

The Christmas Story

It was a cool and crisp evening in *Nazareth, a village in Galilee*, this mid October night. Looking out the window and thanking God for all His blessings, was a young 16-year-old girl named Mary. She grew up here in Nazareth and would enjoy her friends, family and the duties she had to do each day.

Every morning and evening she would go out to the well to get water for her family, as well as help her mother prepare the meals throughout the day.

She was in her home, thanking God for her family and His entire blessings,



as well as the fact that she would soon marry a carpenter *named Joseph, a descendant of King David*.

Suddenly as she was praying a man appeared to her from out of nowhere *and said*,



"Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!"

She was a little startled, and as she looked at this man she could tell he was no ordinary man. He was as tall as the room itself. And was a solid, muscular man who Mary could tell was a mighty warrior of God. No, there were no wings, but he glistened like a new fallen snow and Mary knew she was in the presence of the angel *Gabriel* sent by God Himself.

Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. After all, the doors were closed and how could he have entered the room, also she never considered herself to be a favored woman of the Lord, since her and her family had very little and they had little to offer others or the Lord.

As she was pondering these things the angel answered her, *"Don't be frightened, Mary, for God has decided to bless you! You will become pregnant and have a son, and you are to name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!"*

Now Mary knew she was to marry Joseph who was a descendant of King David, but she also knew that the angel was speaking of her becoming pregnant before she married, so *Mary asked the angel, "But how can I have a baby? I am a virgin."*

Then the angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby born to you will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she's already in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God."

Mary was excited because she knew her cousins Elizabeth and Zechariah had prayed for many years that God would bless them with a child. But they were well off in years and Elizabeth was beyond the age of having children.

The angels final response of, *"For nothing is impossible with God."* Cut into her heart, and she knew that God had done something special in the lives of her cousins Elizabeth and Zechariah, and that God would now do something special in her life too.

So, *Mary responded with, "I am the Lord's servant, and I am willing to accept whatever he wants. May everything you have said come true."*

Mary was a little afraid and excited at the same time, fearful of what others would say since she wasn't married and she would have a child, but excited because she knew that she was in God's hands!

And then the angel left just as quickly as he came.

Mary was so excited about the news the angel had brought her that she had to go see her cousin Elizabeth. *So a few days later Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea, to the town where Zechariah lived. She entered the house and greeted Elizabeth. At the sound of Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.*

Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, "You are blessed by God above all other women, and your child is blessed. What an honor this is, that the mother of my Lord should visit me! When you came in and greeted me, my baby jumped for joy the instant I heard your voice! You are blessed, because you believed that the Lord would do what he said."

Mary was in awe with all that was happening and how God had spoken through Elizabeth to her.

Then *Mary responded,*



*"Oh, how I praise the Lord. How I rejoice in God my Savior!
For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and now generation after generation will call
me blessed. For he, the Mighty One, is holy, and he has done great things for me.
His mercy goes on from generation to generation, to all who fear him.
His mighty arm does tremendous things!
How he scatters the proud and haughty ones!
He has taken princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly.
He has satisfied the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands.
And how he has helped his servant Israel!
He has not forgotten his promise to be merciful.
For he promised our ancestors--Abraham and his children-- to be merciful to them
forever."*

So *Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then went back to her own home.*

When she got back home she told her fiancé Joseph all that had happened,



but he didn't understand. Even though he loved Mary, he couldn't allow this to disgrace himself or Mary. After all, he was a carpenter and he may have had a chance to be someone important since he was from the lineage of king David.

So Joseph went home and fell on his bed crying out to God and asking why He would allow such a thing to happen to the woman he loved. Joseph also wanted to know if an angel really did appear to Mary or if she was just dreaming or seeing things.

So as *Joseph* thought about these things, *being a just man*, he *decided to break the engagement quietly, so as not to disgrace her publicly.*

As he considered this, he fell asleep, and an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream.



"Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to go ahead with your marriage to Mary. For the child within her has been conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

All of this happened to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet:

"Look! The virgin will conceive a child!

She will give birth to a son, and he will be called Immanuel (meaning, God is with us)."

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord commanded. He brought Mary home to be his wife, but she remained a virgin until her son, Jesus was born.

