

The Fiction Lover's Devotional Series

SAMPLE CHAPTER

Star Light, Star Bright

by Kathy Ide

Joseph sat on a pile of hay, gazing at the sphere of light that illuminated the night sky. It shone so brightly, he could make out every piece of straw outside the cave entrance, every hair on the mane of the donkey Mary had been riding when she went into labor.

“Mary, you’ve got to see this.” He rushed back into the dark shelter, but stopped when he saw her asleep on the makeshift bed he’d hastily assembled after the innkeeper led them here last night.

And why shouldn’t she sleep, after what she’d been through? He sat on the ground beside his beloved, aching to share the thoughts that had been tumbling around in his mind ever since . . . well, ever since that angel appeared to him in a dream. “It’s been an incredible night, hasn’t it?” he whispered.

She didn’t stir. Didn’t move at all, other than the gentle rise and fall of her chest.

“Mary.” Her name felt soft on his lips. “Now that it’s all over, I have a confession to make. I’m . . . I’m scared.” Watching her give birth had been the most frightening thing he’d ever experienced. No wonder men were not traditionally allowed to watch the natural but gruesome ordeal of a woman in travail.

But what he felt now was a completely different kind of fear.

He crossed to the feeding trough, which he’d spent hours cleaning and re-cleaning, packing and repacking with the freshest hay he could find—the only thing he’d been able to think of to do to keep sane during Mary’s labor. There, wrapped tight in swaddling cloths, lay the child that she had delivered into his arms.

But Joseph was not the boy’s father.

He averted his eyes from the newborn. After all, no one could look on the face of God and live.

He turned instead toward Mary. “Adonai, I understand why You chose her—out of all the women who have ever lived—to be the mother of Your only child. She’s so good and kind and godly. She loves You more than anyone I’ve ever known. That’s why *I* love her.”

A thought entered his mind in a split moment of time—as gentle as a sigh yet as powerful as a storm.

I chose you, too, Joseph.

He gasped at the thought. Why would the Lord Shaddai choose him, a lowly carpenter, to raise His only Son? To be the earthly father of the long-awaited Messiah?

“I have nothing to offer. My biggest goal in life was to teach my child the business my father taught me. What does the Son of God need with a mundane skill like that?”

Joseph's gaze returned to the feeding trough. Unable to resist the pull, he dared risk a peek at the newborn's face. Once his eyes landed on the wrinkly red cheeks and sparse brown hair, he could not turn away. The baby looked so ... ordinary.

Could this child truly be what the angel had told Joseph and Mary He would be?

It wasn't that Joseph doubted the divine dream. It was far too incredible and vivid to have been merely his imagination. But this was all wrong. His whole life the rabbis—and his own father—had taught him the Messiah would be a mighty warrior king who would free His people from their oppressors.

Throughout Mary's pregnancy, Joseph had tried to envision what the Son of God would look like when He was born. Surely He would be unique right from birth. He'd be able to walk and talk straight from the womb. All right, that was a bit of a stretch. But shouldn't He at least have a heavenly glow about Him? A radiance that beamed from His holy face, like Moses when he came down from Mount Sinai? *Something* that set Him apart, leaving no question in anyone's mind about who and what this child really was.

And yet ... the sleeping child before him looked just like any other newborn. The only thing different about this birth was that extra-bright star that appeared above this cave moments after Mary's delivery.

Joseph's heart sank. When he and Mary returned home with a normal-looking baby, everyone would discount the stories of their angelic visitations. All the vicious rumors would be confirmed.

He stared at the infant, longing to draw near, to pick him up, to hold him. Yet he hesitated. Could anyone really cradle God in his arms? Especially someone as unworthy as he?

Unable to fathom the enormity of this bizarre situation, Joseph fled the cave and paced outside it.

He stared again at the brilliant star above him. Such an unusual light. People for miles around must be able to see it. What did those who studied astrological formations think of it?

A rustling in the dry brush startled him. The innkeeper had moved his domestic animals to a pen. So it wasn't a cow or donkey or sheep that had made the noise. A wild animal, perhaps?

With all the people crowded into this little town, bandits were no doubt roaming the outskirts, eager to take advantage of anyone who let his guard down.

Then another thought chilled him to the depths of his soul. Perhaps the danger came not from man but from spiritual forces of evil and darkness. Surely they would try to strike at the Son of God while He was a vulnerable infant. How on earth could Joseph even begin to protect Jesus from that?

The sound grew louder. Footsteps. Human footsteps. Dozens of them.

Joseph looked around for anything he might use as a defensive weapon. A rock. A staff. A thick tree limb. But found nothing. *What do I do? God, help us!* Surely He would protect His child. But did that banner of protection cover him and Mary as well? Or were their parts of the miraculous story over?

