

Most Blessed

The story of Mary, the mother of Christ

"Blessed are you among women." That was the angel's message and yet at times I had wondered.

"I was just a young girl born to poor parents in a small town. I was told my beauty was in my auburn brown hair and blue eyes, another gift from my God, and that I was a child my parents could always hold up with pride because I tried to do what was right. I wasn't special in anyone's eyes, except the eyes of God. I had grown up in a home where the scriptures were studied. We had been told that a Messiah would come, but we expected a King arriving in majesty, not through the womb of a peasant girl like me.

"I will never forget that afternoon when I was visited by an angel, nor do I want to ever forget it. I know now that I was blessed. But, can you imagine the feelings I was hiding when no one else knew what was happening. Oh, the angel was so gentle, so understanding, so assured that I was the right one. The angel said that I had found favor with God. I wish I could have felt that same self assurance at the time. She told me about Elisabeth, my cousin, who had conceived a son in her old age. I realized that with God, all things are possible. I questioned "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" And the angel said the Holy Ghost would come over me and the Lord would overshadow me, and that the child would be called Jesus, the Son of God, and of His kingdom there would be no end. All I knew to say was "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word." Yet, it was real, and a feeling that I had never experienced before now had anyone else. I certainly have never experienced it since that eventful day. Then the angel departed. I think back and wonder how I was willing to listen to the angel, and then I realize that the Holy Spirit was already dwelling within me. I was so blessed. I don't know any other way to say it.

"I wondered about Joseph. How was he to believe me? I was innocent of any wrongdoing. And this was a wonderful blessing for the Jews, my people. Our race had gone through generations of banishment, subjugation, homelessness, injustice, and prejudice. Now I had been chosen, but how were people to know, especially Joseph. I knew God would take care of that and that I didn't need to worry. I didn't actually worry, but I was concerned. He was my husband to be and I loved him very much.

"On that afternoon that I will never forget, I went to the shop where Joseph was building furniture for our new home. I waited for just a couple minutes until he finished sanding the one piece he was working on. Many times he was so engrossed in his work he did not hear people coming in to ask his questions about building a piece of furniture for themselves. He stretched and opened his arms to me. He told me later that he noticed there was a look in my eye he had never seen before. He said my thoughts seemed to be far off. When I told him that I was with child, he said the words struck like a sharp knife into my heart. He dropped my hands as if they were filled with leprosy. We had pledged our love in front of witnesses, and he felt this made a travesty of our betrothal.

"He commanded me to tell who the father was, because he knew that he was not. I told him that an angel had appeared to me and said: "Thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt

call his name JESUS." Joseph wouldn't believe it--an angel, the Spirit of God, a baby as our Messianic King.

"He turned his back on me and I ran out of the shop crying. What was I to do? He, by Jewish law, should take me before the Sanhedrin, divulge my shame, and condemn me to be stoned.

"Joseph told me later that he struggled. He loved me very much, but he was confused. Why should the Messianic King be born to a lowly carpenter and a peasant girl? He enjoyed his work and thought God had blessed him with the way he was able to build and satisfy his customers. He enjoyed the smells, the fresh scents, and the sounds of woodworking--the hammers and chisels, planes and saws.

"Joseph said as he pondered these various choices, a bright light shone and he heard a voice say "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. She shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins." Then just as quickly, the light faded. He was alone once again. Soon, he came to our home and told me how he also had been visited by an angel. We prayed together in thanksgiving. It was a wonderful moment, and at the same time, a scary moment.