So now for the next six months Mary would have to be laughed at and looked down upon since everyone thought that she was either unfaithful to Joseph, or that they were in sin, since she became pregnant before she was married to Joseph. They tried to explain it all to everyone, but no one believed them, for they all thought that God would not use such an insignificant little servant girl like Mary, nor a poor carpenter name Joseph. But both Mary and Joseph knew why she was pregnant and even though this bothered them sometimes, they trusted in God and that He knew what He was doing.

By this time it was near the end of June, and the weather had changed dramatically, it even got up to 120 degrees some days, which made things pretty uncomfortable for Mary who was ready to have her child almost any day now.

Also at that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. All returned to their own towns to register for this census. And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. He took with him Mary, his fiancé, who was obviously pregnant by this time.

It wasn't a fun trip since there were no cars or planes or trains or even a bus. But it was one they had to take even though it was about 180 miles away. They couldn't afford to have someone take them in their cart therefore they had to walk, and they also took a donkey to hold their provisions on the way. But Mary could only

walk so far and Joseph knew this was too much on her. So he removed everything from the donkey, including the clothes and diapers for the new baby (Just incase He was born before they could get back home) with only leaving enough water and some food for the rest of the trip there,



and he placed Mary on the donkey to ride the rest of the way.

They were about an hour away from Bethlehem and it was getting late. Even in the evening it was still above 90 degrees.

All of a sudden Joseph heard a scream coming from Mary. Joseph looked back at her as she was bent over on the donkey yelling out.

Mary was now having labor pains, which meant the baby would be born soon.

Joseph wanted to make the donkey run to get to Bethlehem as quickly as possible, but this made the donkey bounce and caused too much pain for Mary.

So Joseph stopped and prayed to God asking for Him to help Mary, and he asked God that she wouldn't have the baby until they reached Bethlehem.

He was also frightened since he never delivered a baby, and there was no hot water anywhere (At least that's what he heard he needed. He didn't know why, but he knew he needed hot water.)

So Joseph hurried as fast as he could with the Mary on the donkey trying not to have the donkey bounce Mary around too much. Every once in a while he would look back at Mary who was dripping in sweat from the heat and the pains she was having.

They finally made it to Bethlehem in about a half an hour, and Joseph had prayed the entire time to God for help.

As they reached Bethlehem there where so many people there. Joseph had not remembered when he had seen this many people all in one place. But they were all there because of the census.

Joseph and Mary had gone from place to place trying to find somewhere for Mary to have her child.

But everywhere they went it was the same story. "Sorry we are all filled up."

Some would try to comfort Mary but she just needed a place to lie down and rest and have her baby. Because of the extreme heat, no one was willing to give up his or her room, not even for a pregnant woman.

Joseph prayed once again asking God for help in finding a place suitable to have this child. (Joseph had not remembered when he ever prayed so much, but from this time on, Joseph knew it was something he must always do!)

Finally, in the middle of town, Joseph went to an inn and spoke with the innkeeper. It was an older man with his wife standing there with him. The innkeeper said that there was no place at all for them.

But his wife said, "I know it's not much, but we have a stable for the animals. At least she can rest on some hay and have the child with some sort of privacy."

Joseph figured this was better than nothing, and the woman followed close behind to help Mary in delivering the baby.

Joseph was thankful for this as well.

As they got to the stable, it was a small cave in the side of a little hill.

Inside they saw numerous donkeys, horses and camels from people who were staying at the inn.



Also, there was plenty of hay which Joseph and the innkeeper's wife had piled together and laid some rags over it to make a bed for Mary.

They tried their best to sweep away the animal droppings and shoo away the flies.

The heat did not help the smell either.

They also cleaned out one of the feeding troughs and placed some hay in it for a bed for the baby. Joseph tore part of his tunic to make a wrapping for the child also.

At this point Mary didn't care, and she looked at Joseph with her face and clothes soaking wet from the heat and perspiration and said, "Thank you for being here for me, for listening to God, and for doing the best you could."

At that Joseph looked up into heaven and thanked God for His provisions.

Joseph thought that Mary and the child deserved better, but still he trusted that God knew what He was doing.

So Joseph went outside to wait, as he did there was a lot of yelling and whooping and hollering with people being drunk and celebrating since they were seeing relatives and friends they hadn't seen in a long time.

Joseph thought to himself, "If these people just knew what was going on, and who was going to be born this night. What would people think of this child and how would they

treat Him when He grew up. Didn't they know this was the Messiah, and why would God have His Son born in such a lowly place as a stable?"

