

Book One

THE KING HIDDEN

Chapter Four

THE SECOND VISITATION

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Mary and her baby are resting when she hears footsteps come up to the little house where they have been staying.

Joseph announces, "I'm back, Mary. I knew we would be finished early today. The master gave me a full day's pay and gave me his blessings for the child and our travel back to Nazareth. He said I was one of the best workers he had. He wished I would stay."

Mary nods and smiles, her eyes gleam. She looks at Joseph to hear the rest. He always has more to say.

"You have been getting stronger and the baby is doing well. We have some long trips to make. The day after tomorrow is the fortieth day so we go to the Temple for your purification and the sacrifice for the redemption of the firstborn for Yeshua. After that we leave for Nazareth. I pray every day for my children. I hope they are doing well. They're young with no one really to watch over them. It is a lot of responsibility for James." Mary nods and smiles to say she is sure they are all doing well. "I know you would like to see your cousin Elizabeth. You had to leave just before she had her son. You could see him and show Yeshua to her. It is a walk, but could strengthen you for the trips to come."

"Thank you, Joseph. I have so longed to see Elizabeth and the child our Lord gave her."

"While we are there Zachariah could marry us so you do not have to look like an unmarried woman with a child."

She melts in Joseph's arms. He is surprised. Mary is also surprised and surprised how very good it is to feel his strong gentle arms around her. She had never before felt the touch of a man.

The next morning Joseph led Mary down the hill from Bethlehem toward Ein Kerem. In places they could see the high towers of Herod's palace and a glimpse of the Temple itself. Except for crossing a deep valley near the end, the road was not too bad. The baby seemed to like the walk and Mary was glad for the exercise.

EIN KEREM, MARY AND ELIZABETH

Zachariah and Elizabeth were delighted when Mary and Joseph called at the door. New mothers showing off their first child are always a delight. For so many reasons this was far more a celebration of joy. Both given sons by the power of God. The women went inside to show the babies to each other. John was seven months, not crawling yet. Yeshua, over five weeks, had filled out and was very alert. They unbound them from

their swaddling cloths and let them exercise their arms and legs. The babies looked and looked at each other, fascinated, touched, and John reached out and held onto Yeshua. The women were delighted to watch them and talk.

“Mary, it was such a pity you could not have stayed until after John was born.”

“I had to leave.”

“Well, you were here so much longer than you expected. Your cousin was supposed to be a few days in Hebron. He spent all that time and still did not get what he was supposed to get.”

“Izzy finally gave up.”

“Idumean King, Idumean judge, what chance does one of us have against an Idumaen? What is right does not matter.”

“You have not said how it was when John was born. I had been praying for you and for him.”

“Everyone was concerned. It was so wonderful to become a mother and be given a child from God. I was very little concerned. I knew God, the Father of all, would take care of me.”

“It is dangerous to give birth, especially when the mother is old or too young.”

“God was with me through it all. There were too many to help. Everyone wanted to be here. I did not like so many women around. There was quite a celebration. Everyone was praising God. People came from all around. Many of the leaders from the Temple came to see. I just wanted to rest with my baby. There were crowds for his circumcision, crowds for his presentation in the Temple.”

“God has done great things. He is to be praised by all.”

“Who would have thought the King of Heaven would notice someone like me or you?”

“The King of Heaven does as He wants.”

“Yes, and all we can do is worship Him. He is righteous, glorious, almighty.” Elizabeth sang, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

“That is beautiful praise to God.”

“You would sing your song when you were here. We love to hear you sing. After John was born we composed a song of our own.”

“Sing it again so I can learn it.”

After Mary learned the song, Elizabeth showed her the gifts the ladies had given. She had to show her each item and tell her who made it and then tell her about the lady. As she was talking, she realized that Mary

had almost nothing for her son. Mary had been spinning, weaving for Joseph's family before and no one gave her anything. Elizabeth insisted Mary take a good portion of hers. Mary tried to politely refuse but it was so needed, she gratefully accepted all she was offered. She also gave Mary two outfits with fancy work. She was wearing her only clothes and they were getting very worn. Mary thought she would be able to redo the fancy work to fit the style of Nazareth, since the motifs were obviously from Jerusalem

Elizabeth tried to find out how it had been for Mary when she had returned to Nazareth, but Mary only shook her head and would not say. Elizabeth held her hands. She knew how hard it must have been. Mary did say that Joseph had taken her in. She made a bed down by the fire. The littlest children mostly slept with her. The youngest, also named Mary, was especially loving and attentive.

