

Book One

## THE KING HIDDEN

Chapter Two

### THE MESSENGER APPEARS

Stephen H. Funck December 26, 2016

#### MARY AND HER MOTHER

“Mother, I was praying.”

“You are always praying.”

“This was different.”

“You seem? You look different. What?”

“God sent me a message.”

“That is special. Something about you and Joseph?”

“Our cousin Elizabeth, the priest’s wife, the old woman, is to have a son.”

“That is impossible.”

“I said so too. The messenger said, “With God nothing will be impossible.”

“I don’t believe it.”

“I would like to go see her.”

Shortly afterward her father Joachim returned from seeing his brother Samuel in Cana. He was laughing as he tried to speak to them. “You won’t believe my news. Impossible, that old woman, wife of the Zechariah, is expecting a child. The cousins in Cana are going down to see for themselves. Ann, you have such a strange look.”

“Mary just told me the same thing. She said God told her.”

Joachim sat down, astounded. He shook his head as to clear it. “They are going to leave tomorrow. They are also going to clear up a question about their mother’s inheritance in Hebron.”

Ann reminded them that Mary couldn’t go without Joseph’s permission. The preparations for the wedding could go forward while she was away. Decency required some time between the death of his first wife Sophia and the marriage. With six children to care for it couldn’t be too long either.<sup>1</sup> Mary said she would speak to Joseph when he came back from work. She didn’t tell Joseph that an angel personally gave her the message or anything else the angel said. She didn’t know how she could.

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<sup>1</sup> The oldest writings about Mary and Joseph’s families are reflected in this. They were leaders in the early church for generations. Some readers will recognize this as their own understanding, others will find this new. There is no “proof” the oldest is accurate. There is less reason to think later ideas are better. The idea is that the brothers and sisters of Jesus mentioned in the Bible are later children of Mary and Joseph is a recent idea, see <http://katachriston.wordpress.com/2011/06/07/richard-j-bauckham-on-the-relatives-of-jesus/>

## THE VISITATION WITH ELIZABETH AND ZECHARIAH

Mary went with the cousins. On the way they slept in the inns together, since an unmarried woman would not be safe sleeping alone. Many priests and Levites lived in Ein Kerem<sup>2</sup>, just west of Jerusalem. They passed by Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, covered with construction.

Elizabeth was long past the age for child bearing. Her husband Zechariah had a vision while he was serving in the Temple before she became to be with child. He had been unable to speak since. The cousins would come for her after they were finished in Hebron.

When the cousins left, Elizabeth wrapped her arms around Mary, beaming with joy. “Mary, I know. When you came into the house and I saw your face.” Mary was embarrassed and glad and in a way disquieted. Still it was good to know that someone understood. She pressed her cheek to Elizabeth’s cheek.

Elizabeth stepped back to take a good look at Mary. “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! Why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? Behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy, blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

Elizabeth told Zechariah. He blinked his eyes, smiled, bobbed his head up and down and wrapped his arms around Mary. Not being able to talk and his whole body filled with laughter that can’t be expressed, all he could do was clap his hands and raise his arms as in prayer of thanksgiving.

The few days stretched into weeks. The cousins didn’t come back from Hebron. Mary, Elizabeth and Zechariah would wait and pray. In the meantime, the women talked and sang. They both sang. Elizabeth did most of the talking. She did learn about Mary’s betrothal to Joseph, that his wife Sophia died recently, leaving him with six children, that he was a laborer, highly respected.

Mary did tell her about the angel who was sent to her. That she would “bear a son, and call him 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.” She had memorized all the angel said to her and kept repeating it to herself. “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.”

Elizabeth and Zechariah rejoiced to hear the news. Zechariah indicated that the angel he had seen was the same Gabriel. God had given two miracle children. All of these centuries everyone had been praying for and longing for God to enter in with Salvation. What are these babies going to do? How? Zechariah was the one who did the wondering, speculating. The women were content that God could do what He wanted, whenever, however He wanted. They did not need to figure out what He was doing. They were the ones carrying babies, sons from God, servants of the Most High. It was too much to think much about.