Joseph knew the Messiah was coming but never thought it would be in such a way. He expected a big fanfare with kings coming and bowing down to Him. Joseph expected the finest bed for Mary and a nice clean room with maids and servants to help her. He also remembered that he had left the diapers and clothes back on the road an hour ago. What would they use for the Messiah who was to be born?

Then Joseph heard a baby's cry coming from the stable. Mary had given *birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the village inn.*

Joseph came running in and as soon as he saw the child he bowed down and thanked God for this child, *and Joseph named him Jesus, just as the angel had told him to.*



Mary lay there on her bed made of hay as the innkeeper's wife took the baby Jesus from the feeding trough and handed Him to Mary.

Mary just looked at Him in awe, thinking how blessed she was by God to carry His Son and deliver Him into the world.

She looked at Jesus and thought.



The God who created all things and even said, "*Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Could you ever build me a temple as good as that? Could you build a dwelling*

place for me? My hands have made both heaven and earth, and they are mine. I, the LORD, have spoken! Was now dependent upon the hands of this little woman to carry Him.

The one who king David had said, *“You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book.”* Was now crying tears that were kissed away by Mary.

God who took care of over three million people in the desert and said to them *“In the evening you will have meat to eat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.”*

Was now dependant upon Mary and Joseph to feed Him.

Mary also remembered that king David also said; *“Yet you brought me safely from my mother's womb and led me to trust you when I was a nursing infant.”* She knew that he was speaking of this little baby, Jesus, and that God would always watch over Him, just as he had been watching over her even now.

If Mary only knew what this little child would go through and why He had to,



but that's for another story we call Easter.

Also that night some shepherds were in the fields outside the village, guarding their flocks of sheep.



They were watching their sheep and discussing how many people were in Bethlehem because of the census. They even told of old friends and family that had come out to visit them because of the census.

Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terribly frightened, but the angel reassured them.



"Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news of great joy for everyone! The Savior-- yes, the Messiah, the Lord--has been born tonight in Bethlehem, the city of David! And this is how you will recognize him: You will find a baby lying in a manger, wrapped snugly in strips of cloth!"

The Shepard's just stood there in awe as they watched and listened to this angel.



Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others--the armies of heaven--praising God: saying "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to all whom God favors."

When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Come on, let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this wonderful thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

They ran to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger, just as the angel had said.



They looked down upon the child, and their hearts were filled with joy that God would allow them, lowly shepherds to be one of the first to see the Messiah. He wasn't what they expected either, once again they expected a royal birth from a royal line. Not a baby in an animals feeding trough in a dirty smelly place such as a stable. But still they remembered that this was where the angel said He would be.

So the shepherds went out afterwards and told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, but Mary quietly treasured these things in her heart and thought about them often.

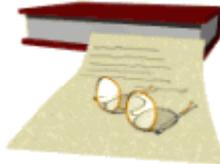
Afterwards the shepherds went back to their fields and flocks, glorifying and praising God for what the angels had told them, and because they had seen the child, just as the angel had said.

No angel has come to you this night, nor were you in Bethlehem 2000 years ago to witness this miracle. But this day I proclaim to you that the Messiah was born just as the prophet Isaiah had said over 2500 years ago.

Isaiah 7:14 (NKJV) "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.

This is more than just a story, but it is true and really happened. Now the exact month we do not know and it doesn't really matter what month or day, what matters is that it really happened.

This Christmas, will you believe it or,



will it be just another story to you?

Some questions you may have about this story

✎ What does the *italics* mean in the story?

Every place in the story where you see *italics* means that it is taken straight from the NLT version of the bible. Therefore you can read this story to your family and share the bible with them at the same time.

✎ How come in the story Jesus is born during the summer and where is the snow?

Remember we read of how the shepherds were watching their flock at night? Well the shepherds would not do this in the winter it was just too cold. Therefore it is believed that Jesus was born during the summer or spring and not the winter as everyone thinks or as we celebrate.

✎ Ok, but where are the wise men? All manger scenes have the three wise men.

Actually the wise men didn't show up until about two years after Jesus was born, and by this time they lived in a house and where not in the stable.

Matt 2:10-11 *When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.* (underlined for emphasis)

✎ One final question then, why would God do this?

I'll let Jesus answer for Himself.

John 3:16-17 *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.*