Elizabeth was angry Joseph had brought her so late in her time to Bethlehem. It was thoughtless and dangerous. Mary explained it was not supposed to be that way. He was coming to register at Bethlehem long before and she was to stay in Nazareth. Sukkoth forced them to come when they did. She suspected the midwife told Joseph she refused to help. She did not want Elizabeth to think ill of Joseph.

Elizabeth asked about the delivery in Bethlehem. Mary said Joseph helped. He had been a shepherd boy in Bethlehem and helped at lambing. He did well. Elizabeth was shocked no midwife from the town came. It was appalling no one would let them in their homes. What Mary did want to talk about was the shepherds who came afterward. "I was resting when we heard voices calling outside. We could not hear what they were saying. Then they were outside. 'Is there a baby here, a baby in a manger?' Joseph got up and went to see what this was about. He came and asked if he could bring them in. They claimed to have seen angels and been told to come. He lit a lamp and they crowded in. They were trembling, bowing with their faces on the ground. Curious and afraid at the same time. They said; 'an angel appeared to them, the glory of the Lord shone around. The angel said, "Fear not, behold I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, who is Messiah, the Lord. As a sign for you, you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths lying in a manger." Then there was a multitude of the heavenly host praising God singing, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!'"

"Well, that is quite a story. The people in town must have been astounded."

"It meant so much for me and Joseph. It is Joseph's home town. He thought we would be welcome."

"I was very concerned how it had been. Zachariah and I kept praying for you."

"The shepherds said they saw the whole heaven filled with angels singing. I would have loved to hear. The choirs in the Temple courts are glorious, just think what the heavenly courts must be like."

"I love to sing praise. Sometimes when I was younger I would go with Zachariah to the Temple for the daily worship. You know how grand it is on the festival when people come from all over. Well, it is glorious every day. Our little synagog is a family. God is close. At the Temple God is great and high and lifted up."

"It is deep peace when He is close, inside. It is glorious when we see God's majestic power and we are nothing more than dust before Him."

Elizabeth told her about John's presentation six months before. It was a grand celebration. A great many prominent people were there. She got to see her old friend Anna.¹ She was widowed after seven years, no

¹ Anna [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna_\(Bible\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna_(Bible))

children, daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She never left the temple, worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. Anna was so excited. Since God had sent this miracle child she was sure the Messiah would soon be coming. Elizabeth didn't tell her about Mary but she did agree.

JOSEPH AND ZACHARIAH

Meanwhile the men were talking in the courtyard. Joseph said; "Zachariah, I do not want you to think ill of me for bringing Mary to Bethlehem so late."

"It certainly looks like a terrible thing to do. She or the child could have died, or both."

"I was not to come so late. Mary was supposed to stay in Nazareth. The midwife refused to stay in Nazareth. The whole village was coming for Sukkoth. It seems God wanted the child to be born in Bethlehem."

"It all worked out. We are able to see her and the child."

"For that I am glad but I have been gone too long as it is. My oldest son is young for so much responsibility. I have six, James, Simon, Jose, Salome, Jude and Mary.² The girls are too little to do all the housework. We need to get back as soon as possible. I am constantly praying for them. They have been good to Mary through all this. They love her. It was their idea for Mary to come to take care of them."

"We were amazed when Mary told us of the marriage agreement. We thought she would be the wife of someone important, a scholar."

"I never would have thought of her as a wife. How are you doing here? Our priest has been cut short by the Temple. The people of Nazareth are giving him gifts on the side."

"Here, so close to Temple, there are too many of us for the people to do that. The chief priests make the rules. They are trying to force all the priests to work on the Temple construction, then there is pay for that, I am too old. There is nothing we can do. Since John was born delegations come by with gifts. I have been sharing them with other old priests. They say they are interested in my welfare and ask who will be raising John after I am gone."

"Giving gifts is normal to smooth the way of your own interests."

"Coming down and back cost you two week's wages. Not something easy to lose. You can't travel quickly with Mary and the child."

"I've been working on Herod's tomb at the Herodium. It is magnificent. We have gotten by. We live in a sukkoth I fixed up on the edge of Bethlehem. I gave my son James all I could. I hope he has been able to manage. Joachim likes him and hires him for small jobs. More often since Mary has been with us."

"He must be concerned."

