

I am Joseph of Nazareth. You know who I am, but you don't **really** know me. I am the father of Jesus of Nazareth—his step-father, actually. The Lord God is his father. I know it sounds impossible...and I really don't understand it either. Maybe if I tell you my story... maybe then...

I am the firstborn of Jacob of Nazareth—the village carpenter. I apprenticed under him and his father, Matthan. Grandfather loved to tell stories of our family and of our people. As they taught me to work wood, they would both talk about the mighty men of God. David was my favorite. A shepherd boy who became a giant-killer and soldier and king! Grandfather could name every man in our line—which went back to King David and before. Some of David's blood runs in my veins. Ahhh...those were the days—the days before the Greeks and the Romans.

Father died while I was still an apprentice. Grandfather was too old and too near-blind to do much work, but he was in the shop constantly---showing me what to do and answering my questions. He would run his hands over all the joints and surfaces of what I was building. God have mercy if my work was done poorly!!

He was bent and weak and walked with a stick (this stick) and he always moved slowly—unless he found a splinter or a rough place or a bad joint. Then, like lightning, he would come around with his stick. WHAM!!! Under the guidance of those arthritis-knotted hands, I learned to always do my best—or else! When he was not correcting mistakes or answering my questions, he spoke continuously about the Law and the prophets.

Grandfather died there in the shop, surrounded by shavings and the fragrance of Lebanese cedar—a fitting place for a carpenter to die.

His death broke my heart—even more than the death of my father. For weeks, I could not bear to work in our shop. Every time I tried, a sense of loneliness washed over me.

After a time, that passed and I could do nothing **but** work. It made me feel close to him.

Except for the Shabbat, I worked every day and half of every night—year after year after year. Mother began to worry that I might never marry and give her grandchildren. She spoke of it constantly. To get some peace and quiet, I began to work even more and I often slept in the shop.

It was mother who first suggested that a distant relative, Mary, might be a good prospect for my wife. I'll admit, it had entered my mind before, but Mary was younger and she was also beautiful—and quite shy. Still, proper inquiries were made--and to my surprise, her family agreed to our union. Mother and her brother Bameth made the final arrangements.

Our betrothal was very simple. Uncle Bameth and I went to Mary's father and officially declared my intent to marry her in front of witnesses. Her father, in turn, promised a dowry of a single piece of silver.

As I came to know Mary better, I could see that she was bright and sure of herself. She knew the law and lived the law--she was always truthful and honest.

Over time, I grew to love her very much.

We had not been betrothed very long when she went to visit her cousin Elizabeth in Jerusalem. She and Mary had always been close—and as old as she was, Elizabeth was expecting a child.

I understood Mary's need to go, but the trip was pretty sudden. One day there was no trip planned and the next day Mary came by my shop. She was leaving with a group of priests who were on their way to serve their duty in the temple at Jerusalem. Mary spoke little and as she said goodbye, she seemed distant somehow. She never really looked at me.

Mary was gone about three months, but it seemed much longer. On the day of her return she seemed different. Something was wrong. I asked her what it was, but she would not say. She only said that we should slip away and meet in the vineyard after dark.

The moon was full and romantic and her beauty was greater than I had remembered, but something was not right. Several times, she started to speak, but her voice trailed off and she didn't finish.

I tried to help—voicing my concerns and wondering aloud, but she kept “ssshhushing” me. Finally, she took a deep breath and opened her outer garment and showed me the size of her belly. Not understanding, I joked about Elizabeth's good cooking.

“I'm going to have a child...” Her voice was little more than a whisper.

“It's not true, tell me it's not true...” was all I could get out before I felt so weak that I fell to my knees at her feet.

I knew her heart and her soul and could not believe that there was someone else and that she would do such a thing. I kept hoping and praying for an explanation, some word of comfort, but she seemed to have lost her voice again.

Finally, she let out a sigh and a sentence rushed out all in one breath, “there has been no one else--there is no one for me but you, Joseph!” She said it with great conviction, her eyes pleading me to understand and believe...

Finally, I understood—someone in Jerusalem had taken her against her will. My face was hot with anger—“Who did this!?!? Tell me, and I'll...”

“It was the LORD!”

Who does he think he is—that he can take my wife from me...Woman, who is this man?”

“It was the Lord God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

Then the whole story came out in a rush of words and emotion. I wanted to believe her, but the whole thing was unbelievable! But why would she make up such a story?

**Mother of the Messiah?!?** Unreal. Impossible.

**Angelic messengers?!?** Who would believe such as this?

**The Spirit of God fathered her child?!?** Unbelievable!

If she was going to lie about it, why didn't she tell a believable lie? Why didn't she accuse someone—someone besides Almighty God?

She said nothing else, but her eyes pleaded with me to believe her. I was lying when I said I did—but I really wanted to.

I walked her home and went straight to my shop—I always think better when I work. Thinking didn't help much—because I had no point of reference. I couldn't understand who or what she was protecting—or why. I still loved her and I wanted to believe her, to understand what had happened.

I knew what I must do—but I would do it quietly because I didn't want to hurt her. I would not go and risk having to see her. Uncle Bameth and his brother-in-law could go read the paper to her father—so that there would be two male witnesses. Then Mary could go back to Elizabeth's for a while—and no one would have know about the baby.

I worked and thought—but could find no other answer. Exhausted, I lay down on the mat I keep there in the back of the shop and after a time of trying to make sense of it all—I fell into a fitful sleep.

Then, I had a vision. In my dream, an angel stood over me and told me exactly what he had told Mary—that her child was from God and that he would be the Messiah. Dream or not—it was enough and I knew the right thing to do was to honor our marriage.

