

Book One
THE KING HIDDEN
Chapter Three
A BIRTH IN BETHLEHEM

Stephen H. Funck December 18, 2019

TO BETHLEHEM

Joseph bought a donkey. Sometimes Mary rode. Sometimes she walked and the beast carried their bundles. Joseph brought his tools so he could earn money while they were gone. She could not go very fast and Joseph encouraged her to take her time. He had always been patient with her, as he was with his children. For Mary it was very different from the last trip with ill tempered cousins traveling as fast as possible. Except for being uncomfortable with the child, it was almost pleasant. They went through cities and towns, people of every kind, there were donkey and camel caravans, heavily laden ox team wagons, the Jordan valley was a grand date orchard. No one bothered them as they traveled. They looked like a man and his concubine, nobody's business.¹

Joseph bought their food. At night he said he was uncomfortable taking her into an inn.² They camped on the side of the road. He told her to rest on the other side of the donkey for warmth. The valley was very warm in the day. Joseph was expecting them to have a nice welcome back in Bethlehem. He had a lot of family there. The lambs for the Temple were from there, so it had connections with the highest leadership of the Temple. Some of that had caused a foul taste in Joseph's mouth which was why he had gone to Galilee. Back in Nazareth he had not talked with her, only what was necessary. She talked with children but never had talked much with adults. Along the way he talked. She appreciated his friendly conversation and would ask him questions. He constantly asked her how she was, if she was comfortable. He did not want her to do too much.

They came to Jericho and went past Herod's palace there.³ It looked huge and luxurious. Joseph commented it was small and simple for what Herod did. Before they began the long climb up to Jerusalem they stopped for the night near the bottom. The next day was long and hard. It is a long way up, hot, dry, without

¹ It was obvious from appearance that a woman was married or unmarried. This is true in nearly all cultures. I have not been able to find authoritative description exactly how that was indicated in this culture. It seems it was by the way the hair and veil/scarf were worn. Roman women wore a wedding ring.

² It would have been necessary for them to sleep in the same bed. A woman could not be safe if she slept alone. On the prior trip to see Elizabeth, Mary slept between her cousins, which was acceptable. The chaperone was necessary so it was impossible to question virginity.

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hasmonean_royal_winter_palaces
<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Archaeology/jericho.html>

shade.⁴ They were constantly being passed and meeting laden caravans. Joseph was so much more pleasant and caring to be with than her cousins. She was still exhausted by the end of the day when they came to the top.

BETHANY

There were some girls playing in the road. Joseph asked if they knew of a place they could rest for the night. The girls looked at Mary with big eyes. Just then an older boy came around the corner. "Martha, Mary. Father said I did so well, he is making me his assistant for the oil of the Morning Sacrifice."

"I knew he would." They both replied. It was obvious they adored their big brother.

The boy looked at Joseph, "What did you want with my sisters?"

"We've just climbed up from Jericho. The lady needs a place to rest."

His father overheard as he came up. He looked at Mary, very heavy with child. "The woman should not be traveling."

Mary replied: "Please sir, it couldn't be helped."

He scowled, took a deep breath and paused. "You must stay with us. It is required that we are charitable. Martha, run, tell your mother."

He led them to a large home, much more grand than her father's. There were stalls for the beast and fodder. The servants had prepared a fine meal for the master and his son. He motioned for them to go with the servants. "Take good care of them. They are to lack nothing. A soft bed for the woman." They ate with the servants, who looked them over closely. Then they were shown a nice room where a bed had been made up.

Mary said to Joseph, "I would like to go to the top of the hill, they say the Temple is beautiful in the moonlight."

Mary and Joseph had a short walk to a place where they could look over the Temple. He was going to tell her all the construction details, but decided not to. "My son James was so impressed when he saw this. It made the glory of God real for him."

"I will pray."

Mary looked over the Golden Temple shining in the moonlight. It was surrounded by the great buildings gleaming pure white. All around were the spacious courts. She was enthralled. God is so great. 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 and all was well.

