

Mary and Joseph

Isaiah 9:6-7

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD, Almighty will accomplish this.”

Mary and Joseph will be the first encounter with Biblical characters the WALK participants will have—they will also be near the last encounter. They will help establish location—just a couple miles outside of Bethlehem—and intentions—stopping for a rest before going on, yet that night, to find lodging in Bethlehem. The second meeting is Mary and Joseph at the stable. Here they merely make the “Holy scene” at the manger. No speaking is done here.

Because it can be uncomfortable if it is cold (dress accordingly). It is planned to have 3 pairs (Mary and Joseph) to rotate one hour on the road to Bethlehem, one hour at the manger, and one hour rest at the Pines.

YOUR BIBLE REFERENCE: *In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria). And everyone went to his own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. (NIV 2:1-7)*

BACKGROUND: Getting Married: Ages of bridegroom 17-18 and bride 13-17. The father of the bridegroom-to-be would go to the father of the bride to negotiate a bride price that his son is willing to pay in exchange for marrying her (A young woman was regarded as an asset, and consequently the girl's father expected to be compensated for his loss.) Once negotiations were complete, a betrothal ceremony took place in front of witnesses. For the next 12 months, the usual period of betrothal, the couple was considered practically married. A child born during that waiting period was considered legitimate. But it was not until the wedding ceremony that the bride left her father's house to move with the bridegroom or his family.

MARY is introduced as a maiden of Nazareth in Galilee (Luke 1:26) we are told that as the time she was engaged to Joseph, she was between 12-14 years of age. Her family must have been a humble one to arrange a marriage for her with a carpenter. A carpenter's lot was a hard one. The artist's conceptions of her clothed in gorgeous raiment are far from the truth. She dressed in coarse, unbleached linen, with a dark-blue headband about her brow, after the manner of Galilean peasants. She was "a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph" (KJV Luke 1:1-27). At betrothal, an engagement ring was given to the prospective bride. This is an extremely ancient custom. At a time when literacy was rare, a party to an agreement "sealed" the contract with his stamp. It was then an unbreakable pact. From the time of the formal betrothal, which was made in the presence of witnesses, the bride wore the bridegroom's ring. It was his "sign", his "seal". This ancient ritual is known as subarrhation. It was a notable occasion. When an engagement had been made in this manner, it could be terminated only by divorce. An espoused woman was regarded as already married, so if her fiancée died during their engagement, she was considered to be a widow.

It was while Mary was engaged to Joseph (Luke 1:27) that the angel Gabriel appeared to her in Nazareth (Luke 1:26). He told her God wanted her to be the Mother of the Messiah. Apart from the gracious manner in which she received this wonderful news, the mere fact that it came to her illuminates her character for us. God does not choose His agents at random. We must believe that Mary was, of all women, the best suited for this sublime task. She was the *Chosen Woman of the Chosen Race*. Hers was

the one heart in “all the World to whose love, authority, and strength God was willing to entrust His only begotten Son”.

Joseph was the husband of Mary. It was commonly assumed that he was the father of Jesus (Luke 3:23). Matthew is careful to state that Joseph belonged to the royal line of David, through Solomon. In the opening verse of his gospel he traces his ancestry back to Abraham.

Joseph was a carpenter. It was not an honored trade. The village carpenter was not a skilled artisan. The fond idea that Joseph was master craftsman who smoothed and polished exotic woods into beautiful furniture has no basis in fact. All he made for houses were crude doors set in primitive frames, and roof beams so rough he seldom was careful to strip off all the bark. He fashioned a few simple necessities for the peasant farmer. He made yokes for the ox and mule. He searched the mountains above the pasture land for straight saplings. He sharpened one end and passed them on to the blacksmith who “shod” them with tips of iron. This transformed them into the most primitive plows. The tools of a village carpenter were an adze (hammer, chisel, and plane in one), a saw, an ax, a bow and drill, and a knife. They indicate the range of his abilities.

Joseph was a poor man. His offering in the Temple shows that. The Law set the Purification Sacrifice as a lamb or a kid (Lev.12:6). Those who were unable to meet this requirement brought :a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons (Lev.12:8, Luke 2:24). Joseph lived in the Galilean town of Nazareth. It was situated in a high valley at the southern end of the limestone hills of Lebanon. Although it was only a day’s journey from Caramel on the coast, or from Capernaum and Tiberias on the Sea of Gennesaret, Nazareth was cut off by the mountains from the rest of the world. It was the abode of genuine hillbillies. They tilled the sparse soil. Their necessities were few. They were out of touch with the political conflicts of Judea. The Romans left them alone so long as they paid their taxes.

Because of the role he played in our Savior’s life and his treatment of Mary, we have to know that Joseph was a just and good man. He was “*chosen*”.