Later, Roman solders came to Galilee, making sure that every man registered for the taxes. I tried to put off our trip because of Mary's condition—but the soldiers demanded that we go and register immediately. Since we were to register in Bethlehem, the city of David, we faced four days of hard travel. I really wondered if Mary and the baby would both survive.

Even before we left, we had decided to stay in Bethlehem a while and I packed as many of my tools as possible. What I couldn't carry, I traded to a cousin for a donkey. At least Mary would go in style!

You can't imagine the number of people on the road. The closer we got to Bethlehem and Jerusalem, the more there were. We arrived in the middle of the night.

I knew we were in trouble when I saw people sleeping in the street—but mother had given me the name of a cousin's cousin—and we wound up sleeping in an old stable in the middle of town. It was a perfect place, really. Quiet and private. Mary had the baby that night, attended by the innkeeper's wife.

"It's a son!" she said, as she brought the baby straight to me. I looked him over carefully. I don't know what I expected the Son of God to look like—but he was helpless and pink and a bit bloody—just like any baby. His hair was matted on his head. And pretty soon I found out that he cried when he was cold and hungry.

The strangest part of the night were the uninvited guests. Not long after he was born, several shepherds came to the door of the stable—asking to come in and see the baby. **THEY KNEW HIS NAME!** I invited them inside to see him as they entered, they told wide-eyed stories about angels from God—not all that different from Mary's story—but their angels were singing. Singing about the birth of our son!

We unwrapped Jesus for them to see and I wondered if they saw what they expected—but they were still excitedly talking about what happened as they left. I guess they woke several people with their strange story, because a few came to see what all the fuss was about.

As the census wound down and as people began to return home, we moved to a small house with an attached shop where I could work. There was soon more work that I could do. People even came from Jerusalem to commission work. Mary and I spoke little of the things that happened and Jesus seemed like any healthy, happy baby boy.

When he was 31 days old, we took him to the temple to present him to God and to redeem him with a sacrifice.

While we were there, an old man singled us out, walking right up to us—asking to hold Jesus. He whirled and he sang and he cried as he looked into Jesus' face. He was radiant as he gently returned the baby to Mary. He looked straight up and said, "I have seen the salvation of my people...now I am ready to die..." After the ceremony, an old woman, Channa, did almost exactly the same thing. I would never forget the look on their faces as they looked at his.

Soon we settled into a routine. I worked and did very well—saving all the money I could—while Mary watched our son. I watched him too—and looked for signs and miracles. I saw nothing unusual. He cried when he was hungry and soiled himself after he ate. He even got sick.

As our lives seemed more and more normal, I found myself trying to forget all the things that had happened. Then, one evening, strange men came to our door. They were dressed in rich clothing and had foreign accents. They came to see the new king—the king of the Jews. These rich and powerful men bowed down and worshipped our Jesus. They said they were following a special star, but I hadn't noticed anything unusual.

They brought two things—gifts and trouble. The gifts were from their homeland and were fit for a king. The trouble was from Herod.

They said that they had gone to Jerusalem first, thinking that the new king would be born to Herod. I thought little of that until they left and another angel appeared at my bed—telling me that Jesus was in danger and that we should go to Egypt for our protection. Egypt!?! Why not Nazareth? BUT having seen all I had seen, I didn't question or hesitate. We left for Jerusalem that very night—taking very little except our clothes.

We had been in Egypt for a little while when the angel appeared to me in another dream and said that it was safe to go home—that Herod had died. As we traveled, we met some people who told us that Herod's son was king—and we decided it would be safer to go back to Nazareth. Once I had Mary settled in, Uncle Bameth and I went to Bethlehem and retrieved my tools.

Again, we settled into a routine. From my perspective, Jesus was a normal boy. You had to watch him every moment or he would be into something. As Mary and I had more children, he took on the role of big brother and that suited him well.

He was barely walking when he began pretending to help me work in my shop. Before I knew it, he was helping with simple things. He learned quickly and well—but he was a bit stubborn. Of course, stubbornness is a requirement for becoming a master-carpenter. As we worked together, I taught him about our people and about the books of the law. Everything was so normal and so usual that it would have been easy enough to forget all that had happened. By the time he was twelve, I had quit dwelling so much on who he was and what he was doing here.

That changed when we took him to the temple for his first Passover. He was enthralled by the city and the sights—especially the temple, just as I had been before him.

Because of business, we only stayed for the first two days of Passover. As soon as the half-holy days began, our little group left for Nazareth. We missed him right away, but assumed he was somewhere in our little band—talking and visiting, as he often did. When supper time came and went without him, we began to look for him from one end of the caravan to the other. He was not anywhere! A few of us rushed back to Jerusalem, not knowing what to expect, nor even where to look. We found him asking questions—and wisely giving answers in his “Father’s house.” It seemed that our Jesus had begun to understand, at least a little, who he really is and what he is doing here.

I’ve continued to teach him all I know about wood and about God, but sometimes I think he knows more about both than I do. He has become a patient and loving young man—strong of mind and back. He is a skilled carpenter—better than I am, and maybe as good as my grandfather.

I’ve always wondered what the future holds for him—for our people. What is God’s plan? I used to think I’d see it all happen, but now that I’ve gotten old and sick and weak—my only regret in life is that I won’t be alive to see my Jesus restore our people and come into his kingdom. That’ll be the day...

See, I told you it was quite a story. Strange, I know, but every word true. Every word. You see, this all happened because “God so loved the world, that he sent his one and only Son to reclaim his people and to redeem all who believe on him--in a new kingdom, a kingdom that will never end...”