

1 Mary's Mother-in-Law

2 **Scene One: Mary and Joseph on the road to Bethlehem. Mary riding on a donkey**

3 **Mary:** This trip couldn't have come at a worse time. I'm due any day now.

4 **Joseph:** I know, but we can't ignore the new law.

5 **Mary:** The Romans already take the best of our crops, now they want more tax money.

6 **Joseph:** It all makes me so angry. Last week I was on the road back from town and there was a man
7 dying on a cross next to the road. He was in agony but when I offered to help get him down he said I
8 shouldn't risk it because they would do the same to me if I did. I really hate the Romans.

9 **Mary:** That's terrible.

10 **Joseph:** What we need is a strong leader that the people could get behind to fight them. Maybe I'll live
11 to see the Messiah return. With God on our side we could kill them all and make our country great
12 again!

13 **Mary:** What about the women and children? Even if you win, the wives and children of the Romans that
14 you would kill suffer. There must be a better way to live than fighting wars. (pause)

15 **Mary:** Did you hear back from your uncle about putting us up while we are in town for this Roman head-
16 count thing?

17 **Joseph:** No. I expected a letter but none arrived.

18 **Mary:** This is your family's town. You must have a dozen relatives here with an extra room. Why haven't
19 any of them offered to have us stay with them?

20 **Joseph:** Our relationship is a great embarrassment to my family. My father thinks I'm a naïve fool or a
21 liar and I won't repeat what my mother said about you.

22 **Mary:** I'm so sorry that this pregnancy has caused a rift in your family.

23 **Joseph:** It is what it is. We'll make the best of it.

24 **Joseph:** We should be there soon. I think there is an Inn on this side of town that is just around the next
25 bend in the road. We might find a place to stay there.

26 **Mary:** Thank goodness. I really have to pee.

27 **Scene Two: Check-in desk at the Inn. Joseph and the proprietor**

28 **Proprietor:** I'm sorry but there are no rooms available. Since the emperor decreed that all men must
29 travel to their home towns to register for the tax, the whole town is full of people from other cities.
30 Every available accommodation is full.

31 **Joseph:** Surely some of the local people must be traveling to other cities for the same reason and there
32 would be homes available for rent.

1 **Proprietor:** Perhaps, but only to people of good character with references from relatives in town. I know
2 who you are. You and your pregnant girlfriend are not welcome in respectable people's homes.

3 *Mary walks in.*

4 **Joseph:** I'm sorry dear but they have no room.

5 **Mary to the Proprietor:** Do you know who my husband is? He is a direct descendent of King David!

6 **Proprietor (with wry humor):** Lady, this is Bethlehem. Everyone here is a direct descendent of King
7 David.

8 **Mary:** What kind of man would turn a woman into the street who is about to give birth? Surely, you can
9 do something to help us.

10 **Proprietor:** The best I can do is let you stay in the stable. I've got some empty stalls and you can have
11 two of them for a very reasonable price, considering the circumstances.

12 **Mary:** You will muck out the stalls and put in fresh straw?

13 **Proprietor:** Your boyfriend can do the mucking out. There is a pitchfork and bales of fresh straw beside
14 the stable.

15 **Mary to Joseph:** I'll see you in the stable.

16 *Mary leaves*

17 **Proprietor:** You've got your hands full with that one.

18 **Joseph:** I like a woman with spirit.

19 **Scene Three: In the stable. The donkey in one stall and Mary and Joseph sitting**
20 **on the saddle blanket in the other stall on clean straw.**

21 **Mary:** That man was so rude to us.

22 **Joseph:** Yes, I'm afraid he represents the general feeling of the town.

23 **Mary:** I feel badly for you. This should be a happy home coming despite the Roman tax thing.

24 **Joseph:** It's OK. We'll get through this together.

25 **Mary:** You are such a good man.

26 **Joseph:** Do you think we have time to return to Nazareth before the baby comes where your mother or
27 one of your relatives could help with the birth?

28 **Mary:** Maybe, but it could happen any time. Will you try to arrange for a midwife in case we need one?
29 I've never even attended a birth let alone had a child of my own. Many women die in childbirth even
30 with help. *(pause)* I'm afraid.

31 **Joseph:** Stay here and try to rest. There is a common room in the Inn. I'll go there and see if I can
32 arrange for someone to be with you if we need her.

