

## **Birth of Jesus**

### **Gabriel - Hope**

By Sara Sosa

October 2014

Hope.

There is nothing that extinguishes hope when you are in the presence of God.

He has called me to his side and I am waiting for him to reveal to me what he needs. He is thoughtful, then leans toward me and speaks. When I hear what he wants from me, I am excited, proud and more than willing. I am also perplexed and left wondering about the ideas that he puts into play. This one is particularly breathtaking. I gladly accept my role and his blessing as I turn to leave his presence. I am just steps away from him and I feel the distance already.

In no time at all, I am standing on earth...from the realm of the Creator to world of the created in a breath. I am outside a small home in Nazareth...a little town of no consequence in the world of its day. But those who know the prophecies of God have been waiting for God to move. He is moving now and I have the privilege of announcing his plan. I have been in a similar place recently. Only a few months back, I stood outside of a temple in the hill town of Hebron. As God's messenger, I brought news to Zechariah about the coming birth of a long awaited child. To the barren couple, it was too much to believe. But it was the way God chose to restore their hope.

The girl I will visit now is young. I know she will not be afraid of me. Even in my human form, she will know me to be a messenger from God. She will know that God is in the room. She will understand that something much bigger than anything that could be imagined is about to happen. And, just like me, she will count it a privilege to have a role in this new plan from God. I have come during her prayers and I pause to listen as she pours out her heart to the God she loves. Words of compassion, of love, of obedience mingle with trust, with devotion, with hope. He has chosen well. I have come to expect no less.

The message I have been chosen to deliver is about to change her life. It will drastically change it. It will impact those she loves. It will change this town. It will change the entire world forever. God will call out to his creation in a way he never has before. I pray this time they will listen. I pray this time they will allow themselves to be reconciled to their Creator...the one who loves them so fiercely that all of heaven trembles. The HOPE of the world is coming soon.

I turn to walk into Mary's prayers to reveal to her that she will be the one to conceive, carry, birth, nurture, raise and release this hope for all of creation. I am ready and so is she. I am Gabriel, God's messenger, sent to tell Mary she will bring this Messiah, into the world. It will not be easy. But she will not do it alone. God will be with her. The Messiah is coming...this is HOPE.

## **Birth of Jesus**

### **Joseph - Love**

By Sara Sosa

October 2014

I love her. It's the truth that keeps me tethered to this town. If I were not so tangled in that love, I think I would walk away. But my love for her anchors me here as I wrestle through my pain and wonder when I'll ever stop hurting. Tears spring to my eyes and I blink them away.

Just yesterday, she told me she's going to have a baby. I know it's not mine. We've shared many things over the years, but not the intimacy between a husband and his wife. That's a boundary I would never have crossed. I'm shattered to find that she has. What am I to do?

We haven't told anyone else yet, but we will have to. And when we do, she'll be punished. She'll be cut off from the temple, from her friends, from her family...from me. She'll be alone. How can I let that happen to her?

Where are you, Lord? I've been crying out to hear your voice in this, but you are silent. I've heard nothing. Have I done something wrong that you won't whisper to my heart when I need your direction the most? Have I not walked in your ways since I was a small boy? Have I not studied your Word and committed it to memory? Still, you don't speak to me. Your silence is a heavy weight that presses into me.

I could stand with Mary. I could allow people to believe an untruth...that the child she carries is mine. But it would be a lie. I wonder if I could do it. I wonder what life would be like between now and the birth of that child. And when the child comes, could I care for it as a father? What would that take from me?

I'm exhausted, so I lay down to sleep. Perhaps in the morning I'll have a better idea of what to do.

As I close my eyes, my conversation with Mary comes back to me. I can see her face as she speaks. Strong. Steady. Her eyes were pleading with me to understand and believe what she was telling me. But what she shared is impossible. She told me about the baby and more. She talked of a visit from God's messenger, an angel. I saw the sincerity in her eyes and somehow knew she was telling the truth.

Then she shared what the angel's message was...that she would find herself with child by the power of the Holy Spirit and God himself...and the result would be that she would bear the Messiah, the hope of the world, the proof of God's love. I can't get my head around it. It just doesn't make sense. A baby? How can a baby be the Messiah come to save us? This can't possibly be God's best plan.

