

REJECTED

It's eighty miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem. The rocky trail wound south to the border of Samaria, across the Jordan River (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 tortuous trip, and the last miles were the hardest—almost straight up the side of the mountains. It took almost a week to make the agonizing trip by foot and donkey.

But it was agonizing in more ways than one for Joseph and Mary. Both were probably teenagers, Mary perhaps sixteen at the time—and preg-

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nant, well into her ninth month and expecting her baby any day. Riding the hard back of that donkey, being jarred with every step, must have caused excruciating pain.

Besides this, they were traveling alone. Yes, there were others traveling from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be counted in the census ordered by the Roman emperor, Augustus. But the townspeople back in Nazareth had shunned them—ostracized them. You see, Mary was a social outcast. She had been betrothed, engaged, yet great with child. What possible explanation could she have made that would have sounded believable? Who would believe a wild story about a visitation from an angel saying, "Hail Mary, full of grace"? And a virgin conception?

Only with her cousin Elizabeth, an old woman who was herself pregnant, could Mary share her concern. Even Joseph would have deserted her had it not been for a special visit from an angel.

Now the question pounds in her temples with every jolting step of the donkey: "How can I ever return to Nazareth with my baby? Will they treat Him as they have treated me?" Little does she know it will be three years before she's able to return home.

And then those final terrifying miles up the Jericho Road, dark, winding, rocky, narrow, with thieves lurking in the caves.

It was cold that night in Bethlehem when they arrived. "No room, Nazareth. Can't you see that my inn is already full of important guests? You and your wench will have to sleep in the stable tonight."

What thoughts must have accompanied them as they made their way behind the inn into the dank cave where the animals slept. Alone. Friendless. Hungry. Cold. Shut out.

And Joseph. What faith. How he



must have loved this dainty child with her stomach protruding under her dress. He had nothing more than the word of an angel that God was in it all.

They prepared for the night of pain and fright in the filthy, foul-smelling, cold stable. No doctor. No hospital. Not even a midwife. Before dawn, Mary would scream in pain, and Joseph, awkwardly, would receive the baby from her body.

Born alone in the filth and dung of a stable. 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

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Meditation

*Oh precious child, born in this
lowly place
Your glory is not hid, it lights
your face.
Deliverer of Israel, through the
sea
Now, fruit of Mary's womb,
how can this be?*

*Word of God Incarnate, Holy
Child
Love in Person, pure and
undefiled.
Abraham and Moses know Thee
well
Your breaking into Time, the
angels tell.*

*I tremble as I think on Who
Thou art
A deep repentance stirs within
my heart.
May revelation of Thyself,
in me, increase
Thou only begotten Son and
Prince of Peace.*

Ruth Congdon

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 Savior of the world. God's own Son—at whose name every knee would eventually bow. Bow, innkeeper! Bow, important guests! Bow, gossipy old women back in Nazareth! Bow, Herod. Bow, Roman soldiers. Bow, Augustus Caesar. The King is here. King Jesus!

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

So take heart, all ye whom the world calls common. Take heart all you misunderstood youth, all you heartbroken parents, all you cast out children, all you drug addicts, all you alcoholics, all you prisoners, all you unwed mothers, all you lonely, sad and left-out ones. God uses the forsaken, the rejected, the despised, the lonely, the unlovely, the ugly.

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