"I told him that I wanted to go visit Elisabeth, and he agreed that I should. Although Elisabeth and I did not live very close to each other, we were close in many ways, like some of you may be to your cousins. I wondered what she would think. So, I went to visit Elisabeth in the hill country. She was so happy for me. She had no bad feelings. She told me this and I believed her, and I still believe her to this day. We were raised in the faith, and we knew not to challenge the word of God. Elisabeth said the child she was carrying leaped in her womb when I told her my news and she was filled with the Holy Ghost. I realized that God had chosen me for a wonderful task. He had also chosen Elisabeth to bear a wonderful son. I was just a young girl who believed the word I had been taught by my family. But, I never thought I would be the one chosen to be the mother of the Christ, Emanuel, and the Holy Child of God. And, Elisabeth was also blessed because she and her husband had not been able to conceive, and now she was also going to have a son, and her son was going to help in telling about Jesus before he began his preaching. Her son, John, was blessed and was a blessing to all of us as he helped prepare the way for the preaching of Jesus. John even got to baptize Jesus, but that is an event for Elisabeth and John to tell, not me!!!

"After I returned from seeing Elisabeth, Joseph and I realized we had many other things to consider. How would this affect our families and friends? Who would believe us, two common people in the little town of Nazareth? Nothing important ever happened here. Joseph went to the temple to pray and seek some answers. He heard the Rabbi read "Therefore, the Lord himself shall give you a sign. Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel."

"Then, together we faced the wonderful blessing that lie ahead. Why did we worry about what other people would think? Our God had taken care of all that. People did believe the scriptures, and they believed us. Now, all we needed to do was make sure that we were able to go to Bethlehem to be there for the census as we were told.

“And as the child in my womb began to grow, I knew a blessing that no one else would ever know, a blessing that would wipe out any fear, and leave me with an eternal joy. Oh, I wondered why this couldn't have taken place in Nazareth. Why the long journey to the little town of Bethlehem, Joseph's ancestral town. We knew the birth of the Messiah needed to be in the City of David according to the scriptures we had been taught as we were growing up.

“This King would be born in a stable with cows, and ox, and ass. Our journey would be rough on the back of a donkey. People would say, “Shouldn't a King arrive on a beautiful best of burden in style?” But, I knew that everything would be according to God's will. I had been so blessed, why should I worry about the travel on a donkey to our ancestral home. My God would provide any comfort I needed.

“The streets were crowded with travelers, beggars, thieves, and soldiers. With the census, there was no place for us to stay. We were young, and very poor. There wasn't any sweet lullaby on a CD! We had the mellow tones of the animals and the birds. Again, the beauty of God's handiwork was our song and comfort. The streets were noisy with the shuffle of sandals as other people hurried to find some kind of shelter, and yet others hurried to see if they could make some money from the new tourist trade that was so desperate for lodging. We had relatives there, but I was with child, and that made everything a little different. We were like other people, but we also wanted privacy to have Jesus born far away from the crowds of relatives. We knew our God would provide everything we needed.

“But the birth of Christ, the one sent as Wonderful, Counselor, The Almighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, would not be the end of my story.

“Shortly after Christ was born, we were visited by Shepherds who told us how they had been visited by angels the night Christ was born. We didn't wonder at the visit from the shepherds. Some people considered them to be the scum of the earth, not even common folk - the ordinary person-in-the-street. But they were common folk, someone just like you and me. And we knew that Jesus was coming for everyone, not just the rich and powerful. In fact, those rich and powerful people were the ones that felt defenseless against the teachings of Jesus later on.

“The shepherds told us that an angel appeared to them. They had never seen anything like this before and they were terrified, just as Joseph and I had been. But the angel told them not to be afraid and suddenly there was a whole choir of angels singing “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” They said the angels indicated there would be peace among all people who believed them. The angels also told them to go to Bethlehem and they would see a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger. They came and were very kind to us and said they had told everyone they saw on the way about their vision, but no one believed them. They were so friendly and didn't feel vulnerable. They felt blessed, and we felt their visit was a blessing to us. We knew that they were sent by God.

