

I sometimes wish we still rode horses to get around.

Astride a horse, your perspective changes—the road ahead becomes more visible than if you are walking. You can see further.

Now, I know you can do that in a tall truck too, but most people aren't thinking about a better perspective on the road ahead while driving. Most of us are anticipating eating up the miles in our powerful vehicles with much more horsepower than a real horse.

But—at speed—we miss so many of the details. We can only see details when our speed is slower. We certainly could get the details of our journeys by walking, but we would give up the advantage of just a few feet more in height.

Mary and Joseph travelled a long way on this night long, long ago. They had spent days—perhaps even weeks on the road, Joseph walking, wearily. Mary, I'm sure, walked a bit, but because of her impending childbirth, more often she was seated on the donkey.

Joseph took in all the details—the dusty road, probably peopled with other travelers. He saw the sheep on the hills, and the quiet towns they stopped in. He saw the bustling energy and dangers of the larger cities.

Mary saw these things, too—but she could see further down the road as well from her perch on the donkey. While Joseph saw the road, she could see where the road was leading. She could see fully into the lighted windows of the buildings they passed.

Because she left worrying about the dangers of daily travel to Joseph, she had more time to look ahead at what was coming.

Would she be able to deliver the child without female relatives, or even a midwife? Would Joseph faint, or would he help? Would she know how to do all the things mothers were supposed to know how to do? What kind of future would be in store for her – for *their*—son? Would the people of Nazareth accept him or be scared—or resentful—of him.

Would her family and Joseph's family love him as much as she already did?

He was supposed to save the world, the messenger said. How? Would there be war? Would he be hurt?

Would he be a great leader? Would this leadership --lead him far from her?

That messenger from God had come to her in light and fire. Would her baby bring light and fire to the world, too?

Mary looked down the darkening road and saw Bethlehem in the distance. She'd been feeling pain all day but hadn't told Joseph. Hadn't wanted to worry him.

But she was sure glad to see the dust of many horses ahead. And she could begin to hear the sounds of the city. The baby wouldn't be born alone.

Joseph finally found a place to stay, where he could water the donkey and lay his betrothed down gently. Then as her pains grew stronger and faster, the night became more confusing for everyone: the new mother, the poor man who never thought he'd ever be so up close and personal with a childbirth.

Even the animals nearby were a bit startled by the ruckus.

Finally, there was a cry.

Mary's eyes glowed like fire with love for her son, Joseph noticed. The trio was lit by the lights of heaven, and one strangely bright star.

Everything around them looked the same as it had a short time earlier, and at the same time, everything had changed.

God's eternity had entered a mortal form and the baby's eyes squinted at the light and sounds and smells that surrounded him.

It was at once perfectly ordinary, and completely new.

The mother, the father, and the child felt surrounded by the soft breathing of the animals, the sounds of the city at night, the warmth of their closeness. For a moment, they were complete, this trinity of beings. They were a family.

In the space of one evening, we see the whole universe reflected in a mother's eyes, and the soul of all creation contained within the form of a child.

This is the night we remember again the journey: the mother, the donkey, the husband, and the child who was born to them, and **for** us.

That night he became the center of the life of his family, disrupted the shepherds, caught the imagination of wise men, and worried the powerful.

May he be the center of all of us, disrupting our lives, and sparking our imaginations, and still worrying the powerful. This Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us.

Amen.