

# Joseph's Tale

by Vaughan S Roberts

*In this brief story I try to imagine Joseph's reactions when Mary first told him she was pregnant.*

Have you ever had the feeling that things will never be the same again? Well, that's what he felt like at that moment. Imagine him standing there looking into her eyes – eyes that were excited, radiant ... joyous. Despite her *elated* eyes, he had that *sinking* feeling.

"I'm going to have a baby," she said. His eyes just stared and his brain scrambled. Panic stations! She's going to have a baby! Thoughts, questions and visions of the future flooded through the open portals of his mind. And the most profound thing he could respond with was: "What did you say?"

I guess we all know those times when news comes out of the blue. Things we can't **quite** believe occur or things we don't want to believe happen. And like Joseph, to give our minds a second to rejoice or a second to hope that it's all some terrible dream, we reply: "What did you say?"

But underneath we know it's inevitable and Joseph knew it too because he looked into those burning, happy eyes and – through his mind's daze – he heard again: "I'm having a baby!"

However, the pause had done its job and questions were beginning to fall into place. Mostly: Who? How? Why? But occasionally a question would last longer than one syllable. In fact, stretch to a sentence. And one question kept coming round in his head again and again as somebody (not him surely, but someone close by) seemed to be shouting: "What are we going to do! What are we going to do?"

Mary continued to look at him for what seemed like minutes, but must've only been a few instants. And in that time she seemed to have seen his incoherent thoughts – even more, she seemed to have seen into the deepest reaches of his heart. And yet remained silent in her compassion.

Eventually he spoke. He was going to say who? But it came out how? And she said: "An angel came to me!"

His legs almost gave way not only because the news was surprising but also because a sea of faces appeared in front of him. Joseph sat down as he imagined the faces he'd have to tell that Mary was having a baby and how she'd become pregnant. Imagine having to tell your mother that your wife has been made pregnant by an angel?

Then there were all his friends down at the tavern. He could see it now: "How's it going Joseph?"

"O fine really – apart from the fact that Mary's going to have a baby from an angel."

And they'd reply: "Come of it Joseph, you've been drinking too much of that Galilean red wine. It kills off the grey cells you know."

Or, they'd say... No! He couldn't even bear to think about the alternatives!

Mary sat down beside him under the olive tree. "In my vision the angel said this baby was the child of God and he's going to be extraordinary."

"He? You mean it'll be a boy?"

"Yes, and we must call him Jesus."

"That's putting yourself on the line – saying it's a boy," thought Joseph. "What if it's a girl?" His mind paused as he worked through the implications. "If it was a girl ... then he'd know for *sure* there'd been no angel."

So he responded flippantly, "And if it's a girl we'll call her Joanna I suppose."

Mary said quietly, "He'll be a boy. I know."

Joseph put his arm around her. There are times when a touch means more than words and they sat for a while; silent but communicating; alone but together. And gradually another word focussed in Joseph's mind – trust. He had to trust in Mary and in God. There was nothing else for it ...

Our story moves on. Mary has made preparations for the birth. Joseph has faced his drinking partners in the tavern and they've made the demanding journey required by imperial commend. We now see a man standing with a baby in his arms.

He's looking almost as shell-shocked as when we first saw him nine months ago. But this time excitement and joy light up his eyes as well. His wife has finally fallen asleep after the long birth and he's cradling the child, murmuring in its ear.

"So you are a boy after all."

The child looks back, unblinking in the dim light of the candle.

The man smiles and says, "I wasn't sure." And then laughs, because he knows he *was* sure. Somewhere, somehow, deep down he was convinced and he trusted that the child would be a boy.

Joseph sits once again, this time with his back against a wooden pillar and seems to be speaking to child and himself and anyone who can hear.

"I suppose," he says, "somewhere in the middle of all the questions, there's trust and the heart of trust is God. And in the middle of a birth, there's a danger of death; and in the middle of death there's still hope of resurrection. Don't you think, lad?"

But the child ... is asleep.

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