Tid-Bit Information: Bethlehem is a small village, 5-6 miles south of Jerusalem. Land is hilly—with lots of rocks. Temperature can be 25 to 75

degrees. May through October no rain and December through March is the rainy season. On the road to Bethlehem you would see scrubby trees—oak, cedar, olive, and myrtle are some. Most people walk to Bethlehem from Jerusalem on a narrow winding road. One could possibly travel 15 miles on a good day. They would never travel on the Sabbath. Roads from Jericho to Jerusalem were very treacherous, steep, narrow, and lots of places for robbers to hide. In Bethlehem you could find many beggars too. Just east of Bethlehem you can see the white and chalky wilderness of Judea.

CENSUS: the Romans started the census system shortly before Jesus' birth. They require registration every 14 years. People were required to return to the place of their birth to get their property registered so Rome would know how much tax would be charged. The Roman soldiers would be intolerant of the fanatical Jews—but tolerant of the quiet Jew. They can compel anyone to carry their burden for one mile. **Jewish Marketplace:** Narrow streets, noisy, aggressive sellers, smelly. Bartering is the way to buy—don't walk up and pay the first price. Food in the marketplace comes in from local areas. Spices and citrus fruit are shipped in and more expensive. Have olive oil for lamps, cooking, and medicine, bread, vegetables, and fruit. No corn around in the 1st century. **CUSTOMS:** Business as property transfers, marriages, etc. was transacted at the village gate. The Elders sat on benches there. The **SYNAGOGUE** is a place of learning. Scribes are experts of law and instruct in the synagogue. Priests serve in the Temples ONLY—there was no Temple in Bethlehem. Women didn't have equal rights—only in work. They worked in the fields alongside of men. Women and girls were not forbidden in synagogue but were held to the back. Houses were small but always had a guest room—even tents had guest rooms. Animals often housed under or near house—often goats and sheep come into the city at night. A farm would be the size of 4-6 acres. Most families kept a goat or two to milk, a few sheep for wool, and one or two donkeys or oxen as draft animals. Chickens or other fowl were in the courtyard.

COINS OF THE TIMES: Roman coins—silver **denarius** (plural is denarii) was wages for 1 day of common labor. Greek coins—**drachma** is about the

same as a denarius. Double drachma was used for paying the Temple tax. (No temple in Bethlehem) so this is why they would need money changers. Jewish coin- **lepta** (translated the same as mite) is small in value (fraction of a penny) It would take about 80 lepta to equal 1 denarius. **Shekel** is an Old Testament term and it is possible to be used as a weight of silver or gold (4-5 oz). Herod had his own coins too. In Old Testament times people bought either by exchanging goods or by paying an agreed weight of silver or gold, for instance, a shekel is a weight, not a unit of currency. **Talent** was equal to 3,000 shekels.

INTERACTION WITH GUIDE AND GUESTS: As the group approaches the Guide appreciates it if you will invite them to warm themselves by your fire. It would be appropriate that you each introduce yourselves and conversation should run along lines of:

Traveling conditions—weather, number of people, where are you from, etc.

But the two most important messages at this stop is---Mary is with Child. And you are going into Bethlehem yet this night to find lodging.

Joseph: Shalom. Come. Warm yourself by the fire.

Guide: Shalom. That is very kind of you. I am _____ from _____ and this is my family. We are on our way to Bethlehem.

Joseph: And we are too. I am Joseph and this is my wife, Mary. We are from Nazareth. We have stopped to rest awhile. This has been a hard journey for my wife---she is with child. We are going on into Bethlehem yet tonight to find lodging.

Guide: Your wife must be very weary. We intend to go into Bethlehem yet tonight, too. Our journey can't be far. Perhaps we'll see you at the Inn. Take care my friends. Shalom.

Joseph is the primary speaker here. We do not encourage Mary to talk much—especially to engage in conversations with guests. We do not want to get into the realm of “Virgin Birth” labor, or birthing, etc. Guides will move on as quickly as possible.

Note: You will have a donkey at this station. Joseph needs to be aware of his temperament. If it should happen to get “testy” perhaps you will have to move him back from the area where the crowd gathers. Usually they have seemed to enjoy the attention—and it certainly adds to the scene.

AT THE MANGER: It is merely a “setting”. Mary may hold the baby affectionately or be attentive to the baby at the manger. It doesn’t have to be a “no moving” scene, but there is no interaction with the guests. Mary should be aware to keep the baby’s head covered with cloth so guests do not have to be concerned of “it’s cold” or that it is just a doll. However, children have been dismayed that they never saw Baby Jesus. Can we have just a peek of the face? Joseph will be standing near---attentive to the baby also.