

## **MUSINGS OF JOSEPH**

Christmas Eve 2011

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I had a pretty quiet life going until about a year ago. This last year has been something else.

Mary and I were just starting the year long engagement period that is customary in our culture. My business has been good, making things for the new Roman city of Sepphoris. With all that construction there has been plenty of work. All in all life was really great.

Then some strange things started to happen. I mean not just little things, but dreams and visions and angel messages, really strange stuff. I still do not know what to make of it.

This all started with Mary's cousin Elizabeth getting pregnant. She said that the angel Gabriel appeared to her husband Zachariah while he was on duty at the temple. This angel tells him that Elizabeth is going to have a baby. Talk about a miracle she is well past childbearing years. He of course was somewhat skeptical. We of course were delighted when it turned out to be true, but poor Zachariah could not speak after coming out of the temple. See what I mean about really strange things happening. Well that was just the start.

Then Mary comes and tells me that the Angel Gabriel had appeared to her. I'm beginning to wonder what's up with this angel Gabriel and why our family is so "blessed." In a very calm voice she tells me that the angel has told her that she is going to have a baby and name him Jesus. She assured me she is still a virgin and then babbled something about the Holy Spirit. I was stunned, I could not really take it all in. I took a long walk and wondered what to do about this.

Mary is such a young girl, but there was something about her when she told me. I found I really couldn't question her or be angry, but I certainly was confused.

Then I had this dream. I swear it seemed like an angel came to me and told me that it was ok that Mary was pregnant. The angel tells me to go ahead and marry her after the baby is born just like nothing had happened. I really struggled with this. I mean I was going to do the honorable and kind thing and let her out of the marriage contract. I wasn't going publicly humiliate her or ask for her to be stoned as was my right according to our laws. I really wrestled with this. Was this dream for real? I mean was God really talking to me through this angel? I am just

a down to earth kind of guy who works hard. I have never experienced anything like this before.

Yet, somehow I knew that what the angel said was right. That's when things really started to change for me. In some ways things started to return somewhat to normal. I went to work on a project and Mary went to stay with her cousin Elizabeth for the last three months of Elizabeth's pregnancy. The village was full of whispers and the looks I got as I walked down the street each day were painful.

All was quiet for a while and then out of the blue comes this decree from the governor that there was to be a census for tax purposes. Worse we had to go back to my hometown. Now I'm from Bethlehem and that is not even close to where we live in Nazareth. There really wasn't any choice; the governor wants a census so he gets a census.

So now we find ourselves in Bethlehem. That was one long trip, why it's almost 80 miles. We had to stop quite frequently, I'm not as young as I used to be and Mary was well into her 9<sup>th</sup> month so the trip took us 6 days. I took a chance and traveled through some unfriendly territory. There is a lot of bad blood between the Samaritans and us Jews and we had to go right through the middle of it. But what do you know, there wasn't any problem at all. Speaking of miracles!

There were a lot of people on the road so we really didn't have to travel alone, but when we got to Bethlehem it was pretty much every man for himself when it came to getting somewhere to stay. Bethlehem is a pretty small town and just about everybody was renting out rooms. However since we were traveling at such a slow pace we were one of the last ones to arrive so nobody had a room left. We trudged from place to place until one innkeeper said we could stay in the cave behind the house. We were so tired that neither of us cared. We were just happy to be able to lay down somewhere.

Well I guess those 6 days on the donkey were too much and no sooner had we settled in and had a little something to eat, then the baby decided it was time to be born.

I got the innkeeper who managed to find someone to help Mary. I didn't have a clue what to do. This giving birth is something women take care of and they prefer if we go away until it is all over. Well it didn't take very long and there he was, a little boy that the angel said we are to name Jesus. I guess that's what it will be then. So we thought the excitement for the night was over, but there was this huge commotion in the courtyard. A bunch of shepherds were outside babbling something about the Angel Gabriel telling them to come look for a baby in a manger. Well there's Jesus in a manger wrapped up just like the angel said. That Gabriel sure does get around. Personally I've had about enough of him for awhile.

Yet what they said matched exactly the things that Gabriel had told Mary. And Mary, she just sat there by the manger holding little Jesus. Such a look of serenity on her face. I'm not sure I understand how she can be so calm with all that is going on.

That's the thing about this incredible young girl that I will soon marry. She has a faith in God that is unique at least to me. For me I faith in the God of my forefathers. I'm an observant Jew. I've made the trip to the temple in Jerusalem and Jesus will be dedicated at the temple just as is written in the law.

My faith tells me that if I follow the commandments and do what God has ordered all will be well. But the angel said to Mary that she was greatly favored by God. I always thought that the people favored by God had it easy. I mean you are faithful and do what you should and God protects you. How is being favored by God connected with what we have experienced over the last 12 months. This kind of being favored makes me nervous. God has really challenged me, but Mary she seems so confident, so content to simply let God be God as she told me.

Maybe faith isn't about having all the answers. Maybe faith is what Mary understands that though the way forward is not clear, God is in charge and we just need to follow the his lead. Her faith is such an example to me. She may question God, but she follows his lead. Faith is not about our having all the answers, but believing that God does.

We have started on a great journey and we do not see the end, but I believe that we have the faith to make the trip. I hope this night that you find the faith to follow the path that God has laid out for you. That you will continue as we will to listen to God and follow God's lead. God is doing something great this night, but God needs us to participate with him.

I do not know where this is all going, but I for one am going to follow the path , with Mary Jesus and a new sense of faith. How about you?