

Mary and Joseph in the Christmas Story

Scripture:

“Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child.” Luke 2:4,5 NKJV

Focus:

I will never forget the birth of my third child. It was early December, and I was 9 months pregnant with my baby. My second child had been born with a congenital heart defect and died shortly after birth. Although the doctors had assured us that everything was fine with this baby, we were all anxiously anticipating the birth. The baby was big, and I was so uncomfortable. I wasn't able to relax in any position, sitting, standing or lying down. A few days before my due date, my husband and I were driving home. The road was full of potholes and ruts. Every jolt felt as if it were going to send me into labor on that excruciating ride. I couldn't wait to get out of the car.

As I was complaining to my husband about the bumpy roads (and probably grumpily about his driving!), a vision of Mary, Jesus' mother popped into my head. In my mind I transported myself back to her journey on a *donkey*, of all things, into Bethlehem. I imagined what it would be like to be her. She knew the birth of her baby was imminent, and yet she found herself leaving behind her home, her family, her mother—who would have helped her in the birthing process—to begin a long, tiresome journey to another city.

I could well imagine what it must have felt like to perch atop

a donkey as it plodded along, step by jolting step. The dust the donkey kicked up surely wafted around them, clinging to her garments and scratching at her dry, dusty throat. How her back must have ached from sitting slumped on a donkey for hours, that pain being overshadowed as the force of intensifying contractions gripped her weary body.

I at least knew I would have a birthing room and expert help for my baby. Mary had no such assurances. All the women who would have helped her were back home. She had no idea of where they would be stopping and what accommodations she would have. "How did she do it?" I found myself wondering. By all accounts, she was probably only 14 years old, and this was her first baby. I can only imagine what Joseph felt as he looked back at his young wife suffering on the donkey.

We have the advantage of knowing how this story ends. There was no room in any inn, so Joseph gently settled Mary in the stable with a clean pile of straw for her bedding and the cows and bleating sheep for roommates. They had each other and God and His promises to sustain them through the most holy of nights. Despite the odds against them, God's plan was not to be denied, and Jesus entered this world with a herald of angels melodiously announcing His birth.



Since that time, I've never again glossed over Luke 2:7 as I've read through the Christmas story. I allow myself to think about the journey and suffering and sacrifice that went on

that night, as the Word became flesh. Two young peasants with the love and courage to say yes to God's miraculous plan found themselves as the earthly parents of the Messiah! And the world has not been the same since.

Prayer: Lord, we are humbled by the birth of Your Son. We thank You for sending Him to earth so that we can be saved. We look to the example that Mary and Joseph set, and we can only pray for the same willingness to say yes to Your plans when you call on us. Amen.

Merry Christmas!