

Mary's Journey

Finding encouragement
along a difficult path

By Anita Neal Harrison and Larry E. Neal



There she is. Heavy with child and traveling to Bethlehem. Caesar would pick this year for a census. Oh, well. She'll get to rest soon. A nice bed in a cozy inn. Surely God will provide that much.

Or will He? For some time now, nothing has gone as she expected.

The pregnancy began so wonderfully. Hardly a day passed without some miracle. First, the angel appeared to her and called her blessed among women. He told her of God's plan to make her the mother of the Savior.

Then God spoke to Joseph and let him know Mary had done nothing wrong. Joseph believed her when she said she would give birth to the Son of God. And when she visited her cousin Elizabeth, the wife of a priest, she didn't have to explain a thing. God let them know

about the miracle, too.

But then God grew quiet, and Mary's belly grew big. When her neighbors snickered, God did not strike them dead or even send more angels to set them straight. He did not tell any more religious leaders about His plan. No prophet stood up in the synagogue and announced the coming of the King. Caesar issued an order to register for a tax, and God did not provide a way for Joseph or her to get out of it. No, they had to go.

Why? What had gone wrong? Had she misunderstood? Had she failed God somewhere along the way? Surely this couldn't have been His plan. Surely something had gone awry.

We know the story.

We know things only got worse before they got better.

Mary and Joseph did not find a cozy inn in Bethlehem. Instead,

they had to make do with the shelter of a stable. In that limited shelter among the animals Mary gave birth to Jesus. The new mother wrapped her precious infant in large strips of cloth and laid Him in a manger.

A manger! How highly favored of God do you suppose Mary felt right then?

Yet, regardless of how Mary might have felt or how things might have seemed, God had not abandoned her. Mary had not misunderstood the angel, and she had not failed God somewhere along her journey.

We should find encouragement in this story.

Too often, we believe when God gives us a dream the birth of that dream will be easy. We expect Him to keep sending us signs and messages to confirm what we already know He has told us to do. We expect Him to orchestrate

circumstances so that everyone around us knows we have heard from Him.

But God does not often do that. He expects us to keep going in the direction He sent us even if we have not had any confirmation for a while. Sometimes He allows our journeys to get difficult. Really difficult.

Mary is not our only example. Look at David. Samuel anointed him king of Israel. David killed Goliath and became a military hero. He married into the royal family. Then King Saul turned against him and hunted him like an animal until Saul's death. The road to Israel's throne had a serious rut or three.

Look at Paul. He knew God had given him the privilege of taking the gospel to the Gentiles. Yet he endured slander, shipwrecks, beatings and imprisonment.

Most importantly, look at Jesus.

He never once failed God. Yet He endured ridicule, betrayal, emotional pain, physical suffering and the cross before He experienced the glory of the Resurrection.

But what about Mary?

God did not leave her without answers in that stable for long. He sent a host of angels to a group of shepherds. The shepherds came to the stable asking to see the Savior. Don't you know Mary was glad to see them! She listened to their stories and "kept all these things like a secret treasure in her heart. She thought about them over and over" (Luke 2:19, NIV).

God had not forsaken Mary. He knew exactly where she was, and she was exactly where He wanted her to be.

Mary did not face hardships because she stumbled out of the will of God. She faced hardships because God's plan included difficult circumstances. Mary may

not have understood all of those circumstances, but God did not require her understanding. He required her to have faith, to persevere and to take care of the Baby He had placed inside of her. When she did, He took care of the rest.

Has God given you a dream? Have you begun to wonder if that dream will ever become reality? Do not despair. Take care of the dream God has given you. Pray about it, seek direction in God's Word, take the steps you know to take — then trust God to do His part.

God didn't fail Mary. He will not fail you. **tpe**

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