

A Ninety Mile Journey Matthew 1:18-23, Luke 1:26-38, and Luke 2:1-4

Life is a journey. We start life at conception, and it ends in heaven or hell after physical death. Many things happen along the way. Sometimes, storms—the bad stuff of life—happens, and sometimes they come one after another.

Mary and Joseph experienced storms in their journey starting with the archangel Gabriel's visit to Mary, and you could argue, the rest of their lives. We will focus, however, on the journey from Gabriel's visit to Bethlehem.

Mary's Part - Luke 1:26-38

View these verses from Mary's perspective.

Vs. 26-27 – Mary has dreams and plans, like any young woman.

Vs. 28-29 – Mary is greatly troubled; she knows that angels always have news that alters people's lives.

Vs. 30-37 – This is the life altering news that she knew was coming.

V. 38 – She believes the angel and accepts what is asked of her.

Can you hear what she might have thought as she stepped back from this encounter? — “What did I just agree to?” We see this as good news, but she is trying to make sense of all of this.

Now she gets to tell her parents and Joseph.

Joseph's Part – Matthew 1:18-23

Vs. 18-19 – Mary tells him the news before the angel visits him. He is a righteous man, but also a normal guy. He doesn't shrug off the news. He is angry. He wants out of the relationship. What we see is that *he reacts with anger, but he responds with grace*.

VS. 20-23 – Now Joseph has an encounter with the same angel that Mary did, and now he received the same life-altering news. Joseph's head is spinning.

Both Mary and Joseph just had their world's flipped upside down, and the journey they thought their life was going to be, is now...is now...what. You've been there, right?

Do Not Be Afraid

Mary and Joseph thought they knew where they were going. This is the Christmas story. What we celebrate as some of the best news in history was the scariest news in these two lives.

Did you notice what phrase that was said to both Mary and Joseph-- “*Do not be afraid*”.

You probably do not associate fear with Christmas, but this is where the Christmas story starts.

Mary should be afraid. The legal penalty in Jewish culture for having an affair was death, and even though this penalty was not enforced, it was still on the books. And the defense of “God made me pregnant” isn't going to hold up in court. She could now legally be killed. And if that did not happen, her husband could leave her.

Joseph must be thinking, “What do I do? How do I get out of this mess that I didn't create?” He very well could have lost his job or business when people found out Mary was pregnant, and he refused to leave her. Or, if he refused to publicly denounce her, it would have been seen as him accepting that he had sinned.

And just when they are believing that this is God's will, the world they live in isn't making things easier. Caesar Augustus decrees that a census should be taken. In those days that meant traveling back to your hometown. So not only are they the object of gossip in their community, but Mary, who is in the ninth month of her pregnancy, must travel some 90 miles, predominately on foot. By the time they get there, they are too late to find lodging, and the baby is on the way!

So, Mary, the highly favored one, carrying the Son of God, gives birth to Jesus and lays Him in a manger—a feeding trough. We glorify this scene, but this is more than likely a small, smelly, and dark cave. There was no nice furniture, or medical equipment. This is where the son of God enters the world.

At this point Mary and Joseph must be thinking, “The worst is surely over.” Herod, however, finds out that a king has been born. Being a jealous king, he decides to act. He decides to kill EVERY baby boy, two and under in and near Bethlehem, causing Mary and Joseph to flee to Egypt.

This is the Christmas story. It’s not nice and neat. It’s messy; it’s scary; it’s some of the worst and most difficult moments in Mary and Joseph’s life—when Jesus entered their lives. We read the whole narrative in just a few moments, but this journey lasted years.

Do you think Mary and Joseph ever questioned what God was doing? Mary and Joseph have every reason to be afraid.

This is how Jesus enters many of our lives. It’s in our mess; it’s in our scariest moments. When Jesus enters the picture *things change*. It’s in these moments that we are told to not be afraid.

How can Mary and Joseph, and us, move past our fear? Mary was able to say (and Joseph would concur) in Luke 1:38, *I am the Lord’s Servant may it be to me as you have said*.

Response to Fear

People of God, *we, like Mary and Joseph, are called to be faithful and obedient despite our fear*. He doesn’t always calm the storms, but He always walks with you through them. That’s the Christian faith. It’s believing in advance what will only make sense in reverse. That’s exactly what Mary and Joseph do. Even though things don’t make sense, they trust the sovereign control of God.

Here is the lesson: *Don’t look at your circumstances, look at the One Who has power over your circumstances*. Mary knows that trusting and obeying God will cost her much.

She was able to say, *I am the Lord’s Servant. May it be to me as you have said*, because she saw God as the Lord of her life, and God has never let her down. He has been faithful to her.

She doesn’t have to sweat the details, because God’s in control. And because He is in control, she can trust Him even though she cannot see what is up the road and around the bends.. She obeys out of her faith.

The same can be said of Joseph. This is why they did what they did. And this is why you can do what you need to do.

Conclusion

Here’s what you need to be reminded of this Christmas season. Jesus understands what you are going through this holiday season. He gets it. He lives in you. He’s carrying you. He’s walked on this earth. He’s experienced what you are experiencing. He gets it.

The reason you can journey through life is because Jesus is the Lord over your life, and nothing ever catches Him by surprise. God knows the reasons why things are happening to you. He is working all things for your good and for His glory. Your finite, but God is infinite. Because Christ came over 2,000 years ago, you have hope. You can have peace. Fear does not need to control you.

And when fear does raise its ugly head in your life--pause. Reflect on what you know is true. Put things back in perspective. Focus on God and not on your circumstances. You are not alone. God is with you. When you focus on Him, your fears will dissipate.