

Joseph's Story

11.27.2022

Shalom! (*Enter from backstage, walking toward a fire and log to sit on*)

Please forgive the intrusion, I didn't mean to barge in but I noticed your encampment from the rise where my family is settling in for the night. Welcome, welcome! I can tell by your garments that you are not from this area! Since you are travelers, I had hoped to hear of any news of the uprisings in Jerusalem and all that turmoil & upheaval. Surely you are aware of King Herod losing the throne by losing his own life, which is NOT a bad thing, let me tell you! But his replacement! Ooh, it is terrible...

Can I interest you in a table, by chance? It is a very nice table! I am a woodworker by trade, and I have this table, one of the finest I've ever made, AND it has been imported by my family from my former workshop in Egypt. It is made of the most exquisite olive wood, hand selected, and rubbed 18x with oil! If you are interested let me know, as it would be a piece that would bring beauty to your home for generations.

Oh, pardon me, my name is Joseph. Joseph of Nazareth, or Bethlehem... of even Alexandria most recently, it all depends upon when you catch me, and what you'd like to know about, but that's quite the tale...

(*Perks up with attention towards the audience*) Did you say you want to hear it? Yes?? Well, wonderful, just fine, yes! (*Takes a seat and settles in*) Oh my, all this travel is wearing on a body... "Ships of the Desert my eye! If a camel is the ship of the desert, then my backside attests to there being high seas every day! Thank you for the warmth of the fire. No, no, I appreciate the offer, but my family has already eaten this night.

Well, again, Joseph of Nazareth, or Bethlehem, or Alexandria... you would begin to think that either I cannot keep a job, or that towns keep moving me along, but I assure you that neither is the case! A long story indeed. I ask that you, perhaps, suspend a bit of belief to start with, at least until I tell you the full length of it. I

see that you are also followers of the God of Abraham, and it is always good to meet more of His people who worship Him. And perhaps that will make it easier for you to believe as I give you my account.

I wonder if you might recall the census that Caesar Augustus demanded several years back.

SLIDE: Luke 2:1-4

Yes, how could you forget! Turned our days into weeks into months into miles! Well, I brought my family to Bethlehem, which is our ancestral home, the City of David. There are few places I would rather be—I love that place!

SLIDE: Micah 5:2

But I was raised in Nazareth for the most part. There was my family's home and my woodworking shop. As I may have mentioned, I am a carpenter by trade, a woodworker by hobby, and I have an olive wood table for sale that would enhance the hospitality of your home 7 times over! I would love to show it to you...

Well the travel to Bethlehem was long, and it didn't help that my wife was very much with child.

SLIDE: Luke 2:5

For a rather small town Bethlehem seemed to be overrun! Can you imagine what it must be like to live in a town that suddenly finds itself with a population so large that even the streets are clogged with people!? Hmmm... I can see in your eyes that you can indeed! I am fortunate to still have family there, but even within the house there was so little room that when my Mary felt the pangs of childbirth she was moved into the front area where the stable was, just to find some privacy. You might think it crude, but the stable was quite clean and between the cool of the night and the warmth of the animals, it really seemed perfect for the purpose. As a woodworker I'm a bit ashamed to say that the one thing I failed to bring with us from Nazareth was the cradle that I had made! In fact, to add to my shame it was a stonemason's work that was our child's first bed! Can you guess? Yes indeed, a manger! But as they say, there's nothing more stable in a stable!

And if all that weren't crazy enough, we'd hardly had a moment to look over our baby when we had visitors come calling at the front gate! You know what smells worse than the animals in a stable? A group of shepherds! You know what I'm talking about, don't pretend you don't!

SLIDE: Luke 2:16-18

And there we had a dozen or more shepherds who had been told to come see the baby and... well this is one of the reasons I cautioned that you would have to suspend belief, because you'll never guess WHO told them to come and find us and our baby, it's beyond imagining! It was... wait... yes, it was a company of Angels sent from YHWH Himself... wait, you KNOW this story? You have heard it before??

