

The Christmas Scandal

(from Matthew 1 and Luke 2)

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God's plan for our lives often winds through dark and painful valleys—but ultimately leads to a glorious conclusion. The Christmas story confirms this. Let's revisit the scene as it very likely played out in both Nazareth and Bethlehem:

Joseph and Mary were engaged—but the wedding date was still pretty far off. When Joseph discovered that his fiancé was pregnant, he could reach only one startling conclusion—Mary had been unfaithful!

That night, however, an angel abruptly altered Joseph's perspective—Mary's baby had been conceived supernaturally! Joseph obeyed the angel's directive and took Mary as his wife (likely in a private ceremony). Joseph carefully guarded her virginity throughout the pregnancy. "God's ways are not our ways!" they must have thought.

Imagine how difficult it was for Mary and Joseph to explain the situation to their close-knit Jewish families. Relatives accused the couple of covering up the truth by fabricating fanciful dreams about angels. Joseph and Mary were likely ostracized from their families.

Before long, Mary could no longer hide the fact that she was pregnant. Imagine the harsh rumors, wagging heads, and stinging insults that flew from house to house in the small village of Nazareth. However difficult those days were, God's plan gave them hope!

Perhaps Joseph and Mary were glad to learn the news of Caesar's census. Traveling to Bethlehem was an opportunity to escape the abusive name-calling in their hometown. (Mary could have stayed behind in Nazareth—but they chose to make the journey together.) Though others from Nazareth were headed to Bethlehem as well, it appears that Joseph and Mary chose to face the difficult trek alone.

When the weary couple finally reached Bethlehem, they did not pursue hospitality among relatives. As they wandered from place to place seeking a room, Joseph and Mary were very discouraged—perhaps the nadir of their lives. One sympathetic innkeeper saw their plight and invited the couple to settle down for the night in a stable among the animals. "God has a plan!" they reminded each other.

That night, Mary gave birth to the Savior—the long-anticipated Messiah. Shepherds arrived to give Him homage. Their incredible description of the angelic choir confirmed to Joseph and Mary that God was working His plan—and nothing is impossible with Him!

Though Joseph and Mary's Christmas story contained dark valleys, the Savior's birth helped to erase the pain of rejection from their judgmental family and friends. What the residents of Nazareth believed to be "scandalous" was actually "glorious"—the Savior of the world had come!



APPLICATION: It's always good to walk in another person's sandals before blaming, criticizing, or pointing fingers. Unfortunately, we often draw conclusions before examining the evidence. We're all guilty of doing it! Sometimes we assess the situation correctly, but we often reach the wrong conclusion—and end up with egg on our faces—or worse.