"Heartbroken. Mary is the crown of their old age. The perfect daughter. They have always been so proud of her. Mary has been so burdened by their pain, she has not noticed her own trials. She constantly prays for them."

² For the family of Jesus see <http://katachriston.wordpress.com/2011/06/07/richard-j-bauckham-on-the-relatives-of-jesus/>

“Joseph, I insist you take some of my surplus. It will make your trip back easier. You even lost a day’s wages coming here to see us and another day tomorrow for the presentation. We do not need it.”

“So the chief priests who visit you are helping Mary and her son. God is good.”

“They are so sure of themselves. They put their own words into God’s mouth. They bind what they want bound and loose what they want free. That is how Joachim came to Nazareth.”

“I always wondered. He is a merchant, a great man. He should be in Tzeppori. Yet he is in Nazareth and his brother in Cana.”

“They were in Tzeppori. The priest drove them out.”³

“That makes no sense. You could not find more righteous, more generous men.”

“Anna was childless. Joachim wanted to give a large gift to the Temple. The priest refused to accept it. He said their lack of a child proved God had rejected them. They went to the Temple themselves and prayed for a child. They left Tzeppori when they got back to Galilee, then God gave them a daughter, Mary. His brother went to Cana. I never understood why he went to Nazareth.”

“Maybe he moved there for the same reason I did. They are the nicest people I met. So many places synagogues are full of bitterness, condemning not just foreigners but their brothers. God is Chesed⁴, loving kindness, merciful. Nazareth is like that. They are eager for God, pious but not fools for every passing wind of greatness. Bethlehem is associated with the Temple because of the lambs. The chief priests in charge have been getting richer and richer, building beautiful homes, while the rest are getting squeezed. When someone finally gives up and has to sell his land, they are quick to buy it up.

“The Chief Priests and Sadducees arrange matters for their own benefit.”

“They are the Judges. They have high sounding reasons why the way they have it arranged is proper. I had to get away. There was plenty of work. I could have stayed. Nazareth is simple. It is a walk up the hill from Tzippori. But it is better, good people, the best are Joachim and Anna.”

“I so grieve for them. Mary being with child must have been horrible for them.”

“I had angry words with Joachim when I found out. He put Mary out.”

“When she was here visiting, we were concerned. John is a miracle child of God, but Elizabeth and I are married. A second miracle child, when there is no marriage, is not the same.”

“She was here much longer than expected. When she came back, it wasn’t too long before her mother suspected. The women in town started to wonder. It was as bad as you could imagine.”

“But you took her in. Why?”

“Angel. An Angel told me to in a dream. ‘Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ I remember every word.”

“Why would anyone do something he was told in a dream? I do not know if I would have. My angel

³ Joachim <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joachim>

⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chesed>

looked me in the eye and right through me. It still frightens me to think of it.”

“The dream burned in my mind. I could never forget it. I found her in the morning sitting on a rock at the edge of town. Praying. I told her to follow me. Can’t say I was very nice about it. People saw her following me to my house. They weren’t so nice either.”

“I can imagine. We knew it would be bad when she went back home.”

“She made a bed down by the fire. The little children would sleep with her. We were all expecting her to come as stepmother. She had been so kind to Sophia and the children. Everyone knew it was arranged. That Joachim would marry his only child to a laborer astounded everyone. She should be the wife of a scholar, a very prominent scholar. Sophia was the best of women, wise gracious. She had it all arranged. She wanted a good woman to care for her children.

“We wondered, it did not make sense to us. Mary is a rare jewel.”

“She doesn’t know that. Most women don’t attend Sabbath services. Anna and Mary, Sophia and our girls were always there. Even afterward, Mary kept coming. None of the women would sit near her, not even her mother. My little Mary sat on her lap as long as there was room. Salome sometimes would be near her. One thing, she no longer sang the psalms with the women. Joachim and Anna did not speak to her.”

“I am amazed people weren’t vicious to her.”

“It could have been worse. Mary always had been well loved and respected. She was kind and always helping everyone. Then the way she walked, carried herself. She wasn’t ashamed or proud. She was just as normal as always, yet like she knew a secret. Everyone knew I wasn’t the father. No one knew what happened. She says very little, never did talk about herself. She was in my house taking care of my children, just as it had been arranged.”

“When she was here before I noticed how quiet she is. Except for singing all the time. We weren’t able to get her to tell how she ended up betrothed to you. Mary and Elizabeth would sing together the Psalms for hours and make up songs. I loved to listen to them.”