A reeking stench of manure filled Joseph's nose as men dressed in crudely made woolen garments moved into the open.

Shepherds.

Joseph fought an instinctive reaction of judgment and condemnation. With a few exceptions—tax collecting and prostitution came to mind—shepherding was the lowest profession an Israelite could choose. Why would anyone spend months at a time wandering the hillsides herding stubborn animals that didn't have the common sense to find their own grass or

stay out of brambles or keep from tumbling into pits? And shepherds rarely had time to attend synagogue ... which was just as well since they'd find little acceptance there.

"Please excuse the interruption," said the first man in the group, his weather-worn face covered in wrinkles and scars. "But ... angels told us to come here."

Joseph swallowed hard. The Lord had chosen two average people to be the parents of His holy Son. Apparently He had deigned to deliver the news of that child's birth not to kings and nobles, or religious leaders who had studied the messianic prophecies so diligently for so long, but to the lowliest of the low. And Joseph was no better than these shepherds—how dare he judge them when God had so blessed them?

"Welcome, gentlemen. You've come to the right place. Wait here a moment, please." He ducked into the cave, eager to share the amazing miracle with the people God had personally invited to see it.

He knelt beside his betrothed and gently tugged on the rough blanket that covered her. Her eyes fluttered open. "Mary, my love, we have our first visitors. I'll go out and talk with them while you get yourself and the baby ready."

Mary had managed to stay awake for their first guests, and of course she'd been kind and gracious to them. But the effort had taken its toll, and she fell asleep soon after their departure.

When the child cried—and stank—Joseph forced himself to overcome a lifetime of strict instruction not to touch anything deemed holy and changed the Son of God's soiled swaddling cloths. His mind still reeled.

As he held the tiny, helpless baby in his arms, a rush of emotion engulfed him. As much as he loved Mary, this feeling ran even deeper and stronger. He couldn't take his eyes off the precious bundle in his arms. Nor could he stop his forefinger from gently stroking the soft skin of those pudgy little cheeks.

"Jesus, fathers are supposed to teach their children everything they need to know. But what can I teach You? You've already shown me more than I'll ever be able to show You. You've taught me about ... miracles. God's infinite power. His overwhelming love for mankind. What can I offer You in return? Nothing!"

Nothing but love.

Joseph sucked in a quick breath, the realization hitting him like a plank over the head. "Oh, Jesus, if that is what You need from me—love—I can give You that in abundance!"

Perhaps God had made the right choice after all.

He held the babe tighter to his chest. "Sweet little Jesus. I can hold You when You cry. I can provide food and shelter." Joseph chuckled. "Mary and I don't live like King Herod, mind you. But our home is a far cry better than this stable!"

He grinned at the infant in his arms. "Wait till you see our place, Jesus. My father and I built the house, and Mary's done a wonderful job of making it feel like home."

His exhausted bride stirred, and Joseph took the child outside. "Jesus, I don't know what kind of father I'll be. But I promise You ... and all the angels watching us right now ... that with the help of our heavenly Father, I will love You and Your mother with all my heart, all my strength, and all my soul, every day of my life."

He looked up into the brilliantly lit night sky. "Thank You, Lord, for the awesome privilege and responsibility You've bestowed on me. And thank You for placing a special star in the heavens to unmistakably guide all who see it to Your strange but amazing plan to save the world."

Life Application

God provided the way to reconcile sinful man with His holy presence: by becoming a human being Himself. Like the star that accompanied that auspicious occasion, Jesus spent thirty-three years lighting the way, telling us—and showing us—what God is like and how much He loves us. Then He died on the cross and rose again, to become the bridge we need to enter into the Father's presence and have Him see us as just as holy and righteous as His own Son.

And yet ... often we view God as being too big, too holy, too powerful for us to even consider approaching Him. We feel too small, too sinful, too unimportant for God to be interested in the insignificant details of our fleeting lives.

Other times, if we're honest, we may view ourselves as being perfectly capable of handling our own lives without any divine help—or interference.

I'm sure Joseph didn't feel worthy of being the earthly father to God's only begotten Son. But I'm equally certain that he and Mary loved Jesus with all their hearts. And that's really all that God the Father wanted them to do.

That's also what He wants us to do. Simply love Him.

About the Author

Kathy Ide, author of *Proofreading Secrets of Best-Selling Authors*, is a freelance editor/mentor for new writers, established authors, and book publishers. She speaks at writers' conferences across the country. She is the founder and director of The Christian PEN and the Christian Editor Connection. For more, visit KathyIde.com.