

Christmas is such a lovely time of year

A time when we enjoy telling stories of small kindnesses shared

A time when we sing favorite Christmas carols

We send Christmas cards full of quiet pastoral scenes with a Nativity

The emphasis of Christmas is on joy, peace, and love

But those are our projections on a story that has a very different backdrop

... one that is quite scandalous!

There was some 400 years after the end of the Old Testament as we know it—silence

In fact it may have seemed as if God had forgotten about them

Suddenly, out of the silence, God speaks in the form of a baby

Quite suddenly, the angel comes to Mary and announces that she will have a baby

Unmarried and pregnant was a serious situation

The law said she was guilty of adultery and subject to death by stoning

Joseph quietly intends to dismiss her until an angel comes to him in a dream

That in itself is scandalous—that the Messiah would be born to an unmarried woman

And who is she... if a king is born—his "ancestry" is known

Both Matthew and Luke give us a record of Jesus' ancestors—but they differ

Clearly the records had different values than our historical perspective

One may be the lineage of Mary and the other of Joseph—no one really knows

Matthew includes women in his lineage, while Luke does not

But none of the women are the historical matriarchs of Israel

Such as Sarah, Rebekah, or Rachel

Rather it is Tamar and Rahab—Canaanites, and Ruth—a Moabite

Bathsheba, wife of Uriah whom David seduced

All have scandal associated with them

Last in the list is Mary, an unmarried mother

The men are no less perfect—David killed Uriah for Bathsheba

Judah sold his brother into slavery and Jacob cheated out Esau

The Emperor of Rome sent out a decree that everyone should be registered and then taxed

By now Mary was very pregnant and travelled with some difficulty roughly 100 miles

From her home in Nazareth to Bethlehem—likely in a caravan, walking or riding

A difficult trip when one isn't pregnant

It was sufficient for Joseph to go alone as the head of the household

But he took Mary with him—why?

Possibly to protect her from the scandal of being pregnant and unmarried

In Bethlehem she may have a bit more anonymity

But she also was without her mother, aunts, and close family

Contrast the crowd present at John's birth to Elizabeth

Rather she was attended by Joseph and possibly a few others

Women from the village that came to help

The new baby's bed was a manger—the feeding trough for the animals

Since the town was crowded because of the census—rooms were full

People were everywhere and there weren't quiet private spaces left

Mary gave birth in the space that was available

The first visitors may have been neighbors that heard a baby was born... we're not told
But we are told of the angels visit to the shepherds and the invitation to go see
Shepherds? An unclean profession of uncouth people—the last ones expected to hear
Yet, not only do they hear the news—but they immediately go see the baby

The other visitors noted in Scripture were the wise men from the east—they weren't even Jews
They came looking for the one "born king of the Jews"
Their coming struck fear in the heart of Herod who was paranoid of losing the throne
As a result, Herod ordered that all children 2 years or under be killed

Mary and Joseph were warned in a dream and fled to Egypt as refugees to escape the killing
They lived there until Herod died and it was safe to return
They returned to Nazareth where Joseph was a carpenter

None of this is what we expect for one who is born the Son of God
Such a humble birth to a poor, peasant family with associated scandal
Born at a complex time of political unrest and foreign occupation

Yet, it is exactly perfect—God came all the way to earth
Not as a King or born in a Kingly Palace
But God came all the way to earth in all of its brokenness and scandal
God came as a vulnerable baby, completely dependent on those around him for life
God came to live with us, to know us and our human condition from the inside out
To know the struggle, not just the good times
In that God redeems us
Not by "magically fixing that which is broken"
But by joining us fully and making something of that which seems broken beyond repair
God came to redeem us the same way he lived—one day at a time with God
We have the very same abilities present to us as to Mary...
*"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will
overshadow you..." Luke 1:35*

And the very same presence available to Jesus is available to us also...
*Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The
words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who
dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the
Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works
themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do
the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these,
because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my
name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you
ask me for anything, I will do it. John 14:10-14 NRSV*

In us, God continues to join humanity and to live among us
Continually coming all the way to us—in all of our brokenness and scandal
Nothing is off putting to God—not the scandal of his birth nor of our past
Nothing can stop God coming to us