

time came for her to have her baby" (Lk 2.6) suggests a much more relaxed atmosphere than that usually portrayed. But where does the manger come from? It would seem quite possible that in an ordinary Palestinian house the ground floor was shared by domestic animals and the human inhabitants (as is the case with many oriental houses even to this day), so that a manger could very well be a household item for storing fodder. If so, it would have provided a conveniently safe place to lay the baby.

Furthermore, the immediate context suggests that "for them" in Luke 2.7 could possibly refer just to Mary and her child! Why was there no place for them in the guest room? According to some commentaries Jesus was born in the month of Nisan (April), the Passover month; and if so, the guest room could have been occupied by other relatives who had come to celebrate the Feast. On the other hand, for reasons of privacy and sanitary considerations it may have been necessary that the birth should take place on the ground floor of the house. It was probably an all-woman affair!

The popular understanding that, because of the overcrowded inn, Joseph and Mary had to lodge in a stable and the birth took place there poses a further problem for the narrative that follows. Where did the family spend the period before they went to Jerusalem to present the child for purification? (Lk 2.21–22). It would mean that they had to find a place to stay for some forty days (see Lev 12.2–4). Are we to assume that they stayed on in the imaginary stable, or that they found a room in the mythical inn? The fact that Luke did not mention this suggests that the problem did not exist for him.

KAIKHOHEN KIPGEN

Mark 8.23

The account of the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida is found only in the Gospel of Mark. Mark 8.23 demonstrates that in a given passage there may be two levels of implicit (hidden) information that must be expressed in words in some languages, and that these levels are interdependent. The first level has to do with information of a formal nature, while the second level concerns what is required logically.

The phrase "placing hands on him" contains a great deal of hidden information within this context. The person who placed hands on the blind man is clearly Jesus. And by the same token the hands belong to Jesus. Thus, when the participle is translated as a conjugated verb we read: "*Jesus placed his hands on him*" (GNB). In a similar manner, most English versions state that Jesus' hands were placed "on him" or "upon him" without indicating what part of him. But in some languages this is not possible. It is necessary to say precisely where Jesus placed his hands. Two factors in this story make it clear that he placed them on the eyes of the blind man: (1) the story is about healing blindness—it was the eyes that needed attention; and (2) verse 25 specifies that Jesus "again" placed his hands "on his eyes". So in some languages the translator is required to say "placed his hands on the blind man's eyes" in verse 23. The information that is formally implicit in "on him" has to be filled in.

However, if the text is allowed to remain without further information being given in this context, the result may be absurd. Jesus puts his hands over the man's eyes and then asks, "Can you see anything?" Of course not! Since it is physically impossible to see anything when the eyes are covered by another person's hands, logic demands that another bit of information be made clear: "Jesus removed his hands." While in some languages this may be left to the imagination of the reader, other languages may require that it be clearly stated. And translators should be careful to consider the logical implications of their translations after having taken care of those items that are formally implicit.

JOHN ELLINGTON

"Salvation to our God"

This is the literal, Authorised or King James Version, translation of the first words of the song sung in Rev 7.10 by the "great multitude, which no man can number", in praise of God and the Lamb. Similar language is used in two other songs of praise: in 12.10, literally "now has come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God", and 19.1, literally "the salvation and the glory and the power of our God".

Translators have to decide what this language means. Even translations which keep close to the form of the Greek feel the need to add a verb in 7.10 and 19.1. The most natural verb is "belong"; it is chosen in 7.10 by RSV and NIV, "salvation belongs to our God", and also by Phillips and the Italian common language translation (ItCL). "Belong" is also supplied by both traditional and modern translations in 19.1.

But what does it mean to say that salvation belongs to God? It makes sense, in 19.1, to say that glory and power belong to God—but salvation?

The principles of meaningful translation encourage us to replace abstract nouns by verbs. It so happens that Revelation never uses the verb for "save"; but "save" in English, and equivalent verbs in other languages, should help us see the meaning of "salvation" here. Clearly it makes no sense to speak of God being saved; the equivalent meaning should be "God saves". So GNB translates in 7.10 "Salvation comes from our God"; similarly the French and German common language Bibles (FrCL, GeCL).

The problem with this is that in 7.10, the Greek uses a dative case. This may mean "to" or "for" "our God", but not "from our God". The Greek of Revelation is often incorrect, it is true: but before we make it mean the opposite of its usual meaning, "from" instead of "to", we should try all other possible solutions. Strangely, in 19.1, where the Greek uses a genitive case, the meaning could be "salvation, glory and power come from our God"; but all the translations we have consulted prefer to think of these as qualities belonging to God. But once again, what does it mean to say "salvation belongs to our God"?