“Later on, as we were thinking about returning to Nazareth, we were visited again by another group of people who said they had been sent by God. They had been told to follow a star, and that star had

guided them to us. They asked many people where was the baby that was born King of the Jews. They had even gone to Herod to inquire of him where this new King was being born! They said they were following a star and had been led to us. At this point we doubted nothing. Everything that had happened to us was so great, and we knew that our God was in charge of whatever happened. We knew he would guide us in all our decisions. The men fell down and worshipped our baby Jesus and presented us with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

“Soon after they left, we were told that they had been told in a dream not to go back the way they had come. They were to avoid Herod at all costs. However, Herod was keeping a close eye on us, even though we did not know it at the time. Then the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him we were to flee to Egypt because Herod was seeking to destroy our baby Jesus, the King of the Jews. Herod did not realize what kind of King this was going to be and felt it was a threat to him. We left in the middle of the night, so we would not be seen leaving. He went to Egypt as we had been told to do, and stayed there until the Lord appeared again in a dream to Joseph. The Lord told Joseph that Herod was dead and it was o.k. for us to go back to our home country. But when Joseph heard that Archelaus was now reigning in Judaea on the throne of Herod he was afraid to go there and God again turned us aside and we went into Galilee so that the scriptures could be fulfilled that Jesus would be called a Nazarene.

“Oh, so much happened. Joseph and I were blessed with other children, and although we all knew that Jesus was destined to be the King of the Jews, we all knew that he was not seeking earthly power, and we all knew that he was going to be working for our God, and that things might be rough, but there was so much good. Jesus was very learned, and he even spoke to the men in the temple about God on one occasion. Then, in his twenties, he felt that he needed to begin a ministry outside of his home to tell the Good News to other people so they too could worship his Father. He did not want them to worship him. He wanted them to know his Father in heaven. It was a very hard concept for the people to accept because they knew him as a young man who worked in the carpentry business with his earthly father, Joseph.

“As he went out telling others about our Heavenly Father, some people believed, but some refused and thought he was a heretic. Still others were afraid of him, and some were afraid that he was really the earthly king they had been waiting for and they feared his message, and some were so afraid that they wanted him dead.

“Once in a while we went to hear him. One time particularly, the people gathered told him that his mother and brothers were outside. He wasn't concerned about us. He knew that we knew about our Heavenly King and that we knew his message. Other people did not understand. One person told him we were outside and he said "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Then he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother." Oh, there are so many times that I was so proud of him. But I can't tell you all of them.

“Then as the pressure on his speaking increased, we knew that he was in danger. There were so many earthly, powerful people that we afraid of him. As you know they arrested him, and put him on trial.

It was a mock trial in many ways, but we knew not to interfere. We knew that everything that was happening was God's will.

“They mocked him and put a crown of thorns on his head. They shouted, “Crucify him, crucify him!” But Pilate had been touched by the message of Jesus and he told them that he would release either the criminal, Barabbas, or Jesus to them. They wanted Jesus. Then Pilate said "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no crime in him." Pilate tried to get Jesus to change his testimony, but he would not, and could not. Again Pilate said "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar. Crucify him, crucify him!"

“Then when they led him to Golgotha, they nailed him to the cross along with two criminals and put a sign on his cross that read "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." The chief priests were really upset with this and told him that it should be taken down. But Pilate said “What I have written, I have written.” I think Pilate knew in his heart that Jesus was the son of the Heavenly King, but he was not powerful enough to sacrifice his own life at that time. I understand that later on, he lost all his power, and I want to think that he came to know Jesus as the son of God, and his personal Savior, but only God knows that. It is not in the minds of us to judge others as to what they believe in their hearts.

“So many people believed, and so many things happened. But, I had a good life. My other children knew all about Jesus as you know and they supported me through many things. Along with the support from Jesus, we all learned that we must support each other. After the death of Jesus, many believed that he was indeed the Son of God and they gave their lives to follow him. Was I blessed? Even his own brothers went out to spread the Good News, and those of us at home did the same in our own way. We weren't able to establish churches and preach, but we could live the life that we had been taught by Jesus in the few years he spent with us, and we met when we could, often without the much notice, because the government authorities were so jealous. They did not realize that his kingdom was not of this world. We were to worship Jesus, not anything else. God chose me to be the earthly person in his heritage, so that Jesus was both human and godly. I was not special in any way, but - more than anyone can ever realize, I was given the chance to be the earthly mother of the greatest person that has ever stepped foot on this earth, and that is most blessed.”

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