**Christmas Through the Eyes of Joseph**

Grace Baptist (95), Mt. Carmel (95), Sun Park (07), CIC (08), CIC (13)

***Jesus came miraculously yet simply. So simply trust Him for a miracle in your life.***

Reading: Luke 1:26-33 (Gabriel’s announcement to Mary)

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| OOO  OXO | Shalom! I could not help but overhear a familiar story from back there where I appeared a few moments ago… |

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| XOO  OOO | I heard someone talking about my wife Mary, and how the angel Gabriel announced the wonderful news to her. Let me tell you, when she first heard that announcement it did not seem all that wonderful… |

You see, we had a problem. Mary was a virgin who going to have a baby and I was engaged to the first-ever pregnant virgin! You cannot understand this situation fully unless you know some of the marriage customs of my land.

I know that in some countries, after the wedding, the bride and groom leave for a honeymoon. But in my time in Israel, the bride and groom went back to their parents' homes—not to pack for the honeymoon, but to live separately for an entire year. Why? This period was necessary to prove that the woman was a virgin. Mary and I were considered legally married and our relationship could only be broken through divorce.

Do you understand? Can you surmise when the angel appeared to Mary with the news that she was pregnant? Yes! Right after she became engaged to me legally as my wife—during the time period designed to demonstrate her virginity!

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| OXO  OOO | If you were in Mary's sandals how would you feel? What in the world would you do? You would have good reason to despair of life itself! I have heard of other women found pregnant in their betrothal period running away, having a private abortion or even committing suicide. |

In her humanness, Mary could very well have thought…

• What will Joseph think? Will he believe me? Will he bring me before the authorities? Will I be stoned?

• What will my parents say about having a pregnant daughter before the end of the betrothal period? Will they disown me?

• How will my friends in Nazareth respond? We live in such a small, little town of only 350 people in 50 families, and word like this travels so fast!

• Should I stay in Nazareth or have the baby away somewhere else?

• Who will ever believe that I am a virgin having a baby? This has never happened before!

Mary *could* have responded like that. But what *did* she do? Though she did not quite understand all the details how this situation would play out, she ended her conversation with the angel by saying, “I am the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as you have said.”

**“Mary, Did You Know?” (Linda & Amanda)**

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| OOX  OOO | Alas, Mary knew so little at that time, but she trusted God nonetheless. But what was going on in *my* mind during this time? I thought I had but two options… |

First, I could divorce her publicly—bring her before the Court of Justice in Nazareth (the elders at the city gate) and claim publicly that she had been unfaithful to me. I once witnessed Ishmael son of Berekiah say before the authorities, "Look at this woman! She was my betrothed, but now, see! Here she is, found with child! I know not which man has done this thing, but I wash my hands free from her!"

My second option was to divorce Mary privately by handing her a bill of divorcement in the presence of only two witnesses. I decided to end our relationship this way—with the least amount of shame possible. My heart was broken. I loved Mary and thought we had a bright future together, but then all my dreams had come to ashes.

Shortly afterwards, as I was praying about these things on my bed one night, an angel came to me and was about to give me a message. I remember thinking, “Oh, this angel must have good news! Mary must have misinterpreted the message! Mary is not pregnant after all!”

But the angel gave me the same message—Mary was indeed pregnant. Then it hit me. The Messiah had to be both God and man to bear our sin. If Jesus was not virgin-born and He was *my* son, then He would have inherited a carnal nature from me, since this is always transmitted from the father. Worse still, He would also be under the same penalty for sin. So I asked myself, “Will I place my faith in what the angel said by obeying and taking Mary as my wife?”

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| OXO  OOO | I decided to do it. I broke the engagement period by taking Mary into my house as my wife without waiting for the yearlong period to end. In fact, I committed myself not have any relations with her until after Christ's birth. If you have any imagination you can envision what the rest of Nazareth said after this. Some said, “Oh, he got her pregnant and so he needed to bring her into his house as soon as possible.” And yet the exact opposite was the truth. I had to put up with the sneering and behind-the-scenes gossip around town, but could not offer a believable word in my or Mary's defense. |

Yet, one event of great encouragement to Mary was her visit to her cousin Elizabeth during Mary’s first month and Elizabeth’s sixth month. She stayed with her for three months until right about when John was born.

By Mary’s ninth month I really felt like all was well with us despite what the townspeople said. We were willing to put up with it because we knew the truth—and because we had the unique privilege of bringing the Messiah into the world.

**Scripture Reading Luke 1:46-51**

**“It Came upon the Midnight Clear”, “O Little Town of Bethlehem”**

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| OOO  XOO | Mary then returned from Elizabeth’s home to Nazareth. While we prepared for Jesus’ birth in Nazareth, one morning a Roman herald blew a trumpet in our town square, signaling an imperial announcement. I was right in the middle of painting a new chair in my shop, but the law says you must go to the street, so I dropped my brush and went out. |

This is what I heard: “Attention! By order of his majesty, *Imperator Caesar divi filius Augustus*, I issue this decree. The entire Roman world will be counted, person-by-person. Each family must return to the town of the father’s birth within four days.”