Is it God? Is it your best plan?

I think again about the woman I love. I can't let her go, but I know that I should. I want to believe what she has shared, but I just can't. Tears spill onto my pillow as I realize that tomorrow I'll say goodbye to the woman I love, to the life I have built, to the God who will not speak though I need him desperately.

As I wait for sleep to come, I hear a voice drift through the darkness:

"Joseph...son of David...do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

Reassurance and peace suddenly wash over me. God has finally spoken. I have one last thought as I give in to sleep...this is LOVE.

**Birth of Jesus**  
**Shepherd - Joy**  
By Sara Sosa  
November 2014

Let me tell you about JOY. I am a shepherd. I love being outside and being with the sheep. Sometimes it's hard work. But at night, I just wander the hillside watching for danger and looking at the stars. And sometimes I watch the angels. I have seen them on the hillside with us many times. They don't make me feel afraid, even though they are so big. When I see them, I'm filled with joy and I feel safe.

I told one of the other shepherds about the angels once. He just looked at me like I was crazy. I guess I wasn't surprised by his reaction. But I have to admit that there was a part of me hoping he would say he had seen them, too.

The sun is setting and I'm getting the sheep settled for the night. I can see small lights from lanterns that have been lit in the city below. The city has been really busy this past week. People are coming to be counted by the Roman government. I'm not sure why the Romans care how many people are in my village. Bethlehem is just a sleepy little town.

I grab a piece of bread out of my bag and take a bite. As I begin to chew, the hair on the back of my neck stands up and the air begins to feel electric. I know what this means. It has happened before. Suddenly before me is a man dressed in white. He looks like a man, but he shimmers and shines. I know he is an angel. No one else sees him. No one else knows he is there.

I look at the angel and realize that I've never seen one this size. Usually they're enormous and fill the sky, but this one is not much taller than me and he's watching me. So I watch him. He moves to the side and my eyes follow him. He smiles and says, "You can see me." I'm startled. He has spoken to me! Amazing.

"I have come to deliver incredible news" he says.

I nod my head "yes" but say nothing out loud. I can't get my head around the truth that an angel is talking to me. He smiles at me, then, and says, "Get ready."

He turns away from me and is suddenly the size of the other angels I have seen and this time...this time...the other shepherds notice. They stop mid-sentence and stare with growing fear at this spectacle before them. They scramble closer together, eyes wide with fear. The angel says in a rolling thunder voice, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy." They crowd together, trying to back away from the angel. But I step closer...I want to hear this news.

"Tonight, in the City of David, a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah. This will be a sign to you: You will find the baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

My feet are already moving toward town. The Messiah? In Bethlehem? I run, not waiting for the others and barely hearing what sounds like a choir singing in the background. I'm going to find this baby. Surely he's important if the angels announce his birth. I'll find him...I'll see him with my own eyes. I can't wait! This is JOY.

## **Birth of Jesus**

### **Anne - Peace**

By Sara Sosa

December 2014

I'm finally at peace. These have been long months full of tension. You see, I've watched my daughter Mary bear accusations that she is a liar. I have seen her almost lose her marriage to a man she loves deeply. I have stood by in silence as she endured anger from synagogue leaders, distance from childhood friends and disappointment from her father. She has been strong and sure through all of it, but I know that her father's disappointment is the one that has hurt her the most.

I love this girl that God gave to us years ago as a tiny, beautiful baby. I know her father deeply loves her as well. But the revelation of her pregnancy before her marriage to Joseph was more than he could handle. And I stood in the middle. Silently. I wanted to wrap both of them in my arms and bring them back together. I wanted to be the one to say everything would be okay. Instead I said nothing.

How could I? I was not invited to speak into my husband's misery. He had the luxury of suffering publically. I have been suffering privately. For nine months I have stood smiling at his side, genuinely offering my support to him, while crying out on the inside for what has torn our family apart. No one would know...no one will know...what I have endured because I haven't said anything.

I couldn't even speak to Mary. I wanted to tell her I believed her story that the baby was of God. But until recently, I did not believe that. It was too outrageous to believe. We all know how babies are born. I was angry with Mary and Joseph for a long time. Angry that Mary had not waited until her marriage. And even angrier with Joseph for abusing the promises our family made to his.

