

## **The Birth of Jesus sequel**

Dan Evans, May 2001

When we left Joe and Mary (we're on a first syllable basis now), their little package of joy had just arrived in Bethlehem and they were adapting to the role of parents. Joe checked out a copy of Rabbi Dobson's latest scroll on parenting from the library, and together he and Mary were studying how to be good role models to Jesus. Think about that one for a minute.

Prepared to return home shortly after Jesus' birth, Joe learned of some political unrest up north. That, together with the fact that some shepherds were keeping them stocked with chops, convinced them to linger in Bethlehem. The camel convention ended a few days after Jesus' birth, making it possible to secure a nice studio apartment above the sandal maker's shop. Joe's carpentry skills brought in even more income than back home. It really was an idyllic situation and while they were there the local Rabbi married the two kids and made everything legal and proper. Some visiting foreign kings even attended the reception, though there was some confusion about who their gifts were for.

A warm spring emerged from the cool winter, making it practical once again to take baths. That helped fill up the bleachers down at the camel racing track. Laundered diapers dried in the breeze on the roof of Joe and Mary's apartment. Flower merchants popped up at the town's only intersection. As luck would have it, Italian rowing teams annually came to Bethlehem for spring training, so Joe would often hike with some of the local guys to the Sea of Galilee to watch. On one occasion, against Mary's wishes, Joe took Jesus along. Joe's buddies were initially hesitant about taking a baby along, but it turned out to be one of their better trips.

Jesus slept peacefully through much of the day. The rowing teams nicknamed him their good luck baby because it seemed that every time Joe let Jesus splash around in the kiddie section on the shore, Lake Galilee's horrible wind and waves stopped. The guys did get upset with Ishman, the cobbler's son, because he forgot it was his turn to bring lunch for the group. Fortunately, the guys pooled their coins and bought a single bag of Manna chips from the concession stand and, somehow, the bag seemed to be bottomless; they all ate their fill, shared it with the rowing teams and they still had leftovers. When they returned home the guys asked Mary if they could take Jesus again next time, but Mary put her foot down...hard...on Joe's toes.

One day in early summer, a tourist talked at the café about the king sending out his soldiers to kill every first-born male child in the country. The reason was unclear, but he did know that Bethlehem could expect the death squads in a day or two. Word spread through town quickly, and out to the fields where the shepherds worked and nomads lived.

Joe heard about it. He rushed home to tell Mary, who became terrified. If the rumor was true, Jesus would soon be one of those killed. Some people packed up immediately and headed for Jordan, others went to the caves in the hills to hide. Many shepherds simply walked away from their flocks and took their families to the coast in hopes of escaping the carnage. Mary recalled her father's stories about Egypt, to which he'd gone on many business trips when she was a child. She suggested they head for the border and Joe agreed.

Since so many sheep had been abandoned by fleeing shepherds, the couple was able to adopt a cute young one from the SPCA. Joe made a little seat that he strapped to the sheep for Jesus, and the family started out for Egypt. That's how the saying "he left town on the lamb" came about.

Early summer was not the best time for desert travel, but they had no trouble finding cool shade, food and water during their trek. One afternoon, they stopped at an oasis where other travelers rested and watered their livestock from the waters of a fresh, cool spring. While Joe and Mary chatted with some Midianites, no one noticed that Jesus had crawled over to the springs to play in the water. They did notice, however, when several donkeys that had been drinking from the spring, started braying loudly, stumbling around the oasis and hiccuping. Mary looked at Joe and said, "oh no, not again." They ran over, retrieved Jesus and quickly resumed their trip before the other travelers noticed that the crystal clear spring water had turned red as wine.

After several weeks (it could have been shorter, but Joe refused to ask for directions), Joe and Mary, Jesus and his lamb crossed the border into Egypt and settled in a small village partially populated by other Jews who had outrun Herod's army. It wasn't Israel, but they worked hard to continue their traditions and enjoyed Sabbath services at a makeshift village synagogue. Joe once again found his carpentry skills much in need and he opened Pyramid Furnishings, specializing in hand crafted sarcophagi and burial crypts. The young Jesus liked watching Joe in his shop, so he was given his own little carpenter's apron and hammer on his third birthday. Mary also had another baby, named James, while in exile.

A few years later, news reached Egypt that Herod had died and most of the exiles decided to return home to Israel. Mary was anxious to take Jesus and his brother James to Nazareth so they could be introduced to grandparents, uncles and aunts. They traveled in the cooler months of fall and arrived home in time for a simultaneous welcome home and birthday party for Jesus. Cousin John the Baptist supplied appetizers for the party, but they weren't very popular.

So, as Paul of Harvey would have said, "that's the rest of the story."