They would sing for hours. Mary also composed songs. She made one and sang it for them. It began, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” They both complimented her on it. Elizabeth was getting more and more tired as the child grew within her. Her days seemed to grow longer. And the cousins

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<sup>2</sup> Ein Kerem, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ein\\_Kerem](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ein_Kerem) ,  
Elizabeth [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth\\_\(Biblical\\_person\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_(Biblical_person))  
Zechariah [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zechariah\\_\(priest\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zechariah_(priest))  
Birth of John the Baptist [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nativity\\_of\\_St.\\_John\\_the\\_Baptist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nativity_of_St._John_the_Baptist)  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_the\\_Baptist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_the_Baptist)

still had not returned. They kept praying for them. Zechariah was not happy to hear that Idumaens<sup>3</sup> were involved. Court affairs can take a long time normally. They would have to just wait and they waited.

Elizabeth tried to talk to Mary about what would happen when she got back to Nazareth. She was expecting a child and was to be married. Mary just shook her head. She didn't know. How could she say anything to Joseph? God would have to work it out. Nothing they could do would help. They did pray for God to bless, guide, direct. It seemed improper for them to complain, considering what already had been done for them.

## THE RETURN TO NAZARETH

It was almost Elizabeth's ninth month when the cousins came back, angry, frustrated. Mary hardly had time to get her bag and say good by before they dragged her off. There was no leisurely stop to see the Temple. They were in a foul mood all the way back. Nothing had worked out. They wasted all their time, and money. The bribes did not do any good and they didn't get them back. "Idumean King, Idumean judge, the Idumaen got their mother's inheritance."

There was great distress back in Nazareth while they were waiting. This was much more than a decent interval between Sophia's death and the marriage. It would not have been such a problem if Mary had been there. She would have taken over the house work before the marriage. Now the women who had been helping during Sophia's illness were upset. Their husbands felt advantage was being taken. Complaints were made to Joseph and Joachim. They knew Joseph couldn't do anything. His children were upset. They just lost their mother and Mary was gone too.

In Cana and Nazareth the quick trip promised down and back became weeks, months. What was going on? What had happened? Were they safe? Had they been attacked on the road? Both anger and worry grew. Joachim was helpless. It was his brother Samuel's sons who had gone with Mary. Samuel had not heard anything. It was no surprise he had not heard. Messages were sent in person. He was upset. Men did not normally travel from Hebron to Cana. So they waited. Joachim began giving gifts of money to the husbands of the women who were caring for Joseph's children.

The cousins did agree to go to Nazareth first before going to Cana. Mary was tired. They had walked fast for three days. They didn't take the short cut through Samaria. Children saw them coming up the hill and ran to spread the news through the village. By the time they got there it seemed like the everyone was outside greeting them, talking all at once. Why were you gone so long? What was keeping you? We were so worried. Everyone has been waiting for you. Joseph's children, the smaller ones, all put their arms around her. James and Simon were too old for that but they were full of smiles. Joachim and Ann, at their age, walked down to meet her. Both a great honor and a sign of how concerned they had been.

Her cousin Isaac held up his hand for quiet. He explained to Joachim in a loud enough voice for those around to hear. He apologized for keeping Mary away so long. They had been tied up by the court in Hebron. There were all kinds of problems, locating witnesses, negotiating with people who claimed to have an interest. The Judge was very uncooperative. They used all the money they could afford to encourage proper consideration. When he mentioned that the other party was Idumean and the judge was Idumean as well, there were loud cries of outrage that included the Idumean king Herod. Some were muttering, they should have known better than travel all that distance and take all that time . They were not going to get their mother's inheritance from an Idumean. In the meantime Mary slipped off with her mother and Joseph's children.

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<sup>3</sup> Idumeans <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Idumeans> <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/5434-edox-idumea>

Mary spoke as briefly as possible with her mother and excused herself to go to Joseph's home to begin dinner. She hugged and thanked the woman who was there that day caring for the children. Mary would take over the work. The woman was only preparing bread and some lentil stew. Mary sent James up to her mother's to ask for a chicken. She wanted to have something special. She knew Joseph would know she was back before he got to the village. Someone, several, were going to be waiting for him as he came up the hill.

Before Joseph got to the house the children were all excited to tell their father Mary had come back and was making them a chicken for dinner. He was very happy to learn she had finally returned and where did she get a chicken? They told him she sent James up to her mother. James killed the chicken. They didn't get meat every day.

"Well, you finally came back. People were wondering if you had run away. The children have been very upset."

"I know, I thought I was supposed to be here."

"How is your cousin?"

"She is fine. It is all true."

"Has the child been born?"

"No. I had to come back. She is very close to her time."

"That is too bad. To wait all that time and then have to leave." She nodded.

