



Posada Prayers - Reflections & Questions

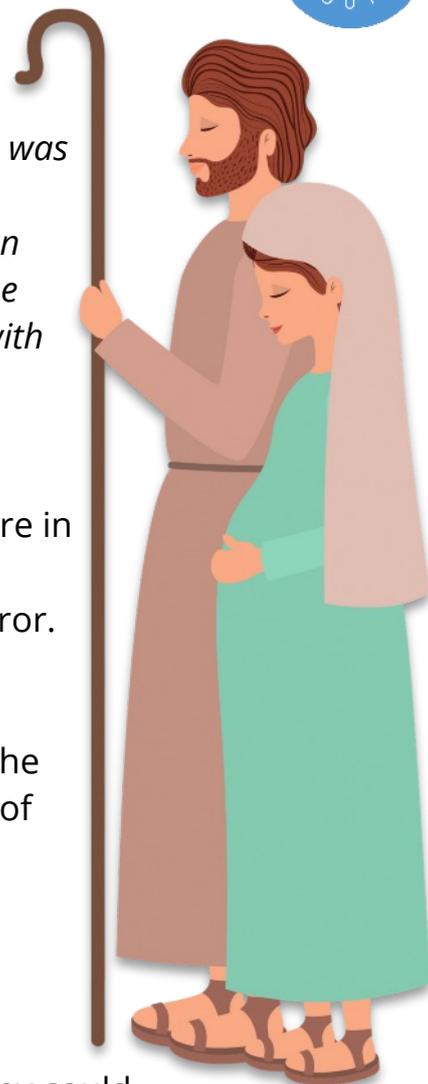


Luke 2:1-5

About that time Caesar Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Empire. This was the first census when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Everyone had to travel to his own ancestral hometown to be accounted for. So Joseph went from the Galilean town of Nazareth up to Bethlehem in Judah, David's town, for the census. As a descendant of David, he had to go there. He went with Mary, his fiancée, who was pregnant.

Sometimes we forget that both Nazareth and Bethlehem were in an occupied land. Mary and Joseph were governed by authorities they didn't vote for, and who often ruled with terror. The last thing that Joseph would want to do was travel to Bethlehem whilst Mary was in the last stages of pregnancy. Firstly because of the risk something happening to her and the baby, and secondly because he probably wanted to keep all of this 'birth of the Messiah' business quiet until he knew a bit more!

They had no choice though, and they set off to register for counting in Joseph's ancestral city of Bethlehem. The Bible doesn't tell us how they travelled, we don't know whether they could afford a donkey. With lots of people doing the same journey it is probable that Mary was able to do at least some of the journey on other people's animals or carts. It would have taken several days though and must have been exhausting, sleeping on mats on the ground, and eating and drinking only what they could carry.



- Think about all the things that Joseph might have been worrying about as he was packing up their belongings for travel
- What do you think Mary and Joseph talked about as they walked during the day?
- What might have kept Mary awake at night?
- This journey to Bethlehem fulfilled an ancient prophecy that the Messiah would be born there. Think about the chances of that happening given that Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth and wouldn't have travelled if they had the choice. Consider how God can make good out of bad

Philippians 2:5-8 (The Message)

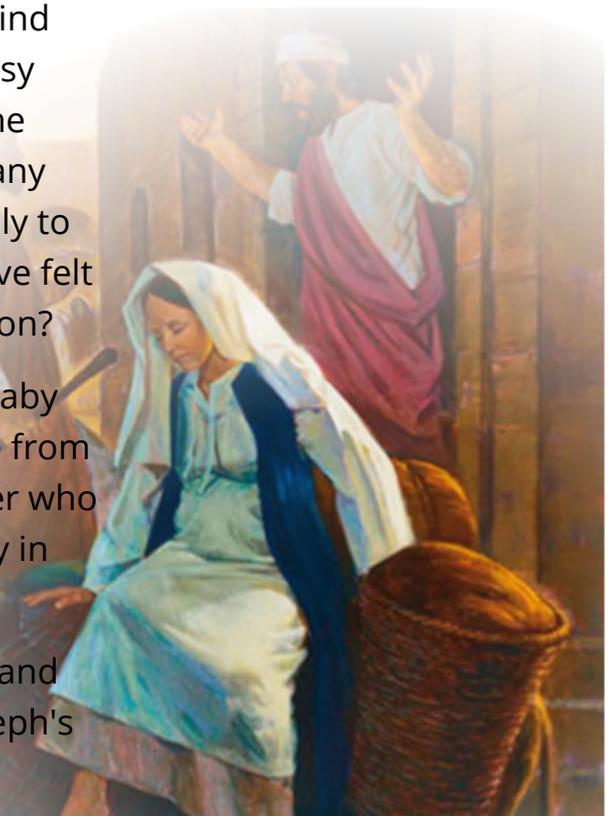
Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death - and the worst kind of death at that - a crucifixion.

