

*In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3All went to their own towns to be registered. 4Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

*8In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." 13And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 14"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" 15When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." 16So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. 20The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*

Poor Mary. Just a young girl, pregnant, shamed because she is not yet married. People were talking, heads were shaking.

Poor Mary. At the most difficult part of her pregnancy a journey was to be made. A long hard journey with no fine hotels, not even a place to stay at its end.

Poor Mary. The labor pains have begun, no midwife with her there, no mother or sisters to assist her, just Joseph who may not have been much help at all.

Poor Mary. And now her child is born, a piece of cloth torn into strips to wrap the newborn child and to hold him as her womb had held him for every moment until now. But no crib for him, no soft bed, just hay in some hard, wooden manger. Scratchy dried grasses, maybe there was a blanket to make his first bed more comfortable, maybe not. Poor Mary.

But in her heart every moment of the way, she was blessed Mary.

Blessed Mary, honored by God to carry within her God's own Son.

Blessed Mary, able to give birth to the Messiah in Bethlehem, the city of David's birth.

Blessed Mary, given a place chosen by God for her Son to be born, the manger chosen by God to be his bed.

Blessed Mary.

Poor shepherds. Despised ones. Considered in that day to be liars, degenerates, thieves. They were the ones who took the only job that was left over, minimum wage, dirty work. So little were they thought of that their testimony was not even admissible in court. Some towns even had ordinances barring them from entering the city.

Poor shepherds. In the whole region that night the world was asleep. Under shelter, in comfortable beds, wives and children resting with them. But the shepherds were watching their flocks, the midnight shift, the poorest of the poor.

Poor shepherds. Suddenly in the darkness of the night the brightness of a messenger from God was before them, enveloping them. Had the judgement day come? Would a sword suddenly appear in the angel's hand, destroying them for their godless ways? They were terrified. Poor shepherds.

But the angel said, Do not be afraid, for see - I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people; to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.

Blessed shepherds. Not a sword to destroy but a child to save. A savior, for them.

Blessed shepherds. Suddenly the sky was Bright with God's army, messenger, angels, singing: Glory to God in highest heaven and on earth peace among people whom God favors. And they went and saw the baby lying in the manger and told everyone. Most blessed shepherds.

And now you join them. You are moreblessed. For this Savior is born for you, given to you. He will win the victory over sin and death for you. Though you may look poor and beleaguered to the world, you are honored by God for you are priviled to hold this chidl in your heart as Mary held him. You are honored to tell all the world that he is Savior, Messiah Lord, as angels and shepherds proclaimed. He is yours, God's son, MARY's child, your Lord.

Most blessed are you. Amen.