"How did she come to be with child?"

"It is a miracle. God did it."

"Impossible."

"With God nothing is impossible."

"Why would God do this to your cousin, now?"

"Some of the leaders and scholars were coming, looking for answers."

"Asking the wrong people. Ask God. As if the King of Heaven would tell them. Children, the King of Heaven has answered your prayers. Mary has returned. She is well. She is making you a wonderful dinner. We will have to repay her mother. We have much to praise God for. May evil remain behind us. This long time waiting has made us eager to see you.

"You all must forgive me. I never thought I would be away so long."

The children asked her about the miracle. Why it was a miracle for an old woman to have a child? What did a miracle baby look like? They were disappointed that she had not stayed to see it. She assured them she expected the baby would look like a baby. They asked her about the trip. What the Temple looked like and Jerusalem, the long climb up from Jericho, the date orchards, the palaces. Mary told them what she could. They relived the trip through her words. Joseph listened too. "I have never heard you say so much in my life. You are always so quiet."

"The children asked," she explained. She stayed until after they said the evening Shema. She kissed the little children, the ones who would let her. She promised she would be back in the morning and make their breakfast. They were all happy that the other ladies would not be coming any more. She is the best!

#### WHAT CANNOT REMAIN HIDDEN

In a few days it seemed like she had always been there. She would come early, make breakfast, spin and weave, grind grain, make beer. They were very short on clothing. The spinning and weaving had not been kept

up with. She had brought back the cloth she made in Ein Kerem and repaired and made what was most needed. Nazareth is on top of the hill. The well is a long way down. Water for eight meant walking with heavy jars.

In Ein Kerem she really hadn't suffer much with morning sickness. It came back. Her mother noticed. A few other women wondered, whispers and very close looks. Mary was feeling uncomfortable with the looks. Finally her mother came down to Joseph's house in the middle of the day and asked. What could she say? There was no reason to lie about what can not be hidden. Mary was not one who lied anyway. She could not explain about the angel. No one would believe. It would just make everything worse. Her mother was appalled. She insisted Mary come back home with her. It was obvious she had been with child before she had returned from Judea.

The children wondered where Mary had gone and went looking for her. They learned Mary's mother had taken her home and that she appeared angry at Mary. When their father came home, there was no dinner and they could not tell him anything. He went up to Joachim's house and they stayed home. Joachim met him. Joseph did not see Mary. It was not pleasant. Joachim was humiliated and angry. Joseph had been unaware of the rumors, so he was totally shocked. Betrayed. His children betrayed. He was angry for them. He spoke ill of Joachim and his daughter, unpleasant words and stormed down the hill. The people in town had been watching everything. The rumors were right. They were shocked, Mary of all people! Joachim and Ann put Mary out.

The children were confused when their father came back angry. He did not say what happened. They were afraid to ask. They found this and that to eat and stayed away from him, from the house. While they were outside the children talked with the neighbors. They heard, they understood, what had happened. Even the youngest understood this was very bad.<sup>4</sup> They came in when it was too dark to stay outside. They prayed the Shema and went to bed. James told his father that as it was getting dark he saw Mary leaving. She headed down the road to Nain<sup>5</sup> and sat on a rock. She had a bundle with her. The bed was uncomfortable, tossing and turning. It took a while before everyone was asleep.

It was growing dark as she left. She had nowhere to go. She sat on a rock just outside of the village and prayed. She faced south toward the Temple in Jerusalem. Prayed all night. There was no answer, no explanation. Nothing. She sang the Psalms of despair. She sang them over. She sang other Psalms. She did not feel like singing the Psalms about confessing sin, that did not seem right. She sang Psalms of praise. There was nothing to praise but they were more fitting than the ones confessing sin. She hadn't gotten herself pregnant. She

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph was going to end the marriage contract when he learned Mary was pregnant. He could have had her stoned as an adulteress, which almost never was done. Taking her in, she appeared to be a housekeeper in the eyes of the people of Nazareth. The village knew she was not sleeping in his bed. It might have been acceptable for him to take her as a concubine, if she had not been pregnant by another man. Mary, women, were never alone, without a chaperone. On the earlier trip to Judea her cousins and Zechariah guaranteed her virginity and would be guilty if they did not protect her. It was not legally possible to rape a woman in town, since her cries for help would bring rescuers. In many cultures, a violated woman, cut off her hair and publicly bewailed her fate. It absolved her from blame but did not change the fact she was damaged goods and unworthy of marriage. Mary's behavior demonstrated she was a willing participant in becoming pregnant and not ashamed by it. Normally family and the people of the village would cut off the adulteress' hair to mark her wickedness and shame her. This continues into modern times, see the photo of Ingrid Bergman from the film "For Whom the Bell Tolls" <http://www.imdb.com/media/rm3173685248/tt0035896> .

