

Bite Size Bible Study

Christmas Story – 5 Mary #221

By Pastor Lee

This is the fifth in a series on the Christmas Story. This segment is dedicated to Mary the mother of Jesus, however some of the details of her life were expressed in the segment on Joseph, her husband, so some of these details need not be mentioned again here.

MARY {Heb, *Miriam*}

Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary was a young woman, a virgin, living in Nazareth, and a relative of Elizabeth and Zachariah (a priest). Elizabeth was the mother of John the Baptist. (Luke 1:5; 2:26). Mary was espoused a *tekton* (craftsman), named Joseph in Nazareth of Galilee. All appearances of Mary in the Gospels support a view of her as a normal human woman. A devout Jewish girl perhaps in her mid-teens.

According to a 2nd-century apocryphal infancy narrative, Mary was the child of elderly parents, Joachim and Anna, in Jerusalem. This would accord with her priestly family connections noted by Luke (1:36). There is another tradition, supported by references in early apocryphal Christian writings to 'Mary the Galilean', and that her birthplace was at Sepphoris in Galilee. Sepphoris is very near Nazareth.

Mary, mother of Jesus

She was chosen by God to be the mother of Jesus.

'In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.'
(Luke 1:26-27)

In a single sentence, the sender, the messenger and the receiver are introduced: God Almighty, the angel Gabriel, and the girl betrothed to Joseph.

'And he came to her and said, "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."' (Luke 1:28-30).

Next comes the importance of the message.

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 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 father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.'

(Luke 1:32-33)

Mary's reply is no refusal, but only an inquiry as to how she is to accept. 'And Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no husband?"' (Luke 1:34) And the angel said to her, "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 called holy, the Son of God." (Luke 1:35)

Mary replied: "*Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word*". And the angel departed from her.' (Luke 1:38)

By way of encouragement, the angel Gabriel had announced to Mary the news of her cousin Elizabeth. '*And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible.*' (Luke 1:36)

Mary set out to visit her cousin Elizabeth and Zachariah at their home in the 'hill country of Judea'. Elizabeth met her with the words, '*Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy.*' (Luke 1:42-44)

At this meeting point, Luke includes the a song of praise that has come to be included in the liturgies of all the Christian Churches as the *Magnificat* (Latin for "My soul magnifies the LORD). In nearly every manuscript it is put into the mouth of Mary, but in a few it is attributed to Elizabeth. (Luke 1:45-55). It is said that Mary is the personification of the part of Israel which was ready to 'hear the word of God and act on it'.

Luke emphasizes the agency of the Holy Spirit in the life of Elizabeth as well as of Mary. The visitation would have been the most natural event, for Mary would have welcomed an opportunity to escape from prying eyes and malicious tongues in Nazareth. The three months' rest with her cousin would have been the most welcome retreat. The older woman, Elizabeth, herself going through the same experience, would have been of great comfort and support to Mary.

It is impossible to say how each woman understood so quickly the respective roles they had to play and what would be the relative positions of their children. Elizabeth had no hesitation in joyfully accepting the minor role for her own child, and so establishing even before their birth the position of John (the Baptist) as the forerunner of Jesus the Messiah.

When the time came, the two boys were born within six months of each other, in towns within sight of each other. Joseph and Mary had come to Bethlehem for the census. While the home of the priest Zechariah and Elizabeth was below Mount Orah in *Ein Karem*, (the Gracious Spring).

According to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Jesus was born in Bethlehem before the death of Herod the Great (4 BCE) but probably not more than three years earlier.

Luke says that the original home of Mary and Joseph was at Nazareth in Galilee, and that they came to Bethlehem in response to the demands of a Roman census because Joseph was of David's family and therefore had to report to the City of David. Luke describes the visit of the shepherds, the circumcision on the eighth day, and the presentation after forty days, followed later by their return home to Nazareth.

