

Joseph - A Stranger in a Strange Land



Here is a man who is capable in his trade.

For years he has studied the character of different kinds of wood and how best to use them. In the same way he has learned about life: being curious and alert to what people are doing and how they do things. He rarely judges, and understands that everyone has a place and a task in life.

Last year he has changed his status. He is now a betrothed man with responsibility for a soon-to-be wife. He is very proud of her. Not only is Mary very pretty, but she is also from a family with a very good standing in town.

Sadly this good reputation is now dented. It turns out that Mary succumbed to the seduction of an angel and now she is with child. First he wanted to make a fuss and get rid of her. In the end he gave in to the angel who visited him in his sleep. He was asked to give his future wife grace and support. The angel told him that the baby is God's son and will save the world. Joseph does not understand this. What he does understand though is that he loves his betrothed wife, never mind his and her firstborn being the result of a very unusual encounter indeed.

Now his world is turned upside down again. The rulers have decided that this is the time to hold a head count. Even worse, they want everyone to travel to their place of origin. What an inconvenience. Mary is very close to giving birth, and he himself is settled as carpenter. He really has no incentive to travel. It is winter, birth is imminent and anyhow he doesn't know the area he is supposed to travel to.

Yes, of course he knew where he was born, but his parents have moved away with him when he was very small. He has almost no memories of the place.

It is so strange to walk along the road he is supposed to know. People greet him on the way as if they knew him. When he asks how they know him he learns that they knew his father, and they look very much alike.

Coming from a bigger town, Joseph finds the journey from village to village very taxing on his patience. This is a completely different culture than the one he grew up in. The worst is that he really doesn't know anyone in Bethlehem. It is night now, and they are desperately looking for accommodation. The birthing has started and contractions are coming ever faster.

Mary really needs a woman with her now. Joseph does not know anything about birthing and women's bodies. Finally they are given shelter in a stable and Mary can settle down. The innkeeper's wife helps with preparations and holds Mary when she is in too much pain.

All he knows is that he feels not only like a stranger in this environment. He even feels like a stranger in his own skin. He is five and a half again and fumbles his way through learning the Torah. All these weird words. Stories of ancient countries he has never seen.

Egypt. His ancestors were slaves there. Egyptians killed the male babies of his people. In an odd moment Joseph wonders what it would be like to go there; back to the beginning of his ancestors.

Then: one last moan of Mary - and within seconds he hears the baby cry.

It is finished – for now.