

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)

OO Shalom! I could not help but overhear a familiar story from back there
O where I appeared a few moments ago...
OXO

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

You see, we had a problem. Mary was a virgin who was 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 during my time in Israel, the bride and groom returned 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!

OXO If you were in Mary's sandals how would you feel? What in the world
OO would you do? You would have good reason to despair of life itself! I
O 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)

OOX Alas, Mary knew so little at that time, but she trusted God nonetheless.
OO But what was going on in my mind during this time? I thought I had but
O 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?"

OXO I decided to do it. I broke the engagement period by taking Mary into my
OO house as my wife without waiting for the yearlong period to end. In fact,
O 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”**

OO Mary then returned from Elizabeth’s home to Nazareth. While we
O prepared for Jesus’ birth in Nazareth, one morning a Roman herald blew
XOO 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?

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

“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 clothes. 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)

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

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

“Not something—some *ONE*,” they replied eagerly. “Some angels just appeared to us in the fields and said that 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!”

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

“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 clothes 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 God laid the penalty of death 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 in. Is there room for Him now in *your* heart?

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