Mary and Joseph fulfilled the Law of Moses by circumcising and naming Jesus on the eighth day. Mary, in dutiful patience and obedience, fulfilled the forty days of her purification, before coming up to Jerusalem to make her thanksgiving.

And when the time came for her purification according to the law of Moses, they brought Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." (Luke 2:22-24)

Every first-born male must be consecrated to the Lord' (Exodus 13:2)

Mary and Joseph took with them the poor man's offering demanded in the Book of Leviticus (5:7) at purification: 'a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.

Matthew, however, does not mention Nazareth until their return from Egypt to settle there. Some say that Matthew seems to imply that Joseph and Mary already lived in Bethlehem; he describes the visit of the wise men taking place in a house.

After the wise men left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, so he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt. ... But when Herod died an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 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." 'And he went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth.' (Matt. 2:10,11,13,14,19,20,23)

Mary's home and family

Nazareth, the market-town of southern Galilee, was also a religious center, and surrounded by scenery recalling the Old Testament judges, prophets, and kings. It overlooked the 'Way of the Sea', one of the main trade-routes between Damascus and Egypt. Here, caravans of silks and spices passed camels laden with grain and fish. Here, the rough and rustic Galilean peasant mingled with the merchants and travelers of the east in a truly cosmopolitan community.

Here would have been the home of Joseph and Mary. Since they were betrothed before they left for Bethlehem

it is likely that their home was still under construction when they arrived back in Nazareth. The betrothal time (approximately one year) is the period when the man builds their house, and the woman prepares the items to furnish it. We know from the purification ceremony that they were not well to do. A tekton was not high on the social ladder. Probably their home was a single room which would be used as a workshop by day and as a bedroom by night.

The main room was a "family room" where the entire family cooked, ate, slept and lived. The end of the room next to the door, was either a few feet lower than the rest of the floor or blocked off with heavy timbers. Each night into that designated area, the family cow, donkey and a few sheep would be driven. And every morning those same animals were taken out and tied up in the courtyard of the house.

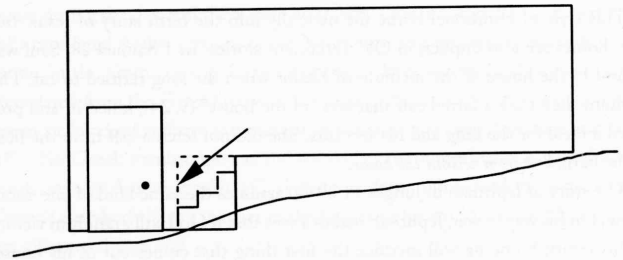


Figure 1.1. Typical village home in Palestine viewed from the side

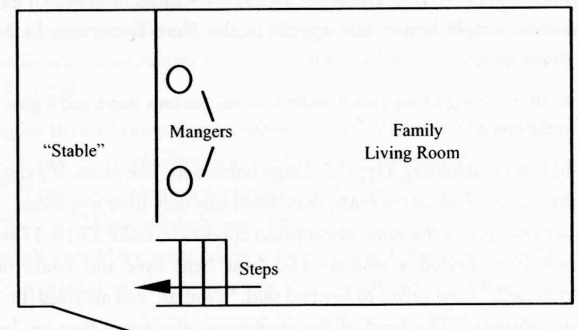


Figure 1.2. Typical village home in Palestine viewed from above

Up on the flat roof, a booth of green branches may have given shade or shelter on summer evenings. It also served as a guest room for a traveler. A flat raised surface provided the low table. Round this, reclining or squatting on the floor, the family may have eaten its simple meals. In the center of the wall could have been a small niche, blackened by the oil lamp for which it was designed would provide light at night.

The house and all it held were considered the property of the wife. This goes back to the times their ancestors lived in tents (aka home), which always belonged to the wife and were her responsibility. Mary and Joseph provided an excellent couple to provide for the Messiah.

Mary – a passionately devoted follower of God.