'Hosting' Mary and Joseph on their journey may make us more aware of their vulnerability and that of their unborn child, Jesus. This is one of the great mysteries of the Christian faith, that the Creator of the universe was prepared to inhabit our frail human flesh and live among us.

Not only did God become human but he chose to join an ordinary family from a small town who held not status or privilege. That fact that there was no room for them at the inn showed they couldn't afford to pay over the odds for space in crowded accommodation. It might also indicate that Mary's pregnancy before their marriage meant that family in Bethlehem weren't prepared to face the shame of putting them up.

God, the ultimate risk taker, had not chosen an easy route to make his entrance, but knew that this was the way to show that Christ the King came for everyone, no matter what their status or wealth, and that in the frailty of his humanity he faced trial and tribulations just as we do, even before he was born.

- Imagine what Mary and Joseph's struggle to find accommodation must have felt like, in the busy city. Was Mary getting twinges? Did she tell the stressed Joseph or just keep it quiet? How many times did Joseph knock on a door in hope, only to be disappointed? How helpless must they have felt to accept an animal shelter for accommodation?
- Think about the vulnerability of a new born baby who cannot survive without care and nurture from those around it. Wonder at the creative power who made that human accepting that vulnerability in order that we might know him better.
- What special privileges could Jesus have had and what did he give up to become Mary and Joseph's child?



Matthew 25:4-36

Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what's coming to you in this kingdom. It's been ready for you since the world's foundation. And here's why:

*I was hungry and you fed me,
I was thirsty and you gave me a drink,
I was homeless and you gave me a room,
I was shivering and you gave me clothes,
I was sick and you stopped to visit,
I was in prison and you came to me.'*

Welcoming the weary travellers if only for a night demonstrates the importance of hospitality in a lived out faith. Throughout the Bible God urges humanity to care for one another, including 'the stranger' (Deut 10:19). In the verses from Matthew above, Jesus identifies himself with those in need and says that our care for them is our care for him.

The weary travellers who had journeyed eighty miles or so through rough terrain, were desperate for shelter and comfort. In our Posada experience we welcome Jesus into our homes, even if it is only temporarily. What welcome are we offering other 'strangers' we come across?



- How might our attitudes and behaviour change if we really believed that every human being we met was Jesus in disguise?
- What would we do if Jesus knocked on our front door? Would we worry about the state of the house, or the state of our hearts?
- Read the list again - if Jesus was saying this to a crowd today, what do you think he would add or take away from the list?

Mark 10:46-48 (The Message)

They spent some time in Jericho. As Jesus was leaving town, trailed by his disciples and a parade of people, a blind beggar by the name of Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, was sitting alongside the road. When he heard that Jesus the Nazarene was passing by, he began to cry out, "Son of David, Jesus! Mercy, have mercy on me!" Many tried to hush him up, but he yelled all the louder, "Son of David! Mercy, have mercy on me!"

When the infant Jesus became a man, he travelled the region helping people to 'see' God through what he said and did. Blind Bartimaeus could not see Jesus, but he understands who Jesus was - the Son of God able to forgive and heal.

Sometimes it is easy for us to get blinded by our circumstances. Unable to see the needs of others because of the comfort of our own lives, or unable to see hope because of our pain and distress.

As we gaze on Mary and Joseph and ponder their journey, we are given the opportunity to see passed our own limitations and look at the Son of God in a new light. To see the vulnerability and the grace, and the challenge to love sacrificially and be loved unconditionally.

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- What are your 'blind' spots - the things that get in the way of you seeing Jesus properly?
 - Who in our society are shouting for Jesus but being 'hushed up' and, unlike Bartimaeus,, don't have the energy to yell louder?
 - What might accepting Jesus' unconditional love and call to love sacrificially look like in your life?