"That is beautiful. Your voice is so pure. I think the men on the walls could hear."

"My song," she said. Joseph felt so proud for her. She had no idea she could be proud. She said so little, did so well. She was so full of peace when all around was disaster. Her presence made everything better. He took her to the room and told her to make herself as comfortable as possible. He would sleep by the beast. The next morning the servants knew he slept in the stable. The lady of the house had a good breakfast prepared for them and packed a large lunch. They had been very graciously received by someone who was powerful. The boy and his father had left for the Temple before them. The girls, Mary and Martha, shyly returned their waves goodbye.

⁴ <http://bibleresources.americanbible.org/bible-resources/bible-resource-center/topics-in-the-bible/from-jerusalem-to-jericho> <http://blog.bibleplaces.com/2006/11/jericho-to-jerusalem.html>

Bethlehem, their destination, was not very far so they did not hurry. Mary wanted to see the Temple.⁵ Joseph tied the beast near the Northern Gate for the shortest walk. Mary was thrilled. It was so beautiful. She hoped they would be able to come back for the Water Libation⁶ of Sukkot. That was the most joyous time of all. She knew there was tremendous building going on, that did not concern her. It was being with all people of God, joining in the praise of the great assembly that she loved, the great massed choirs, the trumpets. She did not know how many there were when it was filled to overflowing. Joseph knew the courts held well over one hundred and fifty thousand. There were many more pilgrims than that. People were expected to come for a short while, pray and leave to make room for others. He was thrilled to be there. Here and there teachers were addressing those who came to hear them. The most popular had speakers to help. The teacher would speak to those close in, and disciples would repeat his words to those further out. Well rehearsed, the message just flowed out to all.

BETHLEHEM

They stayed too long and had to hurry, as much as Mary could, to get to Bethlehem by dark. Just before they got there, they passed Rachel's memorial⁷. She died giving birth. They thought and shuddered but did not say anything to the other. Joseph kept encouraging her that everything would be fine when they got to his family. She would have another good bed. It was not like that. Word about them from Nazareth made it there first. They had heard of the betrothal with amazement. Then the shock when they heard of her condition. When Joseph asked for a place to stay, he was sent away with harsh words for him and that shameful woman. How dare he want to come into their homes, shame. Not even the fact she was close to her time mattered, if anything it made it worse.⁸ With each rejection, Mary felt more and more uncomfortable. She asked Joseph not to try

⁵ My favorite visualizations of the Temple Mount are by Leen Ritmeyer <http://www.ritmeyer.com/category/temple-mount/>. There are many other models. All of these show the finished work in 64 AD when 18000 men and 1000 draft oxen were laid off after 80 years of work. Josephus Antiquities of the Jews - Book XX Chapter 9, 7. "And now it was that the temple was finished. So when the people saw that the workmen were unemployed, who were above eighteen thousand" <http://www.ccel.org/j/josephus/works/ant-20.htm> When Jesus was born and at his death, it was a grand construction site.

The Temple http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Temple Temple Models
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Replicas_of_the_Jewish_Temple

⁶ <http://www.torah.org/learning/yomtov/sukkos/vol3no21.html> http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simchat_Beit_HaShoeivah

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rachel%27s_Tomb

⁸ Joseph had to go to Bethlehem because he was born there and still a citizen on the records. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Census_of_Quirinius

His family would not let him stay in a guest room, the word in the original does not mean a commercial inn. In many cultures, a woman who becomes pregnant before marriage will not be able to marry. A woman who was raped was damaged goods. In Bethlehem, they may have only known that he came with a pregnant woman he was not married to. If they knew more of the story, his repugnant action brought shame on his family village. The lowest a man could be was to have his woman made pregnant by another man and do nothing. "Cuckold" was the worst insult a man could be called. It was legal until recently for a husband to kill his wife and the man if he caught them in the act.

<http://blog.bibleplaces.com/2006/12/in-typical-christmas-pageant-one-of.html>
<http://bycommonconsent.com/2011/12/15/because-there-was-no-room-for-them-in-the-inn/>

again. Joseph knew below the edge of the hill were a number of caves used for stables and storage. The second one he looked in was good enough with left over clean straw for a bed.

