

Christmas Monologue – Joseph

Matthew 2

I admit I was taken aback when I first saw our visitors. Mary first noticed them approach the house and hitch their camels to our post. She warmly welcomed them inside even before they could knock. I was more leery. They were obviously foreigners, Gentiles. Selfishly, I held the baby close to me, as Mary offered them a cold drink and gave their animals water. I wasn't as hospitable.

One visitor quickly loosened my grip and pried Jesus from my arms, kissing him repeatedly before ever saying a word. In my shock I didn't really say anything either. The others pulled from their packs expensive gifts of gold and perfume. I was dumbfounded. Was this some marketing scam? Don't sign your name to anything! Mary, again, saw it differently and accepted the gifts, humbly, and placed them under the tree beside the books and rattles we'd received from others. I was still wondering who these people were...

One of the men proudly placed an astrologer's map on our floor and with a protractor in hand did some quick measurements, rough math calculations, and penciled a star in the centre of the page. In broken Greek, he said, "We must be here, right?" I didn't know. "This is your son's star," he insisted. Neither Mary nor I had seen any star. We had been too busy with diapers and feedings to watch the night sky.

If I understood them right, it was the star, they said, that led them here – after many kilometers and many days. Although I was suspicious, who was I to look a gift camel in the mouth? In truth, I simply wasn't comprehending the scope of influence of our son's birth. From the first leaked report that Mary had mysteriously conceived, to the angels and the shepherds, the pregnancy and birth was never a private event. Why was I so shocked now to have foreigners at my door?

In the course of our feeble conversation – as I've said, I don't know Persian - we learned that our king – that's what they insisted – our king wanted to pay tribute to our son. That obviously raised many red flags. Not the Herod I know. No power-driven monarch would pay homage to a child, unless there were ulterior motives. I had a sick feeling in my gut. News was traveling too fast, and with this visit, things suddenly seemed out of control.

My worst fears were well founded. The night the astrologers left I had a dream. Not a dream, but a nightmare. God spoke clearly, calling our little family to leave. It was more dramatic

than the birth itself. I awoke in a sweat, woke my wife, gathered a few belongings, left everything else, and while it was still dark, took our child and fled, from our village, into the hills, and out of our country. Into exile. To Egypt. As refugees. As God had said.

We made it, but apparently many children in Bethlehem did not. We received news by letter from our families that a mass grave had been unearthed, many children's bodies under two years of age. In one foul swoop, Herod had brutally killed all the Bethlehem boys.

How does one weep for a thousand? We individualized the pain. That must mean, that can't mean Isaiah, we could barely voice the name. What about David? Surely not little Benjamin? I could hardly bear the thoughts... There would be so many grieving families. Was anyone safe? Did anyone survive? We mourned for them at a distance, and wondered how it could happen. Where's God when evil and suffering are so evident, so raw? I held our one year-old safely in my arms and cried.

Egypt was good to us, though in my heart, and Mary would say it too, we were Jews, displaced Jews. We tried to make a go of it and took language classes at night. I set up a small carpentry shop, but business was slow; it was hard to get started. We depended on government assistance for a time. We both experienced culture shock and longed to go back to Israel. To family. To our synagogue. It was difficult to put down roots in a foreign land, but we wanted to do what was best for our child.

One night, quite unexpectedly, I had another dream. It was time for us to return to Israel. We really didn't have much trouble leaving; it was news we were waiting to hear. However, we didn't go back to Bethlehem, though family and friends there had hoped we might. We resettled in the town of Nazareth where we felt the governing ruler was more tolerant.

I'm surprised how well Mary has handled the stress of these last years. Perhaps she finds strength because she's so young. Will Jesus remember these events? He's seen a lot for a toddler. I worry. These aren't typical times. And this isn't a typical child. But Mary often reminds me, "Do not fear. God's with us. Closer than we probably realize. Emmanuel."

Arlyn Friesen Epp (Canada), 1999. First Mennonite Church, Kitchener
[Creative Commons: Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 International \(CC BY-NC 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)