

- There is a part of me that doesn't like the gospel story today. I feel great sympathy for Mary and Joseph. They seem to be very small in this story. The birth of Jesus happened in a very lowly place, a barn. I think of the young mother scared to death giving birth all by herself. In the normal way of things Mary's mother and the other women would have been there. When a baby is coming family should be near to offer help and encouragement. Instead they were visited by exotic people from the East. Instead Heavenly beings were flying around singing their Heavenly hymns. This is not your normal birth.
- When Mary said her "Yes" to God she didn't know that this journey would be so frightening. Because they were devout Jewish people Mary and Joseph went to Jerusalem to present their baby in the Temple. Jerusalem was the big city and small town folks don't handle big cities very well. Jerusalem was always busy with exotic people, pilgrims from afar, buying and selling, crowds of people pushing and shoving. With a new baby I imagine this was their first outing as a family. Their first instinct was to keep the baby safe. You walk lost in the crowd and then some strangers call out to you. Ancient Simeon and ancient Anna approach them.
- Mary and Joseph did not know who these people were. They did not know that they were prophetic people. We don't like it when strangers approach us, especially when we are carrying a new born baby. Their message is terrible. We like it when people come and ask to see the new baby. They tell us that he has his father's eyes and his mother's mouth. They tell us that this is the most beautiful baby ever. What does Mary get? "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted, and you yourself a sword will pierce." I am sure Simeon felt great now that he got that off his chest, but what about poor Mary and Joseph. They must have been terrified after meeting Simeon. Then to add more upset they are approached by Anna, a prophetess. The bible says that Anna spoke of the child to all.
- The whole thing feels very unsafe. No doubt Mary and Joseph got out of there as fast as they could. Then went back home so that they could rear their baby in peace. This is the Holy Family. We would all like to be a Holy Family. We want to be at home and rear our children in peace. We want God to watch over us and protect us from any harm and danger that comes our way. We want our family to grow in a loving community, a place of happiness and safety. We have no way of knowing what challenges might come in the future. There will be crises in the family. There will be health problems for the children. There will be insecurity at work, a shortage of money, danger on the streets, sometimes destruction by storms and hurricanes.

- A verse from Amazing Grace comes to mind: “Through many dangers, toils and snares we have already come. T'was grace that brought us safe thus far and grace will lead us home.” We are Christian people. We follow the Lord Jesus because He is our Good Shepherd. He has promised a Way of safety for us. We put our trust in Him that He will lead us home.