

Joseph's Dream

Bizarre. I guess that's about the only word I can find to describe what was going on there. I mean, now, to look at Jesus running around playing with the other children, everything seems so natural. But there was nothing natural about his birth, or, for that matter, his conception.

I thought my mother was going to pass out when I told her about Mary. My dad just sat down and wept. He didn't speak for hours. My uncles were full of it. "Put her away—it's clear that that's the only thing you can do. There's nothing you can do to salvage her reputation, but think of your own."

I just remember being so sad for so long. I spent a lot of time out in the fields on my own. Nobody would speak to me anyway. I will never forget that night I had a dream, and it was all so clear.

An angel came to me in the dream. Not that I

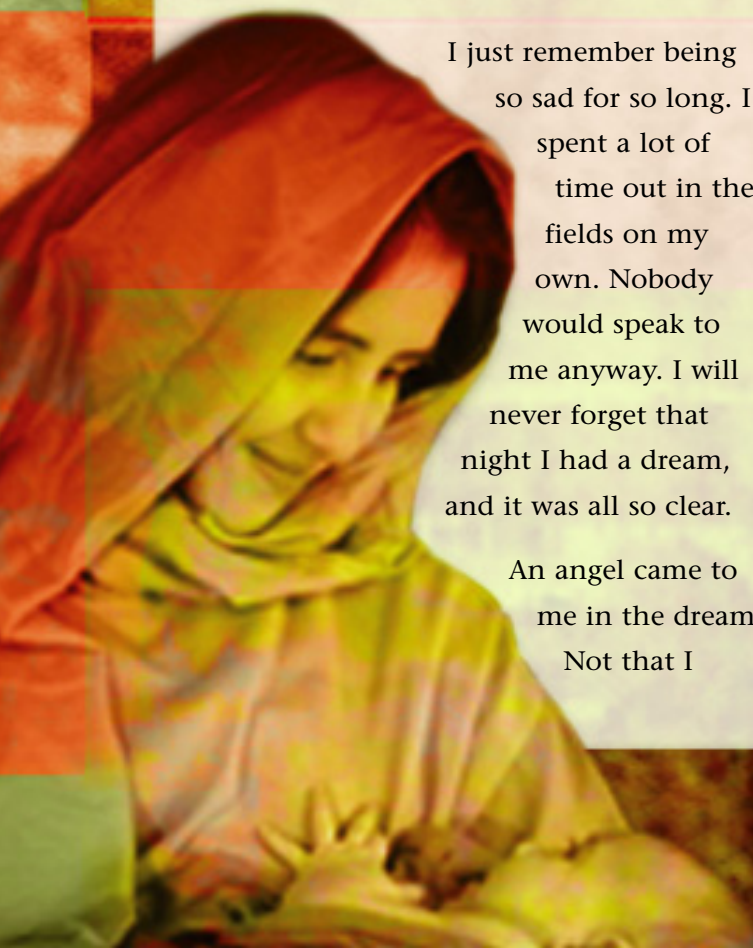
know a whole lot about angels or talk to them all the time. But I know one thing. It was an angel who spoke to me that night, as sure as my name is Joseph.

What he said made such sense and no sense at the same time. It was surreal to think that God was using Mary to be a catalyst for the Messiah. And yet what the angel said restored my faith in Mary, and it tallied with what she had said and with what had happened to her cousin Elizabeth. It squared with all I knew about Mary as a godly and beautiful person.

After the dream, I remember having an unshakeable conviction that this was from the Lord. I didn't know how to explain it, but I knew that God was in it. And just like his cousin John, this baby was to have a special purpose in life, and I was to be a part of it. A big part of it, as it turns out.

They were hard times too, as well as unusual. There was the look on Mary's face when there was nowhere to sleep and we were both exhausted from travelling. She smiled disbelievingly when we were put in the stable, but at least it was warm if nothing else. They say, "If you didn't laugh you would cry." Well, we did both.

Then just after the baby was born we had visitors. I thought the shepherds



by Stanley McMahon

had come to tell us that we were sleeping in the wrong place and ask us to kindly move on, but they didn't.

They just bowed down and wept with joy at our baby boy. They were saying all sorts of things about him and everything pointed in the same direction. What the angel said, what Mary said, what I was saying—all of us were saying the same thing—this baby Jesus was truly Christ the Lord. This was the fulfillment of Scripture. This was the Hope of Israel. This was God with us. And I had to look after him.

I was filled with a sense of awe, of wonder and worship. I still am, but I guess I've just got to get on with it and do my best. The One who called us is faithful, and he knows what he is doing. May his will be done, in his life as well as mine. □

Stanley McMahon has always been passionate about communicating the Word of God in a vibrant manner, whether through speaking or writing. Having served the Lord for many years in Italy, he is currently a pastor in Northern Ireland.

Bethlehem Blues

Just a bed I'm looking for O Lord
To rest my weary bones
Just to give my feet a break
From the dust and from the stones.

I can't believe when I get here
There's no room in the inn
Thought it was going to be alright
That I could settle in.

When I look up at the stars tonight
When I think of what You said
That the Saviour of the world, I'd bear
I can only shake my head.

The wonder of it all, my Lord
Is not that You should come
But that You even could consider me
To be Your humble home.

And as I lay me down to sleep
With Joseph by my side
I wonder what the future holds
For the baby that I hide.

I must confess I'm terrified
Lord, this is my first child.
Are You really sure You've got it right?
My mind is going wild.

So give me strength, dear Lord I pray
Let me know Your presence deep
I can't do this on my own O Lord
Come close and help me sleep.

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