“On the way to Bethlehem, we stayed in a grand home on top of the Mount of Olives. The Master was upset that Mary had come up the long walk up from Jericho and insisted we rest there. Truly a righteous family. His wife packed food for the trip to Bethlehem. It was as if they did not notice she was not married.”

“I know him. He is the Master of the oil for the Temple. Highly respected.”

“Mary asked if she could see the Temple in the moonlight. She sang a beautiful song. ‘My soul magnifies the Lord’. Her voice is so clear. I was sure the men on the walls could hear.”

“She would sing that song when she was here.”

“She composed it after the Angel told her she would have the child.”

“The family were singers in the Temple from the time of King David, before. Elizabeth and I composed a song after John was born.”

“Mary was a little girl when we came to Nazareth. Since her mother had a servant girl, she had a lot of freedom. She would sit near the boys as they learned their lessons. She knows all the scriptures. She would help all the women, especially the ones with little children. Everyone loved to hear her sing. She is very quiet. I wish

she would talk more. Sophia would talk with me. I liked listening to her.”

“Sophia must have been a fine wife. But still how did you come to get Mary?”

“Sophia was wise. All I could have hoped for. She had been praying, asking all the women to pray that God would lead a good woman to take care of her children. My littlest, also named Mary, suggested it. She is very fond of Mary. She kept praying Mary would be her new mother and telling Mary she was praying that. Mary prayed, then she talked to her father. That must have been something. He is a righteous man. He prayed. When it was all arranged, Sophia told me. I can’t say there was much for me to pray about.”

“So Sophia told you who your next wife would be. Not what a man would expect to hear.”

“I told you she was a very wise woman. She made me feel like a good husband. Mary is a responsibility. God chose me to take care of her for Him. To take care of this child, God’s child.”

“Elisabeth and I have been give the responsibility to take care of John. We are old. Who will take care of him after we are gone? We have prayed and searched. If the priests or scholars would get their hands on him they would use him for their purposes.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Everyone is looking for the Messiah to come. The scholars pour over every word in the scriptures looking for information, for prophecies. What is the King of Heaven going to do? What can we do to make it happen? How can we be the first to recognize the great day of the Lord? It is about how great the scholar can be in the opinion of the others, in the eyes of the people. If they could have this child from God fit their ideas, it would be very useful to them.”

“I imagine there was quite a stir when you came out of the Temple.”

“They had been very disturbed when I was unable to speak. Some people thought I had a stroke. Hillel⁵ was in the front row along with Herod’s High Priest, Simon ben Boethus⁶, and the other great ones. Fortunately the king and his retinue were not in the city. Morning prayer is nothing like the festival days, but still the inner courts are overflowing. Have you ever attended regular morning prayer?”

“No. I have only been able to attend on festival days when the outer courts are full.”

“Morning prayer has almost fifty thousand. The inner courts are full and the others crowd around the gates to glimpse inside.”⁷

“I had no idea so many came every day.”

“Almost all of the priests, even when they are not on duty, are there. The scholars consider it necessary. The officials, the shop keepers, tradesmen, the builders, cannot start until after prayer so they are there. When I

⁵ Hillel http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hillel_the_Elder

⁶ Simon ben Boethus http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simon_ben_Boethus

⁷ I cannot find the source of this number. When I read it, I thought the number impossibly high. When I learned there were 18,000 on the building crew and added everyone else around, it is possible. There is no census number for Jerusalem at this time. Hecataeus of Abdera tells us the population of Jerusalem was 120,000 300 years before. Diodorus XL 3:3-6. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hecataeus_of_Abdera http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diodorus_Siculus http://kekrops.tripod.com/Hellenistic_Files/Judaism.html

was younger, I would go every day. I am too old to go that far anymore. I am not sure how many actually go to worship. It is the place everyone goes to meet and start their day.”

“I would think the changes over the years have been something to see.”

“When I was young we had a little temple surrounded by all kinds of structures. In many ways it was very nice. It felt like home, something from ancient times. Jumbled together like the alleyways in the city. No one could move. The priests and levites couldn’t get their work done. The daily prayers were bad enough, the festivals impossible.”

“There isn’t enough space now for the festivals.”