(Stands, shocked that the audience knows the details of Jesus' birth) Yes, I am THAT Joseph, and my wife is Mary, the one you've heard of! No, it isn't the tale of shepherds gifted with bad wine! It is all true! You could see it on the faces of every one of those men, that they had witnessed something so terrifying yet filled with so much... Hope, that they left their flocks immediately to find us. I had feared that you would doubt me, but it's all true!

(Returning to his seat) You see, I have been a stranger in a strange land for several years now, where YHWH is not recognized as the One True God, and to be able to tell our story...! You can see for yourself, I am nothing special. I am a simple craftsman, a man of trade, but I cannot deny that an angel spoke to me.

SLIDE: Matthew 1:20-21

There is no denying it. I was told that the baby Mary was carrying was from the Holy Spirit, and would be named Jesus because he would save his people from their sins! An angel spoke to my wife as well.

SLIDE: Luke 1:30-33

The angel told her that Jesus would be the Son of the Most High. That the child would sit on David's throne, and his Kingdom would never end!

He's cute, don't get me wrong, he's the most charming little man you've ever seen! I'd love for you to meet him, we're staying just up the rise. He is a fine, fine

boy, our little helper, sharp as a wood awl, I'll tell you! But even at that, it gives me pause to think that's who he is.

Well I'm getting distracted here, and I promised you a story.

SLIDE: Luke 2:22

We stayed in Bethlehem for a few months, to take Jesus to present him in the Temple, and also because of Mary's time of purification, which was 40 days from the birth. After that, we returned to our home in Nazareth.

It was just a few months later when there was a noise of a great commotion outside the house. I went to the gate and there was the most unusual crowd of people you have ever seen. Babylonians, Persians and Medes and others among them... camels in richly decorated gear... there were donkeys loaded with bundles... and human packbearers of several different countries from the look of them. I assumed they had the wrong house, but they said no, that they had been following a star. "Good luck," I said, "there are a lot of them up there!" It turns out they were following a very specific star that, according to their wisest scholars, was newly appeared in the sky, and could be seen even in the day, always to the West. I know even I found that hard to believe, and I've seen some things!

Before I could even think to invite them in --and why would they want to come into our house?—

SLIDE: Matthew 2:11

...they pushed past me and started bringing armloads and armloads of goods, and they laid them all over the house, and they found the baby, and these wealthy men of power fell to the ground, and they worshiped my baby. They knelt face-down before our Jesus!

I can tell you that I had a hard time keeping the tears from my eyes. It was one of the most amazing things I have ever seen happen! It was the first time since the shepherds that someone had recognized our Jesus for who He was! And it was once again proof that it was no dream that Angels has visited us! What followed, I can barely describe it to you! We offered to share our food with them but they laughed and shouted commands and their servants set up a traveling kitchen right

there in the street and cooked foods we had never before seen or tasted. I saw more than one of our neighbors whose curiosity had overcome caution, and were being fed samples of dishes that had never been served in our neighborhood before or since! And the smells of their spices, and of the incense! And the gifts, oh, the gifts! They had myrrh and frankincense of value beyond imagining, trinkets from the far East, and if that weren't enough, they opened boxes filled with gold, and laid it all at the feet of the crib!

Evening started to fall on this unbelievable day, and their gear was gathered and loaded to leave. "Won't you stay?" I asked, but they said no, that they had accomplished what they had been led to do, and just like that they rode down the street and right out of town, escorted by our neighbors children, running and shouting and laughing.

With the sudden quiet Mary and I realized that we were exhausted, and in no time we were asleep, but I had the most awful dream, one of those dreams that makes you get up and check the house to make sure all is well. I dreamt of swords, and blood, and my little boy, and over it all was Herod. Now you know as well as I what an insane man Herod was! He was a man who would kill his own wife, his own children, ANYone who he felt might be any threat at all to his throne. He was far more a murderer than a ruler. If that weren't enough to question his sanity, I will remind you that he spent the last 40 days of his life walled up in Jericho having gone stark raving mad before he died.

