

## Our Journey Towards The Infant Jesus

### Following the Star of Hope



*“Human life is a journey. Towards what destination? How do we find the way? Life is like a voyage on the sea of history, often dark and stormy, a voyage in which we watch for the stars that indicate the route... Who more than Mary could be a **star of hope** for us? With her “yes” she opened the door of our world to God himself; she became the living Ark of the Covenant, in whom God took flesh, became one of us, and pitched his tent among us.” [Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi* (On Christian Hope), 49]*

How do we navigate by the Star of Hope? Perhaps we can find a parallel to our own life’s journeys in Mary and Joseph’s from Nazareth to Bethlehem.

We all start at our own Nazareths, with our small-town mentalities, our reputations (if any) preceding us, and voices that ring in the ears of our hearts: “Can anything good come out of there?” (John 1:46) But, like Mary and Joseph who were summoned to the Roman census, we are similarly compelled by the world – students, parents, peers, civil authorities - to stand up and be counted.

Mary and Joseph probably bypassed the shorter way through Samaria, preferring the safer and friendlier but longer and harder way along the Jordan River valley and then up from Jericho, 250m below sea level, to Jerusalem, at an elevation of 750m, and thence on to Bethlehem. It was amazing that Mary – no doubt with backache, bladder discomfort and fitful sleep, swollen feet and general fatigue, like any ordinary woman in the last month of pregnancy – made it in one piece over that rugged terrain five days and 130km later.

We too, find the journey of life difficult, negotiating twists and turns, ups and downs, even as we carry the burden of young peoples’ lives physically and emotionally. Even if we know how to travel smart, eschewing the wide and broad way that leads to destruction, and choosing the long, steep and narrow path through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, we seem to end up being rejected and dejected. Even Mary must have thought that God’s timing could have been better. Instead of giving birth in a clean, warm home with a midwife and women friends in attendance, she shared her delivery room with animals, their droppings and their drool. And poor Joseph – imagine him present at Jesus’ birth, holding Mary’s hand as she laboured, catching the little Christ-child in his arms as he emerged, then cutting the umbilical cord,

wrapping him in swaddling clothes and afterwards, cleaning up the mess and sterilising the manger – how much water he must have carried and boiled! Our loved ones suffer with us too.

Yet, as a fellow pilgrim wrote: “Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts.” (Romans 5:3-5). True love became incarnate that holy night.

### **Standing Before The Gate Of Heaven And Hope**

*“The present, even if it is arduous, can be lived and accepted if it leads towards a goal, if we can be sure of this goal, and if this goal is great enough to justify the effort of the journey.” [Pope Benedict XVI, **Spe Salvi** 1]*

In another age, another pilgrim had written: “I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God. And *now* the Lord says, who formed me in the womb to be his servant, ‘It is too light a thing that you should be my servant... I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” (Isaiah 49:4-6)



The Magi followed a star, but Mary was the Star of Hope herself. On Christmas night, “hope came into the world.... He comes into the world and gives us the strength to walk with him: God walks with us in Jesus, and walking with Him toward the fullness of life gives us the strength to dwell in the present in a new way, albeit arduous. Thus for a Christian, to hope means the certainty of being on a journey with Christ toward the Father who awaits us. Hope is never still; hope is always journeying, and it makes us journey. This hope, which the Child of Bethlehem gives us, offers a destination, a sure, ongoing goal, the salvation of mankind, blessedness to those who trust in a merciful God.” (Pope Francis, General Audience, 21 Dec 2016)

Mary's journey did not stop at Bethlehem. It continued to Egypt, back to Nazareth, to Jerusalem, Calvary, Ephesus and beyond into eternity, with Christ close to her as always. Mary knows full well the perils of our earthly journey and this is why the Church sings ***Alma Redemptoris Mater*** in the season of Advent as we await our Lord's Incarnation. The first few lines, translated from Latin, reads:

*"O loving Mother of our Redeemer, **Gate of Heaven, Star of the Sea,**  
Hasten to aid thy fallen people who strive to rise once more..."*

There is a door in one corner of CHIJMES in Singapore where, in the not-too-distant past, unwanted infants were left abandoned at the doorstep of the former Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus in Victoria Street. It is plain, small and inconspicuous, but all children who crossed its threshold were reborn into a new life. It was called the Gate of Hope.



Just as plain, small and inconspicuous as that little door, Mary was chosen to be the Gate and Mother of Hope. Through her "yes" that opened the door of our world to Christ, we sinners who have fallen short of His glory are reborn through Him into a new life and another chance at being the stars of Bethlehem - to those in our homes, schools, and parishes - that God created us to be.

As we begin our journey towards Christmas with the lighting of the Candle of Hope on our Advent wreaths, let us pray that we will always shine in the world like bright stars because we are joyfully offering it the Word of Life (Philippians 2:16). And Hope does not disappoint because the Word has promised to be with us till the end of time.

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