They rested there for a day. Joseph went into the town to buy food and get water. They were not nice to him. After that he went to the next town for supplies. He was planning to leave her there the next day while he went to the Temple for Yom Kippur. The next morning as he was getting ready to leave, he looked at Mary. He took a closer look at Mary. She was trying to smile, look brave. He knew her time had come. She knew birth would be hard and painful. It was worse. It was worse than that. That night it was over. Joseph lay the baby on her stomach. The baby was beautiful. She rested in happy peace.⁹

“I wished there had been some woman here to help you.”

“Everything is fine.” She was softly saying. “Yeshua, Yeshua. He said he would be called Yeshua.”

Joseph finished cleaning up, made sure Mary and the baby were comfortable and put out the light. Some time later, he heard commotion, voices in the distance. A short while later there were calls outside. “Is anyone there? Hello, hello. Do you have a new born baby in a manger? “

Joseph answered, “Who are you? Why have you come to bother us?”

A timid voice replied, “We were watching our sheep. An angel told us to come. The sky was filled with angels singing. Didn’t you hear them?”

Mary was awakened by all this. Joseph asked her if they could come and see the baby. He lit the lamp. Three shepherds pressed into the cave, put their faces on the floor and look frightened and joyful at the same time. Mary asked, “Angels? You saw angels from God?”

The shepherds, excited, all replied at the same time. “The sky was full of them. They were all singing glory to God. It was wonderful. The first one spoke to us, told us you were here.”

The shepherd with the timid voice said, “I remember the exact words the angel said, ‘Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger’. Angels and angels, the sky was filled with angels singing. ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!’ You didn’t hear them?”

Mary said, “That must have been wonderful. I would have loved to hear angels sing. Come. Closer to the baby. God wants you to see him.” She asked them to repeat what the angels said. How many spoke? what they sang? until they all agreed on exactly how and what. Joseph watched and listened and was amazed. Shepherds? Angels? It was all true! The angel was more than a dream. After a while they realized Mary and the baby were tired. They bowed their faces to the ground and backed out.

Mary said, “I saw an angel once.”

Joseph replied, “One spoke to me in a dream.”

“The angel spoke to you too?”

“He told me the baby’s name was Yeshua, too. ‘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

⁹ It has always been know where Jesus was born in Bethlehem <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bethlehem> http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_the_Nativity http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nativity_of_Jesus For an excellent free information go to <http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/free-ebooks/the-first-christmas-the-story-of-jesus-birth-in-history-and-tradition/>

Yeshua, for he will save his people from their sins.’ I got up and found you on the rock by the side of the road. It wasn’t just a dream. It seemed impossible to tell you.”

“I couldn’t tell you either.”

“What did he tell you and when?”

“Remember when I said I had a message that my cousin Elizabeth was to have a child?”

“Yes.”

“I didn’t know how to tell you the rest. The angel said. ‘Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!’ I was troubled, why would an angel come to me? The angel said, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb, bear a son, and you shall call his name Yeshua. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. 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.’ I asked, ‘How will this be, since I am a virgin?’ The angel explained, ‘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. Behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.’ What could I say except, ‘Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.’”

“You were right not to tell me that. It would have made everything worse.”

“I kept repeating it all to myself. “

“I did too. I wish it had been better for you in my house.”

“It was good there. I was safe, doing what I was supposed to do. The children were wonderful. You treated me properly. I had no complaint.”

They spent the next few days in the cave. It was big. The well was below the village. He made a sukkah¹⁰ on the edge of town for Mary and the baby. It was more cosy than the cave. They made their home there even after Sukkot was over.

The eighth day after the birth was the day God commanded for circumcision and naming.¹¹ Joseph took the baby into Bethlehem to the priest. He refused! Joseph was forced to circumcise the baby himself. Unbelievable discourtesy.