“Each year more and more people come. Long ago, they made a southern extension and deep passages to the Hilda gates. There have been long discussions about what to do. The northern extension was underway when Herod came. There were all kinds of ideas how to refurbish the Temple and what to do with the side buildings. After Herod built a new fortress and pools, he took over the Temple work. The extension on the west side is going further south. We are not sure how far. They are talking about adding to the southern extension.”

“That will make more space for the festivals but all those houses will have to be destroyed. It will make a lot of people angry.”

“Many Sanhedrin had been bitterly opposed to Herod when he came. He had them killed.⁸ Some of their sons took over their positions. He appointed obscure individuals, of priestly descent, from Babylon and Alexandria to the most important posts. Herod took over the rebuilding. First he rebuilt the fortress and named it for the Emperor. His soldiers there control everything. The Council is forever discussing and arguing. It is hard to get anything done. They argue who is to get power and wealth. But wealth and power come from the doing not the talking.”

“I am amazed that the sons were not bitter about their fathers being killed.”

“Bitter yes, but not foolish. The sons knew he could have them killed, if they opposed him. But if they cooperated, it would be well. There is money to be made. Property bought up to make room for the extensions, the destruction of more fine homes.”

“There is hardly anything worse than taking homes that have been in the family for generations.”

“It is done for a noble cause. They are very well compensated. After all they have to build new homes, even more magnificent. That is where the problems are. Finding property - close to the Temple - to buy and tear down, finding workers. Everything is at premium price.”

“That sounds like a lot of complaining.”

“Not even the worst of it. Herod charges the Temple for much of the expense, and in order to rebuild the Temple and Chambers the old had to be demolished. Everyone lost their work space. The wood, the oil, the shewbread, the lambs, the vesting areas. On and on, there are very many people doing very many things. Gate keepers, singers, musicians, everybody is in temporary spaces. Temporary until their space is finished.”

“So everyone wants their space finished first.”

⁸ Wellhausen, Julius (2001). The History of Israel Chapter 14 14. HEROD AND THE ROMANS. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wellhausen>

"If it was decided by the council nothing would get done. Herod's builders do what they want, when they want, how they want. They don't listen to anyone no matter how loudly they complain or how powerful, Chief Priest and Sanhedrin included."

"Well, everyone hates Herod anyway so what difference does it make if they have more to complain about."

"Sometimes I wonder what he would be like if we had been nicer to him. Before he was made king the council twice filed charges against him with the emperor. The Parthians were here⁹. They came in with the confusion between Mark Anthony and Octavian. Herod was astute. He switched sides. The Romans chased the Parthians out and he took over for them. He has served Octavian well."

"I did not know of that. I did know Herod had priests trained as stone cutters for the new Temple. I thought that priests would become stonecutters was something."

"We do not say new Temple, and especially never say Herod's Temple. We can not acknowledge him in any way. It is still the old Temple, slightly renovated."

"That sounds like a joke. Is there anything of the old temple left?"

"Not that I know of. Even the pavement was totally replaced. What was here was a small Temple and jumbled buildings. People who have seen temples in other countries said it did not look we had a very important god. The only thing that was impressive were the huge courtyards. It was the enormous crowds that proclaimed how great our God is."

"What do they say now?"

"This is the most glorious Temple in the world and when the outer temple chambers and courtyard expansions are finished, it will be worthy of the only God, King of the Heaven. That does not sound right. How can man build anything worthy of the King of Heaven? The old had the Shekhinah¹⁰, the presence of the glory of the King of Heaven. The God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob was there with His people. Now instead of the presence of God you see the glory of what men can build."

"The Temple is glorious, surrounded by all that construction. What I really was thinking about was what men can build. I liked to study the work when we were here for festivals."

"They made great changes in the way we worship God, the Father of us all. They want everything to be more pure, more holy, than what God commanded. The women in Elizabeth's family were singers in the worship. Those who wanted to make themselves greater than others did not like women there. They proclaimed seeing women led men astray, harmed their worship, so they replaced the women with young boys. I have heard it said some men do shameful things with young boys. They should have been rejected, despised, for being so filthy minded. They changed the worship God commanded. Now only men can come forward. It was never like that. Women always could give sacrifices. They made a side gate for women so they can bring their

9 Pathians in Jerusalem http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/40_BC

10 The Shekinah <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shekinah>

gifts. Women are not allowed into the court for Israelites, but are allowed past it into the court of priests.”¹¹

“They discourage women from synagog prayer. At home Mary, her mother, my Sophia, were always there. Other women came at times, not always. God commanded us to worship every Sabbath. Who are we to go against God? If they say women should not, why should men? There are great women in the scriptures. If a man thinks women are able to manage a house and raise his children, did he not learn from his own mother, how can a man say what she is unable to do?”