“Four days!” I thought. “It is already a four day trip to Bethlehem and Mary is due any day! With her pregnancy it will take *at least* four days to travel these many miles. We must leave by noon!”

Scrambling up whatever supplies we could for the trip, we left in about an hour. It was a very hard trip—almost all uphill to get into the hill country of Judea. I walked while Mary, at nine months pregnant, rode sidesaddle on our donkey—feeling every jolt, every rut, every rock in the road. But by God’s grace we made it just in time before they closed the census register. There I reported to the Roman authorities and paid my taxes. Why else do you think they wanted us all to be counted?

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| OXO  OOO | But Mary looked at me, “Joseph, I’m feeling really dizzy.” I stammered, “Now, Mary, let’s try to get over to my relatives house across town.” |

“Joseph,” she said, “I think it is time!” She started frequent and intense contractions.

I had to think fast. “Ah, the inn on Boaz Street! I will get you there.” We arrived just after the last guest had paid for his room. Seeing Mary in pain, the owners were so gracious. They quickly led us to the cave under the guests where the guests’ animals were kept. It was warm and private in the back of the cave. Within minutes I became both a midwife and a stepfather!

Our baby born that night was so beautiful. The joy I felt was so deep! It was a quiet night, even silent. The thought hit me as I looked at the boy that Mary’s baby had been ascribed majesty for generations and generations, but every royal privilege for this One had been postponed since conception.

And yet, after Jesus’ birth, one of my first responsibilities was to keep this Majestic One warm. I did my best to try to make the little baby feel comfortable while Mary lay exhausted from the journey, the labor, and the delivery. We packed quickly and carried little on the trip to lighten our load, but I did remember to bring the swaddling cloths. I suspect you use these too in your land, do you not? They are strips of cloths about a handbreadth wide and twelve cubits long—the length three or four men.

I gave the cloths to Mary and she skillfully wrapped the boy into a warm little ball. I laughed at the sight but then caught my breath as I realized that Jesus wrapped like that reminded me of the wrapped body a friend of mine who had recently died.

I immediately dismissed the thought from my mind: “Death? For the Messiah and King of the universe? Never! Praise Jehovah that this One, God Himself, would never be wrapped like that.” And yet still the idea lingered—a new baby snuggled tight in strips of cloth like those intended for death?

**O Holy Night (congregational song)**

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| OOX  OOO | Mary was extremely tired and fell asleep. Jesus did too. But I could not sleep, so I walked out to the mouth of the cave for some fresh air. To my surprise I saw some ill-dressed and foul-smelling scoundrels rummaging about. |

“Are you looking for something?” I asked them.

“Not some *thing*—some *ONE*,” they replied eagerly. “Some angels just appeared to us in the fields and said that the Christ is born here in Bethlehem! Do you know anything about this? Someone said that a pregnant woman came to the inn tonight?”

“As a matter of fact,” I replied, “It was my own wife who gave birth to this Baby! They’re asleep inside the cave right now!”

“No, we aren’t!” I could hear Mary say from inside. “Tell them to come in!”

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| OXO  OOO | We went inside and there was Mary with the sweetest smile on her face! “Visitors already?” she asked me. |

“Please excuse us,” one of the shepherds said, “But we were out in the field and…”

“Yes, so I heard,” Mary said.

We showed them Jesus, lying there in the feeding trough. We had no baby basket, so the next best thing was to put the little guy in the cow’s feeding trough. The shepherds were amazed. So were we. They stayed for a while, we prayed together, then they left.

Mary and I laughed with joy as we could hear them running down the alley, praising the Lord, shouting in the streets and glorifying God all the way back to their own cave on the hillside. Then I went over to the feeding trough, picked up Jesus, and put Him in His mother’s arms. Mary remarked how she had treasured all these memories in her heart, pondering all the difficult but wonderful events of the past few months—the angelic announcements to both of us, the unique manner God moved everyone in the entire Roman Empire just to get us back to Bethlehem to fulfill Micah’s prophecy, the rowdy shepherds, and the bundle of God’s love in her arms. Truly God must really love us all to send His Son like this.

What do I mean? God sent Jesus in a miraculous, yet simple way. He works like that, you know. He mixes the plain with the unusual—the mundane with the miraculous. An ordinary carpenter like me, an unknown woman like Mary, the humblest of delivery rooms—yet filled with His presence and announced by angels! Jesus came miraculously yet simply—so simply trust Him to do a miracle in your life (Main Idea).