Joseph did not feel like attending synagog in Bethlehem, so they kept Sukkot¹² at home. The last day was the “Great Hoshana”¹³, the last of the Days of Judgment, prayers for God’s blessings on the new year, prayers

¹⁰ <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/holiday5.html> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hakhel>

¹¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brit_milah <http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/4391-circumcision>

¹² It is well known that no one knows when Jesus was born. Some think Jesus was born at Sukkoth. Using this date, the “house” the Magi visit becomes a [sukkah](#). If the reader wants to imagine the shepherds making another visit and the Magi having a camel, the result looks something like our traditional creches. http://ffoz.org/blogs/2012/10/birth_of_jesus_at_sukkot.html <http://heartofwisdom.com/biblicalholidays/2014/07/28/birth-of-christ-feast-of-tabernacles/> The following present the spiritual and cultural associations. <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/holiday5.html> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sukkot> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sukkot> The following on the December 25th date is excellent. [www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/new-testament/how-december-25-became-christmas/?](http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/new-testament/how-december-25-became-christmas/)

¹³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hoshana_Rabbah

for the coming of the Messiah, rejoicing, gratitude for a blessed year, tearing down the wall separating man from the Father in Heaven.

Mary was not able to go to the Water Libation. James and Simon sought them out when they did not come to the camp. They went back and told the rest about the baby, Yeshua. James assured Joseph everything was going well. They would be waiting for them in Nazareth. "If we are delayed, and you need to, hire back the women who helped while Mary was in Judea. You should ask my master if you can work for him when there are no lessons. Make sure you are all in school and worship. If you need anything ask Joachim. He is very fond of you, or ask the head of the synagog. I will be praying for you all every day. I will be back as soon as possible. It is possible we will be here until the purification."¹⁴

When Mary was strong enough to be left alone for the day, he took his tools and went to the Herodium.¹⁵ He knew a man who brings his own tools can always find work at a big construction site.

"Mary, how have you been? I have been thinking about you and the baby all day, praying that you were comfortable."

"Good. Yeshua is a very good baby. I made you apples with dates and wine. How was the work?"

"It felt good to be back working. The Herodium was big when I left here. It has gotten bigger and bigger. Now Herod is having his tomb constructed. May he be in it soon."

"Joseph!"

"You are right, we are not to speak evil of anyone.¹⁶ The Tomb is enormous. You can see the Temple from it and see it from the Temple. I am sure that is why it is where it is."

Mary nodded her head as if to say tell me more.

"Early in his reign he built this as a fortress, a refuge. He knew how unpopular he was. Out in the desert on top of a hill, he built a fortress with a palace inside. So I've heard. It can't be seen from outside. It had to be small so then he built a large palace at the bottom. I guess it could hold a thousand people. The swimming pool holds that many."

"What is a swimming pool?"

"You have seen children play in the water on the edge of the lake. It is like that." Mary had seen little boys play in the lake and a few little girls too. They took off all their clothes. She didn't say anything. "The pool has a big island in the middle. I wonder if he doesn't use it for boats."¹⁷

"Out in the desert. Where does all that water come from?"

"He built an aqueduct from near here."

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presentation_of_Jesus_at_the_Temple

¹⁵ Herodium http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herodium_Tomb <http://www.bib-arch.org/bar/article.asp?PubID=BSBA&Volume=37&Issue=1&ArticleID=7> http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/09/world/middleeast/09herod.html?_r=1 <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/11/081119084537.htm> Earlier he had a theater and royal box that were covered over when he built his tomb. Royal theater <http://ferrelljenkins.wordpress.com/2010/09/19/royal-theater-box-at-the-herodium/>

¹⁶ <http://www.jewfaq.org/speech.htm>

¹⁷ Herod's pool parties probably would have been libertine, but more restrained than the utter debauchery of Nero's described in Tacitus Annals xv, 37 <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/tac/a15030.htm> and Dio Cassius lxii 15. http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cassius_Dio/62*.html A

He continued to work on the tomb. He would tell her some of what he was seeing and learning. He had never seen such excess and luxury and could not believe the stories of debauchery he had heard were possible. In the "Holy City" some unholy things happened but out in the desert there was nothing to hold back. Many of the high and mighty enjoyed the pleasures and entertainment Herod provided. He did not tell her what kind of shows he heard were done there. Doing in front of people what should not be done by anyone in secret. Just as horrible to think that people came and cheered to see it. The evil was worse than he could have imagined.

