and sent her minions on missions of consumption. “Mine! Mine! Mine!” It reminded me of a flock of sea gulls fighting over a hot dog bun at the beach. I’d like to report that we rose above the fray, but alas I walked out with three pairs of shoes and a microwave gadget that makes hard-boiled eggs “without the messy shell.”

A few years ago, Jan and I visited Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus. Bethlehem is famous for her ancient olive trees and still today shepherds tend their sheep in the hills below the village. And even though there is a massive, ancient church there commemorating the place of the birth of the Lord, it isn’t

hard to imagine what it must have been like the night Christ was born. Yes, there was the chaos of the crowded village outside, but in the cave (for caves are still used as stables), in a stone manger lined with straw, a tiny baby was tightly wrapped in swaddling clothes. That child brought hope and salvation into the world in the most wondrous way. I can't help but smile as I meditate on that moment, and I wish the bedlam of Black Friday could be transformed back into the peace of Bethlehem.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature consisting of stylized initials and a surname, written in black ink.