



**It was Christmas Day.
I was on honeymoon.
In Jerusalem.**



**Well, where would you go for
your day trip?**



So I woke up, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, and announced to my wife of five days:

“Happy Christmas! We’re going to Bethlehem!”

Bethlehem was only seven miles from our Jerusalem guesthouse. Lucy and I would get to stand there and imagine a pregnant woman and her husband arriving 2,000 years ago, right there in those streets, looking for somewhere to stay as the labour pains started.

We’d get to look at the fields and imagine the shepherds out there with their sheep, in those very fields.

It would be marvellous. What could go wrong?

Here’s what went wrong.

I had forgotten that there was a wall in the way.



I hadn't really thought through the politics of the Middle East as I organised the trip or made our Christmas Day plans. With everything else that was going on with the wedding and honeymoon arrangements, I'd forgotten that there's a wall between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, between Israel and the West Bank. Built in 2003, it is in most places at least 8 metres high. It stretches for 485 miles. And it is a major obstacle if you are trying to get from Jerusalem to Bethlehem with your bride on Christmas Day.

We queued for hours. Guards with guns patrolled the lines. Happy Christmas!

I think you could say it sucked the romance out of the day a bit.

THIS IS WHY IT MATTERS

I don't know if you've ever spent Christmas in a strange place. That's certainly the weirdest location for Christmas morning I've ever ended up in—standing at the place that perhaps best sums up one of this world's most insurmountable divisions.

Right now, as you read this booklet, there's still a wall between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. And right now, there are walls between couples, between siblings, between parents and children—walls running through lounges as families gather (or don't gather) for Christmas. Maybe you're all too painfully aware of the relational wall separating members of your family. That's the reality. We cover it with tinsel, turkey and TV. But even at Christmas—sometimes, especially at Christmas—this is a world of walls.

Jesus—God's own Son—left heaven to come into this world.