SLIDE: Matthew 2:13

The dream said that Herod was coming for Jesus, and that we had to go, and had to go NOW. I woke from the dream in panic because there was pounding at our door, and I found there one of the servants who had been with the foreign men.

SLIDE: Matthew 2:12

He said that they had also had a dream which had told them that they must return home by another route. It seems that they had stopped in Jerusalem on the way to find Jesus to ask where the new King of the Jews had been born. It just goes to show that sometimes even the wise make a mistake, for their questions convinced Herod the Evil that someone was coming to take his power from him.

SLIDE: Matthew 2:14

Having received promptings from God before, Mary and I recognized YHWH's hand in these dreams, so we packed our things as quickly as we could, taking only what we couldn't replace. The wise men had left so much of value, but I had a wagon that was up to the job!

During our time in Bethlehem I was befriended by a man in the neighborhood. He was a craftsman, too... in fact, he was the stonemason that I mentioned earlier, who had carved out the manger our Jesus was laid in that first night!

Oh what an amazing man, Jeconiah! I wish you could meet him! He is the funniest man I have ever known. He can tell camel jokes for an hour straight. Twice I've seen him tell stories that caused men to snort wine from their noses! He and I worked on a few projects together during our stay. His wife Tilpah would come over with their little boy Elias, and they were so helpful for Mary and the baby. Who knew there was so much to learn about caring for a child little enough to hold in one hand!

We had come to Bethlehem with relatively few possessions, but Jeconiah felt we should leave in style, and together we built a wagon solid enough to carry a temple stone without swaying! And we did it in 2 days time! AND it was all done with wood he already had, and he would not let me pay him for any of it—he said it was a gift to Jesus, not to us, so we didn't have any say in the matter!

Oh my... We would talk for hours while we watched the women make over the babies, and joke that one day the boys would be playing David & Goliath, but Elias would be Goliath because he already had feet like a camel! Or perhaps Jonathan and David, because they would be best friends, and nothing would be able to separate them...

SLIDE: Matthew 2:16-18

I hope you can believe me when I say I didn't know what was going to happen! He was so little... If I had known I would have taken them with us! But I didn't, I didn't... and so I didn't... and then Herod's stinking pig troops came with their swords... and began the killing. He was 6 months older than Jesus.

I have not see Jeconiah or Tilpah since... and I don't think I can. I'm sorry. I suppose I am not yet done grieving for the pain that seems to have followed us. I

don't know why God would allow all those children to die. I have a list of things that I hope to ask my son someday, and that is the number one question.

Again, I apologize.

We headed to Egypt as quickly as we could. It was a 7-day journey until we were outside of Herod's reach. Longer before we finally settled in Alexandria. You would be surprised to know, not only what a beautiful city Alexandria is, but that there is also a great number of influential Jewish leaders established there, more than in perhaps any other city outside of the nation of Israel! It was not difficult to find a place to live, for what the Persian magi had given us as gifts was more than enough to establish ourselves. What a blessing from God, they were!

For a Jewish carpenter it seemed like a good place to be. You have seen Egyptian architecture, haven't you? You can't throw a rock without hitting another rock! It is not bragging, but I will say that my woodworking trade flourished there. And we had a strong Hebrew community there in which to be raising a son. We were quite content there, although it never truly felt like home.

I was not too upset then when I had another dream. You know, there are days when I'm almost afraid to shut my eyes for fear of what I might be told to do or where I might be sent, YHWH have mercy!

SLIDE: Matthew 2:19-20

Well I was told in my dream that Herod had died, that the ones who sought to harm our family were gone, and that the way back home was clear! I woke up Mary, and she was thrilled!