You can even trust Him right now, right where you sit. Oh, trust Him not as a baby, but as the *King of the Universe* who humbled Himself to *become* a baby—a boy who became a man to once again be wrapped in swaddling cloths because of undergoing a cruel death. Not because He deserved to die, but because you did! Each of us deserves death for our sins, but this penalty of death God laid on Jesus. He proved it by leaving these cloths empty on the third day. Can you simply accept that He died for you? Not even one room existed for Him at the inn, is there room for Him now in *your* heart?

**“Born Where the Shadows Lie” (Susan’s Solo)**

**Joseph**

First Edition, December 24, 1995 Grace Baptist Church

**Reading of Luke 1:26-33 (Angel’s Announcement to Mary)**

Shalom! I couldn’t help but overhearing a familiar story from back there where I somehow appeared a few moments ago…

What an interesting group of people *you* are! How did you all manage to have the same color of hair and such different eyes from me? And your clothes—who would have thought that such strange, tightfitted clothes could ever be worn by so many!

Oh, where was I? Oh, yes, I heard someone talking about my wife Mary, and how the angel Gabriel announced the wonderful news to her several months back. Let me tell you, when she first heard that announcement it did not seem all that wonderful…

You see, we had a problem. Mary was a virgin who going to have a baby and I was engaged to the first-ever pregnant virgin! You cannot understand this situation fully unless you know some of the marriage customs of my land.

I know that in some countries, after the wedding the bride and groom leave for a honeymoon. But in Israel, the bride and groom go back to their parents' homes—not to pack up for the honeymoon, but to live separately for an entire year. Why? This period is necessary to prove that the woman is a virgin. Mary and I have been considered legally married and our relationship can only be broken through divorce.

Do you understand? Guess when the angel appeared to Mary with the news that she was pregnant? Yes! Right after she became engaged to me legally as my wife—during the time period designed to demonstrate her virginity!

If you were in Mary's situation how would you feel? What in the world would you do? You would have good reason to despair of life itself! I have heard of other women found pregnant in their betrothal period running away, having a private abortion or even committing suicide.

In her humanness, Mary could very well have thought…

• What will Joseph think? Will he believe me? Will he bring me before the authorities? Will I be stoned?

• What will the family say about having a pregnant daughter before the end of the betrothal period? Will they disown me?

• How will my friends in Nazareth respond? We live in such a small little town and word like this travels so fast!

• Should I stay in Nazareth or have the baby away somewhere else?

• Who will ever believe that I am a virgin having a baby? This has never happened before!

But what did Mary do? Even though she did not quite understand all the details of how this situation would be worked out, she ended her conversation with the angel by saying, “I am the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as you have said.”

Well, what was going on in *my* mind during this time? I thought I had but two options.

First, I could divorce her publicly—bring her before the Court of Justice in Nazareth (the elders at the city gate) and claim publicly that she had been unfaithful to me. I once witnessed Ishmael son of Berekiah say before the authorities, "Look at this woman! She was my betrothed, but now, see! Here she is, found with child! I know not which man has done this thing, but I wash my hands free from her!"

My second option was to divorce Mary privately by handing her a bill of divorcement in the presence of only two witnesses. I decided to end our relationship this way—with the least amount of shame possible. My heart was broken. I loved Mary and thought we had a bright future together, but then all my dreams had come to a screeching halt.

Shortly afterwards, as I was praying about these things on my bed one night, an angel came to me and was about to give me a message. I remember thinking, “Oh, this angel must have good news! The heavenly hot line had messed up the message! Mary is not pregnant after all!”

But the angel gave me the same message—Mary was indeed pregnant. Then it hit me. The Messiah had to be both God and man to bear our sin. If Jesus wasn't virgin born then he had a carnal nature just like us and was also under the same penalty for sin. I also asked myself, “Would I place my faith in what the angel said by obeying and taking Mary as my wife?”

I decided to do it. I broke the engagement period by immediately taking Mary into my house as my wife without waiting for the year-long period to end. In fact, I committed myself not have any relations with her until after Christ's birth. If you have any imagination you can envision what the rest of Nazareth said after this. Some said, “Oh, he got her pregnant and so he needed to bring her into his house as soon as possible.” And yet the exact opposite was the truth. I have had to put up with the sneering and behind-the-scenes gossip around town, but I haven’t been able to offer a believable word in my or Mary's defense.

**Four Hymns (beginning with “It Came Upon a Midnight Clear”)**

**Reading of Luke 1:46-51 (Mary’s Song)**

**Solo: “All is Well”**

By Mary’s ninth month I really felt like all was well with us despite what the townspeople said. We were willing to put up with it because we knew the truth—and because we had the unique privilege of bringing the Messiah into the world.