I am not angry anymore. I realize that from the very first telling, their story hasn't changed. Mary's convictions of what happened and is happening in her life are as sure as the rising and setting of the sun. Her devotion to God is undiminished...if anything, it has become deeper. Joseph was not so sure at first. But then, one night, he went from being on the verge of dissolving his agreement with Mary, to standing unwaveringly by her side.

Through all of this, Joseph has been the gift that has taught me to believe. In addition to Mary's story of the visit of an angel, was Joseph's story of God's messenger coming to him. The next morning, Joseph came to find Mary and told her that he believed her and that, together, they would walk the difficult road ahead.

He has done just that. He has loved her in practical and extravagant ways. Together, they have experienced the awe and the fear of a coming child...of becoming parents. While I have been silent, reluctant to add my voice, his voice has been soothing, encouraging, loving. I have watched him love my daughter in a way I could not. It has been water to my thirsty soul.

Now they're gone. Yesterday, they took our donkey for the journey to Bethlehem. Because of the Roman census, he must go there to register for taxes. Although she is nine months pregnant, Mary has gone with him. I thought I would be terrified for her. In truth, she could have her baby along the road with only a young Jewish man to help her. No female relatives, no midwife. So many things could go wrong. I ought to be uncontrollably anxious.

But as I watched them move slowly down the road that led out of Nazareth, I found that I was not afraid. I was hopeful. You see, I have come to believe, through Mary's conviction, Joseph's dedication and the grace of God that my daughter really does carry the Messiah within her. It's that knowledge that assures me all will be well.

God has chosen her. God has chosen Joseph. I have told God many times in the past months that he has chosen well. The Messiah is coming soon. I am at PEACE.

## Birth of Jesus

### Isaiah the Prophet

By Sara Sosa

December 2014

I believe in the coming of the Messiah. I struggle with the possibility that I may not see him in my lifetime. But I'm sure he is coming. God told me so.

I can't say I have always enjoyed my role as God's prophet. There are times when what God shares with me, literally causes me to stop breathing. And in that moment I am reminded that He is God and I am so much less. It's a beautiful arrangement...this relationship...this dance. He could speak in his own right, yet he chooses to speak through me. Sometimes, in the quiet of my prayers, I ask "Why? Why, God, do you choose me?" He hasn't answered that question.

I have other questions like "Why should the God of all that I know, care so much about us?" When I look at the nation of God, as I have had opportunity to see it, I shake my head in frustration and sometimes disgust. They don't honor him. They don't revere him. They don't serve him. Why does God still pursue them?

But I know the answer. Love. In my old age, there are some things that I have come to understand about love. Let me tell you about them...

Love is untamable. You may think you can control love, but in the end, love will rest where it wants. It doesn't wait for an invitation to come around. It simply comes and goes as it will, wrapping some people in its warmth and tangling other people in its web.

Love is tenacious. You can turn your back and walk away, but love will pursue. When you get tired of walking and you turn around, you'll bump right into it. Love will fight for your attention. It will do extravagant things to get you to notice it. Love never gives up.

Love is restless. It's always on the move, always searching for a way in. Love won't force itself in. But when it's invited in, it will stay...forever. When you let love in, be prepared for it to make a home with you and change your life.

Here's the most important truth...**God is love.** He is all of the things I have just said...untamable, tenacious, restless...as he waits for his creation to turn in his direction. He chooses to wait for us. That's love. I know about God's love...he has shown it to me first hand. He has told me about it through dreams. I have experienced it in real life. God has told me he is sending his love to the world in a new way. I know he is sending the Messiah.

I have a lot of words I could share with you about the coming Messiah...God's gift of love for all of creation. I know what we are to call him. God has given him these names: Wonderful. Counselor. Mighty God. Everlasting Father. Prince of Peace.

I'm not sure why God has chosen me to speak to his people. But he has. And of all the messages he has given me to share, this is perhaps the most important. I don't know the time or the exact place when God will choose to enter our lives, but I know that he will.

He has told me that a time is coming when heaven will reach down and touch earth. God will enter our world in a way he never has. There is mystery in the how and why. **But I can say with conviction it will happen. I believe in God's love coming near. I believe in God coming to be with us. I believe in the coming of the Messiah.**