“The great ones only read their writings and talk with other great ones. They think they know all, but really they know very little. Herod gave them their women’s court. There never was one before. They should be happy but they are not. Herod’s builders are in charge. The new fortress¹² and northern wall made the weakest place strong. Finishing the chambers for us is second even though it is our labor and at our expense. When I was a child, Pompey had a hard time capturing the Temple Mount. He came over the old northern wall. Now it is supposed to be impossible to capture.”

“The greatest Temple in the world, the greatest fortress. I have been working on Herod’s tomb at Herodium, glorious tomb, glorious palace, and powerful fortress. What man can build, man can destroy. God brought down pharaoh, the Babylonians, God Almighty will bring down the Romans. God wants us to see His greatness. It is not our buildings He desires. The King of Heaven is not impressed with kings and priests.”

“I am afraid having such a powerful fortresses is changing the way we think. We are between Herod’s palace, an even greater fortress, and the Temple fortress. With the pools and cisterns we can never run out of water. Men talk of their confidence in human power, their ability to prevail. It is all ours when we get rid of the king. What priest needs to depend on God when we are protected by such mighty walls and awash with gold from the diaspora? We have guaranteed our security for all time.”

“I can see what you mean. We are out in the country. Nazareth doesn’t even have walls. We live depending on God as our shield and refuge. His outstretched arm. I will look at these walls in a different way. It is more than just building a glorious Temple, replacing His glory with what we build. Just think we could even say The Lord Almighty has given us this Herod for a little time to make us more powerful than the armies of Rome. Do you think they could ever be such fools to try to defeat Rome?”

“I hope not. I am old and weak. I know I cannot depend on my own power. These young priests have been trained to cut and move enormous stones, build great walls. They have learned how powerful their arms are and how their minds can devise, accomplish greatness. Money to be made, power and glory to acquire. Everybody is eager for themselves, no one seems concerned about that the King of heaven wants.”

“‘He that sitteth in heaven laugheth, the Lord hath them in derision.’ I know that Psalm isn’t about all this building but I can not help but think the King of Heaven would have to come down to see what we call great just like he had to come down to see the great city and tower in Babel.”

¹¹ Women’s gate http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerusalem_temple Women in the Court of the Priests <http://www.ou.org/torah/tt/5764/vayeitzei64/mikdash.htm> There was no separate court for women in the earlier temple constructions.

¹² In illustrations, it seems small compared to the Temple Courts, because it is difficult to comprehend how huge the courts are. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tower_of_Antonia The great size is made clear in <http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/1614-antonia> three hundred and fifty by one hundred forty feet with the highest tower nearly 100 feet high.

“Very good. Elijah met the Lord Almighty in the still small voice. We look for whirlwinds. We make mighty works to impress. He created the sun, moon and stars. He is greater than them all. He is not looking for our greatness but righteousness. People don’t seek His will. They don’t see what He is doing.”

“Two small baby boys. No one would ever guess. Do we have any idea what God is doing here?”

“I will never see it. Elizabeth and I will long be gone before John or Yeshua grow up.”

“I wonder if I will be here. Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin. It crossed my mind that Mary could die in childbirth. Then what would have I done? The promise was that she would have a son, not that she would survive. We live doing the best we can for the day, trusting God. Sophia died and now I have Mary and her son.”

“I heard that some didn’t want to believe the reports of a miracle when they heard about Elizabeth giving birth to John. The scholars are always trying to determine what God is doing. Putting their wishes onto God. Who has the best idea. Who makes the most scholarly presentation. When something does not fit into their scheme of things, they don’t know what to do with it.”

“At first it sounds so wise, then others talk sounding just as wise on another side. After a while it just sounds like showing off, dividing up into the best group.”

“In the Sanhedrin, it leads to power and money. Everyone claims Messiah will do what their group says and they will be his assistants. Each would love to get their hands on John and train him to be one of them. He is not safe. We need a place to hide him so God can raise him up without having men twist him to their purposes.”

“I never thought of that.”

“We wonder, what John will be like, how long we will live to raise him. We can think of no one safe to care for him.”

“I have a younger brother, Clopas¹³, close by in Emmaus¹⁴.”