A few times shepherds would stop by in the evening when Joseph was there. They would come in twos, one had to stay back with the sheep. They would call very politely and prostrate themselves at the door. They still trembled at the memory of the mighty angel and the heavenly choir. Joseph and Mary were delighted to see them and welcomed them warmly. The shepherds had seen and heard what they had seen and heard. They understood, God, the King of Heaven, had given them something no one else would ever be given. Mary held the baby wrapped in swaddling cloths so they could touch and kiss his hand. They were thrilled when he smiled at them. The shepherds said they told the people in town. "We told them about the angel. They called us worthless drunken shepherds."

After they departed again with prostrations, Joseph said, "I so appreciate that God sent the angels to them. If God would do that for them, He could have done what He has done for me, for you. 'It is the glory of God to conceal a thing; but the glory of kings is to search out a matter.'"¹⁸

Mary responded, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."¹⁹ The angel sent John to Elizabeth and Zachariah to prepare the way for this. I would like to see them before we go back."

She spent her days singing to the child. He liked to hear the Psalms. After she was able to grind the grain for bread and porridge, she filled the time spinning and weaving. Joseph needed clothes for work, the baby needed cloth and she had neglected herself. In Nazareth she had been busy making clothes for six growing children. She would take the baby for walks. They would go to the pastures east, away from Bethlehem. The lambs and the baby seemed to notice each other. They did not meet the shepherds who saw the angels. The others paid no attention to them. She continued to pray for her long list and added comfort for her parents and blessings for Joseph's children, thanksgiving for a healthy son, Joseph's care, the shepherds' visits and a comfortable place to stay.

Joseph worried about his children as he worked. He prayed and still he worried. He came back from the Herodium and asked.

"Mary, how have you been, and the baby?"

"All is good. Yeshua seems to listen intently as I sing the Psalms. How was the work?"

"I pray and worry about my children. They are good children but they are still children."

"I too pray for them."

¹⁸ Proverbs 25:2 JPS

¹⁹ Isaiah 55:9 JPS

“James is growing into a fine young man but how much could an older brother do?”²⁰

“May these trials make them wise and see the goodness of the Lord.”

“Who could he turn to for support? The only ones that would have influence are the president of the synagog and your father.”

“I pray that my father and mother have peace in taking care of them, that their hearts are comforted, their loss filled. They are very fond of your family, especially of your daughters.”

“Your parents are such fine people. I can’t say I regret any of the trials we have been through. Yeshua, it is such an honor to be entrusted with him. I am sorry for the pain your parents have endured. They do not understand what has happened. I pray God gives them peace.”

“So I pray. We are to honor our parents. I have only brought them shame.”

“In a few days we go to the Temple and then back home. I wonder what it will be like?”

“The children will be happy to see you.”

“And to see you. I hoped we would be welcome in Bethlehem. I was going to bring my children here. It will be better in Nazareth. They are confused. They respect you. Your situation is beyond understanding. I hope they are able to accept you and Yeshua for what they see and not for what they do not know.”

Questions I asked as I was writing.

How, when, did Mary and Joseph tell each other of their angel messages?

Why was there no room in the inn?

Why wasn’t the shepherds’ coming to Bethlehem seeking Jesus remembered?

Why was Jesus overlooked when they came to kill all the boys born in Bethlehem? Why wasn’t Jesus enrolled on the list of the boys born, circumcised?

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.

²⁰ Jesus had four brothers plus sisters. Until recently, no one ever thought they were the children of Mary and Joseph. James became the first Bishop. See <http://katachriston.wordpress.com/2011/06/07/richard-j-bauckham-on-the-relatives-of-jesus/>