Jesus was publicly accused of being illegitimate. It was one of the reasons they had for rejecting him as the promised messiah. Some influential person must have suggested referring to Mary as the "Virgin Mary" to counter the harsh accusations of immorality.

<sup>5</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nain,\\_Israel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nain,_Israel)

thought of Elizabeth and Zechariah. It was so nice for them. Why was it so hard for her? She was cold in the dark. The wind went by. The rock was hard. She was cold, confused. What was God doing? Where would He lead her? What of the child she was carrying? The angel promised great things. "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 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." She sang her song, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." The song was true. It was dark and she was cold. Up above all the hosts of heaven were serving God. They looked so glorious. She would love to hear their songs praising God. Which one was the angel that come to her? She sang the Psalms of praise again and waited for the sunrise. "Who healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. He counteth the number of the stars; He giveth them all their names. Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite. The LORD upholdeth the humble."<sup>6</sup>

#### RETURNED BUT NOT THE SAME

Joseph had a restless night, a vivid dream. Too real to be a dream, he remembered every word when he awoke. This dream did not drift away and fade with waking. He did not want what the dream said. It was just more pain, more confusion. He remembered every word of the dream. As dawn was beginning, he got up carefully to keep from waking the children. There was enough light not to walk into things as he went to the road to Nain. He could hear her singing. Her voice carried over the village. She was still sitting on a rock. She did not turn around as she heard him walk up behind her.

"Mary." She bowed her head and stopped singing. "Follow me." She followed him to his home. He motioned for her to go in by the fire. He went up on the roof. She picked up the hand stone and started grinding grain for breakfast. The children awoke, looking around, listening, whispering. Jose looked out and saw Mary and hurried back, more whispers. Salome went to look, Jude followed. All the motion woke Mary and she went to see. She was so happy to see Mary that she threw herself at her and wrapped her arms around her neck, "I am so happy you have come back. Never leave us, I love you." They were both crying. The other children came out timidly. Some said they were happy to see her. Mary looked at them with little Mary still wrapped tightly around her neck and smiled shyly. They all sat around her. The older ones wondered. They needed her but what was going on? James and Simon got the fire going and breakfast was soon ready. Joseph came down. He had been praying, thinking. Confused! He lead them all in the Shema. He ate some, told the children, "I am not asking you to understand what I have done. The woman is in great distress and in need. You have known her, you have seen how she took care of your mother and took care of you. It is God's will to treat her with kindness. Close your ears to what people say." He left for work.

Nothing is a secret in a small village. Joseph had been seen leading Mary home that morning. The whole town knew Mary made a bed by the fire. The little ones slept with her. She went to the well for water, carried on just as she had before. She still attended services. She no longer had her gold jewelry and best clothes. She no longer sang with the women's chorus. The women moved away from her so she sat alone. Little Mary sat on her lap as long as there was room. Salome came to nestle beside her. Her mother Ann did not speak to her, neither did her father. Everything was almost as it had been before. Joseph talked with her when necessary. She waited as the child grew within her. She remembered every word the angel told her. She sang as she spun, as she wove, ground grain. She prayed for everyone like she always had. She sang the song she composed.

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<sup>6</sup> Psalm 147:3-6

## DEPARTURE

Joseph had to go to Bethlehem to register for the census.<sup>7</sup> He was still a citizen there. His master depended on him. He was his best worker and did not want to spare him until the project was finished. It had been promised to be completed for the New Year. It almost was finished in time, now he could leave. Everyone would soon be leaving for Jerusalem to celebrate Sukkot. Mary could not stay and her time was coming. Maybe they could leave early and travel slowly. Perhaps they could leave even earlier and he could celebrate Yom Kipper<sup>8</sup> at the Temple.

Coming home from work, he called his oldest son, James, to come to him. "James, you have become a fine young man. I am very proud of you. Your brothers and sisters respect you. I have a request." James was both flattered to hear the words and wondered. "I am leaving early for Jerusalem so Mary will be able to travel slower. She should not be traveling. It may bring the child before its time. I have to register in Bethlehem. We will stay with my family there. You and the others can travel with the rest of the village. We will meet you after registering. You have gone to Jerusalem many times so it will not be a problem. God will be with you. I will keep you in my prayers. Do you think you can do this?"