While we prepared for Jesus’ birth in Nazareth, one morning a Roman herald blew a trumpet in our town square, signaling an imperial announcement. I was right in the middle of painting a new chair in my shop, but the law says you must go to the street, so I dropped my brush and went out.

This is what I heard: “Attention! By order of his imperial majesty, Caesar Augustus, I issue this decree. The entire Roman world will be counted, person by person. Each family must return to the town of the father’s birth within four days.”

“Four days!” I thought. “It’s already a four day trip to Bethlehem and Mary is due any day! With her pregnancy it will take *at least* four days to travel these 137 kilometers. We better leave by noon!”

Scrambling up whatever supplies we could for the trip, we left in about an hour. It was a very hard trip—almost all uphill to get into the hill country of Judea. I walked while Mary, at nine months pregnant, rode sidesaddle on our donkey—feeling every jolt, every rut, every rock in the road. But by God’s grace we made it just in time before they closed the census register. There I reported to the Roman authorities and paid my taxes. Why else do you think they wanted us all to be counted?

Then Mary said to me, “Joseph, I’m feeling really dizzy.” I said to her, “Now, Mary, let’s try to get over to my relatives house across town.”

“Joseph,” she said, “I think it’s time! ” and she started having more frequent and intense contractions.

I had to think fast. “Oh, the inn on Boaz Street!” I said, “I’ll get you there.” We arrived just after the last guest had paid for his room. Seeing Mary in pain, the owners were so gracious. They quickly led us around back to the cave where the guests’ animals were kept. It was warm and private in the back of the cave. Within minutes I became both a midwife and a step-father!

The baby born just tonight is so beautiful. The joy I feel is so deep! Tonight is so quiet—even silent.

**Congregational Singing (last song is “Majesty”)**

The thought just hit me that Mary’s baby has been ascribed majesty for generations and generations. This just hasn’t happened on earth until now. In fact, every royal privilege for this One has been postponed since conception.

And yet, after Jesus’ birth a few hours ago, one of my first responsibilities was to keep this Majestic One warm. I did my best to try to make the little baby feel comfortable while Mary lay exhausted from the journey, the labor, and the delivery. We packed so quickly and carried so little on the trip to lighten our load that we soon realized that we had forgotten to bring the swaddling cloths. I suspect you use this too in your land, don’t you? They are strips of cloths about a handbreath wide and twelve cubits long—the length three or four men. I asked the owners of the inn for help and they looked around. Fortunately they found some strips of unused cloths left over from wrapping one of their own grandchildren born recently.

I gave the cloths to Mary and she skillfully wrapped the boy into a warm little ball. I laughed at the sight but then caught my breath as I realized that Jesus wrapped like that reminded me of the wrapped body a friend of mine who had died recently.

I immediately dismissed the thought from my mind: “Death? For the Messiah and King of the universe? Never! Praise Jehovah that this One, God Himself, would never be wrapped like that.” But still the idea lingered—a new baby snuggled tight in strips of cloth like those intended for death?

**Reading of Luke 2:8-14 (Angelic Appearance to Shepherds)**

Mary was extremely tired and fell asleep. Jesus did too. I couldn’t sleep, so I walked out to the mouth of the cave. To my surprise I saw some shepherds milling about.

“Are you looking for someone?” I asked them.

“Yes. Some angels just appeared to us in the fields and said that the Christ is born here in Bethlehem!” they replied eagerly. “Do you know anything about this? Someone said that a pregnant woman came to the inn tonight?”

“As a matter of fact,” I replied, “It was my own wife who gave birth to this Baby! They’re asleep inside the cave right now!”

“No, we aren’t!” I could hear Mary say from inside. “Tell them to come in!”

We went inside and there was Mary with the sweetest smile on her face! “Visitors?” she asked me.

“Please excuse us,” one of the shepherds said, “But we were out in the field and…”

“Yes, so I heard,” Mary said.

We showed them Jesus, lying there in the feeding trough. We did not have a baby basket, so the next best thing was to put the little guy in the cow’s feeding trough. The shepherds were amazed. So were we. They stayed for a while, we prayed together, then they left.

Mary and I laughed with joy as we could hear them running down the street, praising God, shouting in the streets and glorifying God all the way back to their own cave on the hillside. Then I went over to the feeding trough, picked up Jesus, and put Him in His mother’s arms. Mary remarked how she has treasured all these memories in her heart, pondering all the difficult but wonderful events of the past few months—the angelic announcements to both of us, the unique manner God moved everyone in the entire Roman Empire just to get us back to Bethlehem to fulfill Micah’s prophecy, the rowdy shepherds, and the bundle of God’s love in her arms. Truly God must really love us all to send His Son like this.

You know, we’re already had visitors tonight and we’re open to more. We’ve had animals and shepherds—but how about you? (reaching to child) Would any other children like to come up?

**Children Sing “Come As a Child”**