1 **Scene Four: The common room in the Inn. Joseph seated at a table. The**
2 **proprietor approaches**

3 **Proprietor:** Did you get settled in?

4 **Joseph:** Yes, Mary is resting.

5 **Joseph:** We might need the services of a mid-wife. Can you recommend anyone?

6 **Proprietor:** Sorry, none of the midwives I know will help you.

7 **Joseph:** I'm sorry to hear that.

8 **Proprietor:** With luck, you won't need one and you will be back in Nazareth in a few days. I feel sorry for
9 you but my business depends on good will in this town. Let me buy you a drink.

10 *Proprietor leaves and a serving woman of Joseph's age approaches*

11 **Server:** Why look who's here! It's Joseph. What brings you to our humble Inn?

12 **Joseph:** Hello Miriam. It's good to see you again.

13 **Miriam (server):** It's been a few years. I've heard some stories about what you've been up to. You've
14 been a naughty boy. Too bad you weren't like that when we were together (*winks*).

15 **Joseph:** You were my first love. I'll always think fondly of you.

16 **Miriam:** Too bad your mother didn't care for me. Just because my mother died giving birth and I was
17 raised by my father, she didn't think I was good enough for you. I admit that I'm a bit rough around the
18 edges and talk more like a man than a refined lady, but it broke my heart when she sent you away to
19 Nazareth to keep you from marrying me.

20 **Joseph:** Things tend to work out for the best. Some of the things you've heard aren't true. Mary and I
21 are engaged but we haven't been intimate.

22 **Miriam:** So who is the father?

23 **Joseph:** I don't know. I asked and she said that all children are a gift from God and so is this one.

24 **Miriam (hoots with derisive laughter):** That's a good one. I once shared a bottle of wine with a guy from
25 Persia. I don't know what he put in it but I woke up the next morning with a headache and no memory
26 of the night before. I spent the next three weeks worrying about what I'd tell my father. Fortunately, I
27 didn't have to but I'm sure I wouldn't have thought of one that good.

28 **Joseph:** Well, I respect her choice.

29 **Miriam (pats Joseph's cheek):** You're such a mensch.

30 **Miriam:** So you and Mary aren't doing it and you aren't married yet? Tell you what—I'll be done with
31 the meal crowd in an hour. Perhaps you'd like to come up to my room and share a bottle of wine while
32 we get reacquainted.

33 **Joseph:** I need a favor. Perhaps you can help.

1 **Miriam:** What?

2 **Joseph:** Mary might go into labor any time and we don't have a midwife. Would you be willing to help?

3 **Miriam:** No one else in town would do it but I know what it's like to grow up without a mother who died
4 giving birth. I don't care what your mother or family think of me anyway so yes, I'll do it—for you.

5 **Joseph:** Thank you. It means a lot.

6 **Scene Five: Joseph's parent's house that evening. Discussion between Joseph's**
7 **mother, Hannah, and father, Jacob.**

8 **Jacob:** The Inn keeper tells me that Mary has gone into labor and Miriam is helping as a mid-wife.

9 **Hannah:** Just when I thought it couldn't become more embarrassing. Image what my friends will be
10 talking about for weeks. I'll never live this down.

11 **Jacob:** This is our son and the birth of our grandchild you are talking about.

12 **Hannah:** Don't you get it! The child is not his. They aren't even pretending that it is for appearances
13 sake. This is not our grandchild. If Miriam's as good a midwife as she is at serving tables, the whole
14 problem might go away soon.

15 **Jacob (shocked):** You don't wish that the mother and child both die?

16 **Hannah:** If they did, maybe Joseph would come to his senses and let us find a suitable wife for him so he
17 could start a real family with a respectable girl.

18 *Servant enters:*

19 **Hannah:** What news do you bring?

20 **Servant:** Everyone is talking about the three astrologers that just came into town. They are famous wise
21 men from the great court in Persia and they are dressed in the finest clothes and riding the best horses.
22 They claim that the signs in the heavens have predicted a new King of the Jews will be born but instead
23 of coming from the house of King Herod, the new king will be from the most humble origins possible in
24 King David's city of Bethlehem. Someone told them that there was an unwed mother giving birth in a
25 stable and they all agreed that this child must be the one. Rumors are running wild. Some are saying he
26 is the Messiah at last!

