

Light of the World

Dressed in period clothing, Mary, the mother of Jesus, enters carrying a lantern. Taking in the night sky, she reminisces...

The stars are so bright tonight. I don't even need a lantern. When it's like this I can't help but remember that night so long ago in Bethlehem...

It actually started in Nazareth. I was raised the same as any devout Jewish girl - you know - love the Lord your God, honor your parents, remember the Sabbath day, all the commandments. And we kept all the holy days as well. Just like the other girls, I loved hearing stories about heroines like Esther and Deborah and Ruth, the grandmother of King David. We all were taught that the long-awaited Messiah would come from the line of David and be born in Bethlehem. We would daydream that one of us would bear the Messiah one day. To be chosen for such an honor... who would have ever believed it!

One day, when I happened to be alone, just doing household chores, a blinding light suddenly shone around me. I was terrified - and even more terrified when I heard a voice calling my name... "Mary." I had covered my face with my hands, but slowly peeked out through my fingers and saw before me a most brilliant form. Very gently the figure said, "Mary, don't be afraid. My name is Gabriel. I am God's messenger." He greeted me and called me highly favored. He said Jehovah was with me and that I was to bear a son - the Christ! I asked him, "How can this be since I am a virgin?" Gabriel said the Holy Spirit would come upon me and the power of the Most High would overshadow me. For that reason the baby would be God's son.

I never dreamed God would actually choose ME! I was so overwhelmed with the honor God had given me yet I could not help but think, "How am I going to tell Joseph?!" We were betrothed. Joseph had every right to put me away or even have me stoned. What if he did not believe me? I should have known better. If God had planned it he would bring it about. He sent Gabriel to tell Joseph that the child I carried really was the son of God. It was hard facing the disapproval of the town folk. We clung tightly to our belief in what the angel had said.

A few months later, the Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus, ordered that a census be taken. Joseph and I started out from Nazareth to register in Bethlehem - the ancestral home of those of us descended from the house of David. I was not as uncomfortable as I thought I would be since my time was nearly completed. But I WAS tired. Riding a donkey for days while expecting a baby at any minute... not a pleasant experience! We were so disappointed when the innkeeper in Bethlehem

said all the rooms were taken. He must have seen the desperation on my face and my obvious condition. He said, "Well, you could bed down in the stable for the night." At this point I did not care. I knew the baby was on its way. The pungent smell of fresh hay greeted us as we opened the door and warmth from the bodies and breaths of the animals warmed the cool evening air.

As I suspected it was not long before I held my son in my arms. Joseph had taken the clean swaddling cloths from the saddlebag and together we wrapped the child in them and laid him on the fresh hay in the manger. I was so tired I drifted off to sleep.

I awakened to find light streaming into the stable and Joseph peering out at a bright light and the sound of people approaching. There was a knock at the stable door. It was the innkeeper who said a group of local shepherds wanted to come in and see the new baby. How did they know about my baby?! Joseph must have had the same thought because he asked them, "Why have you come?" The oldest of the shepherds explained, "We were watching the sheep in the field as usual when a brilliant light shone in the sky. Then a great voice spoke, 'Fear not for I bring you good tidings of great joy for all people. Today a savior is born unto you - Christ the Lord. This is a sign for you. You will find an infant wrapped in cloths lying in a manger.' Then the sky was filled with angels praising God. We hurried to see if it was true."

Joseph invited them in to see our baby, and they worshipped him. MY son. Little Jesus. I couldn't quite understand all of this. Now, years later, as I see all the stars shining brightly in the sky, I remember that Jesus once said he was the light of the world and that whoever followed him would never walk in darkness, but would have the light of life. Another time he said that WE should let OUR lights shine before men that they might see our good deeds and praise the Father in heaven just as the angels did that night. Oh how I pray that the light of life would shine as brightly in me as one of those stars so that those walking in darkness would be drawn to the Father. You know, if you listen closely, it does almost sound like angels singing...