



The First Christmas: What Actually Happened

Er Nuylan

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Martha discovers the young Mary's pregnancy by chance on their way back to Nazareth from their three months stay with Elizabeth and her husband, the priest Zechariah in Judea and keeps the secret to herself until she can disclose the matter in the appropriate time.

Mary intends to reveal it in the proper time, too, knowing that she cannot keep it for long - at her third month of pregnancy, everyone will notice it eventually; but Martha divulges it to Mary's parents before the young girl had the chance.

Mary knows how to say the truth exactly, and says it when confronted by her father - "it is by the power of God and the Holy Spirit". She had rehearsed with Elizabeth how to say it and determined to stick to such a statement no matter what happens.

However, they know it is impossible for a woman to conceive without a man involved. It contradicts the way of God's process of procreation - that God, being purely spirit, had given man, Adam and Eve, the responsibility for procreation. Her father points out that "God does not go around cohabiting with and impregnating women." Even if they believe her, being the parents who love her most and can turn a blind eye for the sake of parental love, who will believe her from among the people in the society?

They know who exactly the only man she had been with and conclude the obvious as everyone else would.

They wail at the foreseeable tragedy - the chosen people of God who strictly adhere to the Mosaic laws to the letter, will not hesitate to cast the stones... demanding death.

Three months prior to these events:

The young Mary, barely out of her puberty, but betrothed to Joseph, lives the ordinary life of every girl in her time and place -- pious and dedicated to the tenets of her faith as everyone else among the people of Israel. She dreams of every girl's natural course in life - be married, raise children, and be the household's mother, supporting the husband to make their home a dwelling of place of God.

But the turning point comes with the visit of the angel who announces that she is favored by the Lord from among all women to give birth to a son who she should name as Jesus -- the promised Messiah.

To her question of how possible is it for a virgin like her to conceive without a man, the angel replies that her cousin Elizabeth, although old and barren, is in her sixth month of pregnancy, "by the power of God and the Holy Spirit."

Understanding the meaning of the task commissioned to her, she rushes to her cousin Elizabeth, of the house of Zechariah, to fulfill the prophecy - with the servant and distant cousin Martha in tow, her escort and ticket to an otherwise forbidden journey. It's her way of getting around against the wishes of her parents, and of Joseph, the man with whom she is engaged. Social norms require that the betrothed stay put at home until taken home by her man in a "home-taking ceremony", a part of the marriage process.

Now, having fulfilled the prophecy of conception, she comes back home, victorious of the God-given mission, but along with it comes the people's judgment that she had broken the law.

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