

## Elizabeth

By Joyce Catherwood

(Luke 1:5–8)

**M**ary danced across our threshold. Even after several days of mountainous travel, her lovely dark eyes sparkled and she was full of smiles as she greeted us. Her tunic was tattered and dusty from traveling and her sandals were worn thin. Stones and thorns had etched deep scratches into her feet, but Mary didn't notice as she moved about lightly with the ease of youth. My little cousin was accustomed to trekking up and down narrow hillside footpaths tending sheep or carrying water.

And now she was carrying greatness, the Son of God, supernaturally conceived by the Holy Spirit. I was also with child, miraculously conceiving in my old age after spending many barren years of disappointment and disgrace. At the sound of Mary's voice, the babe in my womb leapt with great gladness as though he knew his Lord had entered our home. Exhilarated, I shouted: "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear! Why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" As we embraced, Mary burst into song, glorifying God, thrilled that she had been chosen to be the mother of Messiah—the longstanding dream of every young Jewish girl.

Over the next three months, it became clear why Mary came to me. In spite of our age difference, we had much in common. We talked about how we would both bear our firstborn child. We both knew in advance we would have sons and knew their names. We shared the same angel messenger, Gabriel, who told us our sons would be great men. We pondered the angel's words and wondered what it would be like for Mary to be mother of the Son of the Most High. We mused over how John would turn hearts back to God, preparing the way for Jesus. We wept as we realized that I, because of my age, would probably not live to see all this come about.

We shared apprehension of the birth process, having seen many a sister deliver a bundle of wrinkled newborn flesh, encircled by women, supporting and soothing the moaning mother. Women's work, it's called, while the men sit in silence in the courtyard. Little did we know that Mary would have to bring her baby into the world without feminine support, and only Joseph at her side.

My John was born as expected, with family and neighbors sharing in the festivities. And my husband, Zechariah, a priest, who was struck dumb by the angel Gabriel prior to my pregnancy, finally spoke again. He prophesied even more wondrous things about John and Jesus. John's birth was an answer to our prayer, but Gabriel said it would also strengthen Mary, showing her that nothing is impossible with God. She returned home refreshed and ready to face the cruel slander of her neighbors and dismay of her family as it became obvious that she, though not yet married, was with child.

Six months later, Mary bore her holy infant in the most humble of circumstances, unnoticed by the rest of the world. But in celestial realms, the day of Jesus' birth was cause for jubilant celebration! Shepherds in a nearby field described how the heavens opened and an angel appeared in a blaze of glory, terrifying them. The angel said: "Don't be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy for everyone! Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you; he is Messiah and Lord!" The shepherds recounted how suddenly a massive angelic choir appeared around the angel. They sang as though they were bursting with delight and amazement as they praised God in the highest, proclaiming peace on earth.

Heaven erupted in joy that day; Earth had finally received her King! ●