



# Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

It's 80 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem. The rocky trail ran south to the border of Samaria, across the Jordan River (for no good Jew would defile himself by traveling through Samaria), down the east side of the Jordan through what was known as "the wilderness," and then back up those final miles on the Jericho Road. It was a torturous trip and the last miles were the hardest almost straight up the side of the mountains. It took almost a week to make the trip by foot or donkey back.

Joseph and Mary made that trip. It was a difficult, agonizing trip. Both were probably teenagers—Mary no more than 16 at the time.

But it was agonizing more ways than one. Mary was pregnant and expecting any day. To have to ride the hard back of that donkey, being jarred with every step, must have caused excruciating pain.

Beside this, they were traveling alone. The townspeople back in Nazareth had shunned them—ostracized them. Mary was a social outcast. They were engaged, but not yet married. And, yet, Mary was with child. What possible explanation could she have made that would have been believable? Who would possibly believe a wild story like a visitation from an angel—and a virgin conception?

"How can I ever return to Nazareth with my baby?" Over and over with each jarring step of the donkey she asked the question.

And then those final, terrifying miles up the Jericho Road. It was cold that night in Bethlehem when they arrived. "No room, Nazarene. Can't you see that my inn is already full of important people? You and your wench will have to sleep in the stable tonight."

What thoughts must have accompanied Mary and Joseph on that tragic night. Alone. Friendless. Hungry. Cold. Shut out—not only from the inn but from humanity.

And Joseph. What great faith. How he must have loved Mary. He had nothing more than the word of an angel that God was in it all. He tried to make a bed on the filthy, foul-smelling floor of the damp, cold stable.

"Common!" Over and over the word rang in their minds. "Common!"

They prepared for the night of pain and fright. Before dawn their baby would be born. Born alone in the filth and dung of a stable. Born to be called a bastard. Born to be despised and rejected of men. Born to be misunderstood. Born to be lonely. Born to be hated. Born to be tortured and killed between two "common" thieves.

And yet out of that night, that horrible Holy night, arising out of his fellowship with the common, the soiled, the filthy, the impure . . . came the Saviour of the world. God's own son—at whose name every knee would eventually bow.

"For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour which is Christ the Lord."

So take heart, all ye whom the world calls "common." Take heart all ye misunderstood youth. God uses the forsaken . . . the rejected . . . the despised . . . the lonely . . . the unlovely.

God knows what it's like to be that way. For He was like that, too, on that Silent Night in Bethlehem.