27 *Men shouting in the street below.*

28 **Jacob:** I've never seen anything like it. Let's go see what's happening.

29 **Scene Six: An alley near the Inn's stable. A crowd has gathered. Joseph's parents**
30 **stop a passing shepherd.**

31 **Jacob:** What's going on?

1 **Shepherd:** Haven't you heard? My brother's wife's nephew said that angels appeared to some
2 shepherds and told them about the new king being born here in Bethlehem. This must be the Messiah!
3 At last, we'll be able to kick some Roman ass! It's about time we ran things around here.

4 *Shepard runs off shouting.*

5 **Hannah:** There cannot be more than one baby being born in a stable tonight. What's going on?

6 *Jacob and Hannah peer into the stable. They see the backs of three men dressed in fine garments,*
7 *apparently talking with Mary and Joseph.*

8 **Hannah:** What fine clothes! Look, one of them is giving them gold!

9 **Jacob:** Let's wait for them to leave and let things quiet down.

10 **Hannah:** You go back to the house. I'll watch things here.

11 *Jacob leaves. Hannah settles in to watch and wait*

12 **Scene Seven: Mary is holding the baby and Miriam is cleaning up. Hannah enters**
13 **hesitantly**

14 **Miriam, seeing Hannah first:** What are you doing here?

15 **Mary:** Hannah, is that you? Come in.

16 **Hannah:** I don't know what to say. Everyone is talking about it. Some are saying you've given birth to the
17 next King. What are these presents?

18 **Miriam:** They are gold, frankincense, myrrh. Gifts worthy of a King.

19 **Hannah:** Perhaps I've misjudged the situation.

20 **Miriam:** I'll say you have. Why don't you crawl back to your friends and remind them how you treated
21 the mother of the next King of Judea. It's your fault that he was born in a stable.

22 *Crestfallen, Hannah turns to leave*

23 **Mary:** Wait.

24 *Hannah hesitates.*

25 **Mary:** Please come and sit down. I have some things to say.

26 *Hannah sits on the straw. Mary hands the baby to Miriam, not Hannah.*

27 **Mary:** This is my son. People are saying that he is the next king of the Jews or even the Messiah and
28 some of them are already talking about how he will lead them in war. I'm sick of all the talk of hate,
29 revenge, and jealousy. I want something better for my son. I cannot do anything about what other
30 people think or what they expect but I can do something about the kind of home my son grows up in
31 and the kind of man he becomes.

1 (Addressing Miriam) I know you still love Joseph and that you made a pass at him earlier today.
2 (holding up a hand to forestall a denial) Yes, he told me. I am jealous of the feelings he has for you and
3 angry that you tried to get him back. But you have demonstrated your love for him by helping me
4 through the delivery. This is the kind of love that we can build on and I forgive you.

5 (Facing Hannah) I have every reason to hate you and I have a strong desire to seek revenge but I
6 don't have to. Your greatest desire is to be respected and widely known as the most influential woman
7 in Bethlehem. Instead, everyone in town will know how you treated the future King and you will be
8 shunned. Even worse than that, when the story of this night is retold, no one will even know your name.

9 I forgive what you have done to me. However, if you are to be part of my son's home in the
10 future, you must try to heal some of the hurt you have caused. One of the people you hurt sits next to
11 you. I owe Miriam a great debt that I cannot repay. You can make amends for your behavior toward
12 both of us by taking her under your wing. You can teach her manners and help her find a good man like
13 your son. You can be the mother she never had.

14 Joseph and I will marry and we will have children of our own. If you demonstrate that you can
15 be caring toward Miriam and discharge my debt to her, then you will be welcome in our home as
16 grandmother to Joseph's children.

17 I doubt my son will ever become King like Herod but I do hope that he might become a great
18 teacher and tell everyone about the worth and dignity of every person, and how we should treat each
19 other with justice, equity, and compassion and instead of seeking military domination he would lead us
20 toward a world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.

21 **Miriam:** Big words. You think you can change the world?

22 **Mary:** If the three of us can make peace and learn to love each other after all we've been through, it just
23 might happen.

24 (baby cries)

25 **Miriam:** The future savior of humankind needs a new diaper.

26 **Hannah to Mary:** May I?

27 **Mary:** Let's do it together.

28 Scene ends with all three women fussing over the baby Jesus.