

Two women are pregnant—both unexpectedly

An old woman, well past the age of child bearing and a young virgin
Both are waiting, anticipating the birth of a child and the promise of their futures
Both are aware of the unusual nature of the circumstances,
Yet they wait for a birth just as any expectant mother waits

Finally, it comes time for Elizabeth and she gives birth to a son

Everyone rejoiced with her
Her shame has been removed
In that culture, to be old and childless meant great shame
The birth of a baby removed all shame and the neighbors and relatives were rejoicing
They recognized that the Lord had shown his great mercy to Elizabeth

Tradition said that the child would be circumcised when he was 8 days old

Given to Abraham as a sign of the covenant between God and the Israelites
Tradition also said that the first born son would be named after the father
But Elizabeth said they were going to name him John and the relatives objected
They asked for Zechariah to come and confirm that it would be Zechariah after all
Zechariah asked for a writing tablet and wrote down “His name is John” to the amazement of all
Immediately his mouth opened and his tongue was free
Zechariah began to speak and started praising God
People were in awe and word spread around the countryside
They began to wonder about the future and purpose of this baby
Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke as a prophet...

“By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” Luke 1:78-79 NRSV

When we recognize that things have shifted and life is changing...
Do we recognize the coming of God into our circumstances?
Do we respond in praise?
Do we see the Light that shines in the darkness?

Before Mary was ready to give birth, everyone in the Roman world had to register for the tax

All men were to go to their home town and register for the tax
Since Joseph was of the house of King David, he went to Bethlehem
Bethlehem was the Judean village of King David’s origin
It was in Bethlehem that Samuel found young David tending the sheep
The boy who eventually became King David

Generally, only the men represented their families in legal and official business

Yet, Joseph chose to take Mary with him to Bethlehem
The simplest reason is that Joseph wanted to protect Mary
If left in Nazareth, she would be at the mercy of the townsfolk
She was a young woman, pregnant, yet unmarried
There may have been questions of safety
At any rate, they went to Bethlehem together

Joseph was a descendent of King David, the son of Heli, son of Matthat, son of Levi
In Bethlehem, those were familiar names
He would have been welcomed in a multitude of homes because of who he was

When the scripture says that there was “no room in the inn”
It really means that there was no room in the guest room in the home of a family
The Greek word used here doesn’t mean inn/hotel, but family guest room
So Joseph and Mary were welcomed into the family living space
The family living space was a single room where the family lived
They all worked, cooked, ate, and slept in this room
The end of the room was lower and behind a short wall
At night the animals were brought into this area to keep warm
A manger with hay sits at the end of the family room
Where the animals could reach it in the night
Joseph and Mary lived with this family in tight but loving quarters

We generally assume that she gave birth that first night that they were in Bethlehem
But in reality it says, “*While they were there...*”
They likely had plenty of time to make arrangements for the birth
Time to call in the women that traditionally attended a birthing

While they were there... it became time for Mary to give birth
The midwives and women came and the men were ushered out of the room
If it was night, the animals went out with the men
The living room became a bustle of activity at the birthing
The baby was born in the midst of care and love

When the baby was born, he was swaddled and wrapped
Then he was laid in a manger filled with fresh straw and covered with a blanket
The manger being at the end of the living room

It was actually a very normal and humble birth in a family home
Surrounded by the family and women of the village that tended the birth

God came to earth, not as a king or in a place of honor
But in a home of ordinary people gathering around the new family
Welcoming the baby into their lives

Do we make space for God to enter our lives?
Do we accept God’s coming when it seems ordinary?

Just God coming as a baby is enough
The ordinariness of birth is miracle itself
God has come to live among us and to love us
Today, we receive Jesus with our love

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. John 1:5 NRSV