James was proud to hear his father's praise. "Father, I pray God will give me the wisdom to do all that is necessary and bless my brothers and sisters with wisdom, cooperation."

"I will talk with them and strongly charge them to obey you and keep them in my prayers as well."

"Here are thirty denarius. You have to buy food after we leave. Your sisters are too small to grind and cook. Take the things I made to sell. That will give you money you need. I am taking my tools. If I have to, I will be able to earn more. I haven't been to Yom Kippur since I left Bethlehem. I am going to leave extra early so I can be there this year. We will leave tomorrow." They embraced tightly. James was both proud his father trusted him and scared by the great responsibility.

Joseph was apologetic when he spoke to Mary. He knew her time was close but he could not leave her in Nazareth. Everyone in the village was going for Sukkot. She had to come with him. They would leave in the morning. He would go to Bethlehem and register. He wanted to go to Yom Kippur.

Mary bowed her head. "I will be ready." She counted the days to herself from the time the angel spoke to her. The nine months would be up before they would return.

The evening meal was a short while later. Joseph told Salome to light the Sabbath lights. They sat in a circle around the pot and bread for dinner. For this last meal together for a while, Mary added plates of dates and figs, wine and sesame cakes. Joseph talked with each child. Telling them he loved them, to respect James, to take care of each other, to say the Shema morning and evening, Salome to light the Sabbath lights. They would see each other in Jerusalem. He tried to be stern and strong. Mary also spoke warmly with each one apologizing

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<sup>7</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Census\\_of\\_Quirinius](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Census_of_Quirinius) The Greek word is governing not governor. The record has him as the official governor later. Perhaps he was an assistant to the governor Varius. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Publius\\_Quinctilius\\_Varus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Publius_Quinctilius_Varus) [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Roman\\_governors\\_of\\_Syria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Roman_governors_of_Syria)

<sup>8</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yom\\_Kippur](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yom_Kippur) [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three\\_Pilgrimage\\_Festivals](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_Pilgrimage_Festivals) The three pilgrim festivals were attended by the population of the area, over two million. All, who could, would go to the festivals. The weather was pleasant. People camped and made a great fair, bringing what they could sell. The whole village, or in a larger place, each synagog stayed together. Over the years, it became well organized routine. Large numbers came from farther away, especially for Passover.

for leaving them alone. She asked James to tell her parents she had to go with Joseph. She would be praying for them constantly and asked that they keep their father and the child she was carrying in their prayers. The children were upset but did their best to be strong. They all said they would be praying for them too.

Joseph spoke the Sabbath blessing over each child<sup>9</sup>. He placed his hands on each of his four sons' heads in turn saying "May God make you like Ephraim and Menasheh." Over each of his two daughters he said, "May God make you like Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah." Mary also extended her hand on each. Then they said the Shama.

Joseph went to pack the things he made to sell at Sukkot and organize his tools for travel. He had brought three donkeys from work. One he would take tomorrow, the other two the children would take. Mary started grinding grain and baked as much bread as she could. She talked with Salome about grinding and baking what she could. Every little bit helped. Salome should ask Judith's, Mary's Mother's servant, if she could use her quern to grind so they did not have to take theirs. It was heavy. Mary hoped Judith would offer to help grind. She would have but James told the boys they had to grind. Women's, girl's work, Simon was horrified but when James started grinding there was not much he could do. With everyone working together, they never had to buy bread. They knew their father would be proud.

The younger ones still bedded down by the fire with Mary, the older ones with their father. The next day after everything was ready, it was time to say goodbye. Joseph raised his hands and said "May God bless you and keep you. May God's presence shine on you and be gracious to you. May God's presence rise toward you and give you peace." He turned quickly to leave so the children would not see the tears in his eyes.

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

Why would Joseph take Mary to Bethlehem so late in her pregnancy?

How did Mary tell her parents that God made her pregnant?

If you were in her place what would have you said?

Why would Mary leave Elizabeth just before the birth of John?

How did Mary tell Joseph about the angel's announcement to her?

How did Joseph tell Mary and his children about the dream of the angel?

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.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://dorsheitzedek.org/sites/default/files/managed/project-lox/blessing-children.pdf>