

## Mary and Joseph

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*Matthew 1: 18-25; Matthew 2:13-15; Matthew 2:19-23; Luke 1:26-38;  
Luke 1:39-45; Luke 1:46-56; Luke 2:-1-7; Luke 2:17-40*

The time has come. You've heard from many who were touched by the events of today—a cruel king, a surprised woman who became a mother at a very old age, an astonished shepherd, and a messenger of God. As the parents of Jesus whose birth you celebrate this day, we want to tell you our own story.

**MARY:** As you know, I was engaged to Joseph (whose ancestor was the great King David) when I received a visit from God's messenger, Gabriel. He called me "favored one" and said the Lord was with me. I didn't understand what he meant. But he told me I shouldn't be afraid because God had found favor with me. He said I would conceive a son—even though I'd not yet physically known a man! He told me to name the boy "Jesus". The angel said, "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." I declared to the angel that I was a virgin, and didn't know how my having a child would be possible, but the angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God." As proof of God's miracles, he told me that my aged cousin, Elizabeth, who had been barren all her life, was now in her sixth month of pregnancy with a boy child. He reminded me that "nothing will be impossible with God." In the end, what could I do but place myself at God's service?

But how was I to tell Joseph? Under the circumstances, the Law said that he should divorce me. And who could blame him if he did?

**JOSEPH:** Naturally, I was troubled by what Mary told me. How would you have taken the news that your bride-to-be was carrying a child? Especially when you'd not yet been intimate. Her circumstances were a disgrace in our community! And if *\*I\** was the father, we BOTH would be shunned. But it would be even worse if I was *\*not\** the father! And yet, if she was telling the truth...who could believe such a fantastic story?? One way pointed to shame; the other, to madness.

But, I, too, received a message from one of God's angels, who came to me as I slept. Amazingly, his words echoed those that Mary had received. He said, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." I don't know if you realize it, but the Lord foretold this through the prophet Isaiah when he said, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel" (which means, God with us). So I found my peace with our situation. I turned my back on the Law, and took Mary for my wife.

**MARY:** Naturally, I was curious about what Gabriel had told me about my cousin Elizabeth. So I left Nazareth to visit her in the hills of Judea where she lived. When I arrived, she told me the baby within her leapt at the sound of my voice. Elizabeth said to me, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb." She called me the mother of her Lord and praised me, saying, "...blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

I answered her with praises to God, saying, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

I stayed with my cousin for three months, until after her baby—John—was born, and then I returned home to Nazareth.

**JOSEPH:** At that time, the Emperor Augustus decided to hold the world’s first census. As I was a descendent of King David, Mary and I had to leave Nazareth and travel to Bethlehem, my ancestral city, to take part in this census. But when we arrived, all the lodging houses were already full of other travelers who also were in town for the census requirement. So with Mary now beginning to suffer the pangs of childbirth, we were offered a space to rest in the stable, among the animals. It was there that our son—whom we named Jesus—was born.

Mary wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger.

**MARY:** While the three of us were resting, we were visited by shepherds who told us that a chorus of angels had announced to them news of our son’s birth. They had traveled many miles to see if what the angels told had come true. They even knew about the swaddling cloth, and they were told they would find the child they sought lying in a manger. But their words comforted me as assurance that God was fulfilling his promise of a Savior to all people. *\*I\** knew my baby was special...and now the world was discovering it, too! The shepherds’ story was proof of that.

**JOSEPH:** Our visitors shortly departed. And when Jesus was eight days old, as is our people’s custom, we brought him to Jerusalem to be circumcised, and to dedicate our first-born boy child to God by offering the sacrifice decreed by law.

About a month after the circumcision, during another visit to the temple, we met a man named Simeon. He was righteous and devout, and we learned that he was told by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before seeing the Messiah. When Simeon saw Jesus, he took him in his arms and praised God, saying, “*Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.*”

Mary and I were amazed at what was being said about Jesus! Then Simeon blessed us and said to Mary, “*This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.*” And so, even in our joy, we were warned there would be trouble ahead... But isn’t that true for most parents?

**MARY:** The prophet Anna also was at the temple. At age 84 and a widow for all but 7 years of her marriage, she lived at the temple, worshiping, fasting and praying there night and day. When she saw Jesus, she, too, began to praise God and to speak about him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

While staying in Jerusalem, we were visited by learned astronomers from the East. They had followed a star in its travels across the night sky, in a quest for the foretold king of the Jews. They brought gifts of gold and healing spices—gifts truly worthy of a king.

**JOSEPH:** One night, after the wise men had departed, an angel of the Lord appeared to me in a dream and said, “*Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there ‘til I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.*” So I rose and immediately took my wife and child to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. As it turns out, this fulfilled what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “*Out of Egypt have I called my son.*”

Then, after Herod died, an angel of the Lord again appeared in my dream, saying, “*Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.*” So I rose and took them to the land of Israel. But when I heard that Herod’s son now reigned over this area, I became afraid to dwell there. I was then warned in another dream to live, instead, in Galilee.

**MARY:** And that is what we did. We settled in the city called Nazareth, fulfilling the prophecy that the savior “*shall be called a Nazarene.*” Jesus grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favor of God was upon him.

**JOSEPH:** Of course you’ve already heard about Jesus’ life as a man—how he was baptized by his cousin John. How he prepared to serve God by spending time alone in the desert as he wrestled with temptation and prepared himself to take on his chosen role as Messiah to the nations. How he spent three years with a traveling group of 12 men and other followers as he taught them (and us, too, through later New Testament writings) about the nature of God and shared wisdom about how we could experience the kingdom of heaven here on earth simply by being kind to one another, sharing our possessions, looking out for those who need our help, and living peacefully with others. You’ve learned how his message threatened those in power, and how those political rulers and temple leaders played on the fears of the people to surrender Jesus to death by crucifixion. And how, despite being placed in a tomb, that tomb was found empty mere days later, and Jesus was seen walking, dining and talking again with his followers. We also know he ascended into heaven and will one day return again.

*(as one character lights each of the 4 outer candles, the other says:)*

Jesus is God’s message of **HOPE** to a world living in darkness.

If we will let it, that hope can bring our anxious hearts **PEACE**.

With that peace comes **JOY** in the knowledge that God’s goodness surpasses any evil that may come our way. Jesus himself is God’s gift of **LOVE**. May your heart swell in the knowledge that this incredible gift...is for you!

*(while lighting the center Christ candle, both MARY and JOSEPH say:)*

**MARY and JOSEPH:** Merry Christmas!