OK, she was not ENTIRELY thrilled, as she had just finished decorating the house to, in her words, just the way it was meant to be, but returning to Israel was a most welcome prospect. There could be no better place for our Jesus to be than amongst His people! I had some thought that we might move back to Bethlehem, as I said, no better town for the Messiah than the City of David! But we learned that Archelaus had replaced his father Herod, and as they say, "The taste of the olive is the taste of the tree", and it was never more true than with Archelaus. You heard about the Passover uprising? 3000 Jews were killed that day, just for Archelaus to prove that HE was in charge. With his throne being only 6 miles from Bethlehem, and still stinking of Herod's brood, I had to consider Nazareth again.

SLIDE: Matthew 2:21-22

But Nazareth is no Bethlehem. Jerusalem is 90 miles from Nazareth, as is the Temple. Nazareth's people are nearly as mixed as they are in Alexandria. It is no special place of learning, no place of teachers, of scrolls and scripture. Nazareth is a bit of a backwater, not a place for the Messiah! Can you imagine if our son, for the rest of His life, were to be known as Jesus of Nazareth?

SLIDE: Matthew 2:23

And you know what they say about Nazareth: "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" I can't see putting that label on the Messiah. No king ever came out of Nazareth, and if he did, no one would take him seriously. He'd likely be totally ignored if not despised!

SLIDE: Isaiah 53:3

Sorry, sorry, it's just that when I said that an old scripture from Isaiah came to mind for some reason. Not sure it applies... (as if convincing himself) No, surely not. No, I don't think... Still, perhaps we should go to Nazareth. We're still thinking about that and praying for God's guidance.

Well, I'm sorry I've kept you so long. It's quite a long story, I know. We'll be on our way in the morning. About that table I have for sale, you are most welcome to come and take a look. To be honest, I'm very, very pleased with it. My design is rather ingenious if I do say so myself. It folds, and if you move a few of the boards just so, you can seat twice as many people if you need to. 18x rubbed with fine oil! I think you'll like it. It took me so long to make.

We are going to continue on tomorrow and see where God will lead us. I hope I haven't frightened you with our story. Our lives are so much happier, so much more... MORE, since Jesus was born. You know, I call him my son, but sometimes I feel out of place calling him that, for he is so much more than I could ever be. He's really God's son. It's like when a friend loans you a camel, and says, the camel is

yours, you can have him for two weeks, treat him like he was your own! You can call him your camel, but you still have to treat him a little differently because you know he's not your own. Not that I'm comparing God's Son to a camel, although they both tend to spit up a lot. A baby on a camel for a long journey, well, trust me, that's a recipe for disaster right there!

It's been a hard road and we've moved quite a bit. I don't mind in the long run. For all the grief that seems to have followed us from Bethlehem, and the discomfort of moving to Egypt, and now back again, well, this following God has been a long road, but a good one. When I think of the alternative...

I've lived in Egypt. I've seen what it is to worship false gods and pagan idols. It's detestable, ugly, empty. I've lived in my own house, and I've seen what it is to live with Jesus at your side, and I will tell you this, he is just a little boy, but there is something about being near to Him that is beyond words.

SLIDE: Isaiah 61:1

You would like him. Come and see him tonight if you get the chance. And I will show you that table!

You know that table took me almost 6 months to finish. It was a labor of love, a labor of love, it hadn't been ordered by anyone, but I knew that if I hurried the process, it wouldn't be as good as I needed it to be. Before I put my name on it it has to be just right. And getting it right is a long process.

I think that following God will probably be the same. I don't think that it will ever get easier for us, but I don't mind. As long as we're taking Jesus where He wants us to, He will protect us. And no matter how long the road is, and how tough it gets, it will be worth getting there when we arrive.

I'd better be off. I thank you for your hospitality and the warmth of your fire, and I bid you a good journey and peace. I am off to follow God now, and to spend time with Jesus. If you would like to, you can follow God with us. It would be an honor to have you by our side, and a good journey to take together. Shalom, and good night.