“Why don’t you speak to him for me?”

“My family treated us horribly in Bethlehem. I expect he also heard. Tell him also about Mary and her son.”

“What happened in Bethlehem?”

“They had heard about Mary being with child. They called me cuckold. Would not even let us inside a house for Mary to give birth. We had to go to a stable. The priest would not even circumcise her son.”

“Unbelievable! Oh, how bitter.”

“I should have known. It wasn’t terrible in Nazareth. On the road was fine. The night before we were welcomed in the grand home at Bethany. I kept telling Mary we would be welcome with my family. I should have known.”

“Your brother, he has no connections with the scholars or Sadducees?”

“No. He works in the quarries. He is pious but not one to follow men who think they are great. Tell him

¹³ Clopas <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cleopas> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clopas>

¹⁴ Emmaus <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emmaus>

I sent you.”

“I will pray the Lord of Wisdom would guide me to say enough and not too much.”

“That gives me another idea. Would you send a message to Joachim about Mary and the child? That both your John and Mary’s Yeshua are God’s doing and he should not be ashamed.”

“Wonderful idea. Joachim would not accept it from anyone else. It has to get to Nazareth before you do. I can send it through the priests. I will also tell him about the angels and the shepherds God sent to you.”

“Be careful about telling him too much. I have another favor to ask. It is one of the reasons we came today. You know, we are not married. We can not pretend we are. Everywhere we go people see we are not. If Mary could dress as a married woman, I would not be ashamed to be with her and she would not be ashamed to carry the child. Could you make up the marriage contract as Joachim’s kinsman?”

“You are right, Joachim would not be able to do that. But I am sure he would be delighted to know Mary and you are married. Who could be better than with us? I will tell Elizabeth at once.”

“Tomorrow we will go to the Temple for the Presentation. Then the next day leave for Nazareth. I cannot wait to get back and see how my children are doing.”

“When you are at the Temple, be careful. Six months ago we were there with John. Some were wondering if John was a sign that the Messiah was coming soon. It is not just the scholars to be concerned about. If it gets back to Herod that a Messiah is around, he will be murderous. A while back some scholars were saying the Messiah was coming to overthrow him. Some people were happy to hear that, even some in Herod’s palace. They were killed.¹⁵ It is good you are leaving.”

Zachariah went inside to tell Elizabeth. Elizabeth had sent a neighbor boy off to get a chicken. The women had prepared a meal for them, a more festive than normal for this was a celebration with fig bread, stuffed olives and their best wine . Mary had not said anything about a wedding, but her face glowed as Zachariah talked about it. Elizabeth was just as excited and very apologetic she had not thought of it. Weddings are supposed to be a celebration. They should go on for days.

The time was getting late, Zachariah shortened the ceremonies as much as possible. Elizabeth took great delight in rearranging Mary’s veil and hair. “Now you look like a proper married woman. You won’t have to be ashamed any longer.”

Joseph added he too would now be proud to walk with Mary as his wife. People thought she was his concubine. He hoped Mary’s parents, the people of Nazareth, would someday come to accept them even if they never could understand.

Mary and Joseph had to be back to Bethlehem by nightfall. Tears and hugs and understanding and resignation to the situation of the day. God knows all their hopes and desires. His blessings were with them always, no matter what the situation of the day.

15 Josephus The Antiquities of the Jews 17:2.4 <http://www.biblestudytools.com/history/flavius-josephus/antiquities-jews/>

Questions. These are questions that were in my mind that I attempted to answer as I was writing.

- 1 How and when were Mary and Joseph married?
- 2 How was it that the miracle child John was raised in obscurity?
- 3 How did the political, economic, religious situation affect their lives?
- 4 Why did Joseph come to live in Nazareth when he was from Bethlehem?
- 5 How do we know the details of the prophetess Anna?

The Gospels record the events of Jesus' life. They do not include the background information everyone knew at the time they were written. The following includes that background faithful to what is known about the history and culture. I hope this provokes-in a good way-the reader to think deeply about the Scriptural account. Go to my web site for more. <http://thesignofconcord.com> . They are in the section titled "King of Kings". There is also a section titled "King of Kings Supplements" with additional information.

If you do not think this reflects the culture and historic situation, how would you tell the story?

Many thanks to my patient wife Lynne for repeatedly proofreading.

Scriptures are from Jewish Publication Society of America 1917 Version. The New Testament quotes are ESV.