

## BLUE CHRISTMAS

### Mary's Story

Dear one, the mornings were the worst part.

There was the sickness, of course, sickness without any of your fancy remedies - no patches or pills.

But worse than the nausea was the moment of waking.

Waking from a dream and waking into your world and that sinking feeling that something is terribly wrong. And then you remember what. And then you are you again. And you have lost again.

I could never reach "a state of loss."

I could never even "go through loss."

I could never get past the *losing*.

I lost it all again every morning?

I lost my relationships all throughout the day  
long after he left me.

I lost it every time i wanted to share something with him and couldn't -  
every time i found something he forgot to take with -  
I lost him again.

I lost my dignity over and over again after I was exposed

I lost it every time I was afraid to do a normal thing  
like haggle for fish

or feed the donkeys

at least, those were *my* normal things

two thousand years ago

in Nazareth.

I'm Mary, by the way.

And dear one,

I write to you across the years.

May these words find their way into your ears  
because I can't let you skim my story too fast.

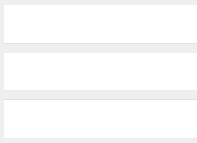
You must imagine inside the commas, periods, and cracks;

yes, I was chosen, favored and blessed

but before I gave birth to the light of the world,

I knew great darkness.

Angels don't offer many details, as it turns out.



Our conversation would return to me in sound bytes –

“Fear not”

“Highly favored”

*Me!*

Poor but favored somehow

“Pregnant”

*Me*

Unwed but pregnant somehow

Son of the Most High

A child of God

By the Holy spirit

Elizabeth, too

My aunt who always wore the same ruby necklace,

my wrinkly old aunt six months pregnant -

for nothing is impossible with God.

Gabriel, the angel, made me feel like I belonged to a different world. Where different things were possible. Where hope was alive. Where I wasn't alone. I wanted to stay in his world of wonder but the next morning-

I was very much still here.

And I was very much-

“Mary, what's wrong with you? Something upset your stomach?”

I was very much pregnant.

It was *this* world where my story would unfold,

*this* town I would have to navigate,

*their* rules I would be judged by,

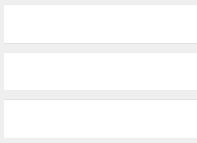
*this* Joseph I would have to explain myself to.

It was only *through* pain that I would get to the miracle.

I suppose I thought that if God was really in this – was in me! – that I would have supernatural power to sort of, you know, straighten the path ahead.

But when I told Joseph my news,

*our* news



that our child was actually God's child and He was going to be the Savior of the world and his kingdom would never end, there was nothing but –

And then:

"I'll see that our divorce is quiet."

Now, remember – I didn't know the end of my story. You never do.  
So, meet me here, in the middle.  
In the unknown  
and the alone  
of your life in collapse.

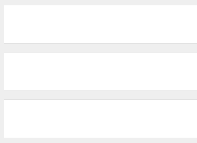
Did I say it wrong?

"Joseph, don't freak out but I'm pregnant and I know it's not yours but it's actually the Holy Spirit—" I mean, it's tough.  
It's a tough line to deliver.  
Should have been more clear –  
And yet *I'm* not clear what is happening to me!

Where are the angels when you need them?

Gabriel, come back!  
I need you to talk to my fiancé-  
who's no longer  
my fiancé.  
Explain it to him!  
Explain it to me, again?

I fantasize how much of the world's hurt would be erased if everything could only be explained.  
Answers end agony, right?  
It always feels like they will.  
Still, you hope your partner – your person-  
will offer you trust.



Engagements and weddings come with so many rituals and dollars and preparation and decisions and support and community and I hear weddings have gotten even like

a little *more* intense since my time

but no one's there when you go from a "we" to a "me."

No one teaches you how to move in the other direction.

There are no ceremonies, your mom's friends don't come with cupcakes.

I was left alone to detangle our memories and our plans.

A quiet divorce – I tell you what – there has never been such a thing

in ancient Jerusalem

or in Facebook's America.

A quiet divorce –

Can he manage that?

He must.

Because while you might face

an empty chair at your table,

the missing TV he insisted on taking,

the holes in your photographs,

the public explanations demanded by your online presence,

impossible conversations with kids and family who just "never saw that side of him"

and court

and custody

and assets

and money

and a love affair reduced to numbers and signatures,

you might face that in your world

and it's unspeakable

but in my world

well in my world

just so you know

in my world

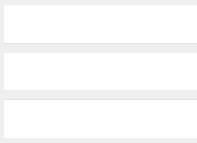
I should be stoned.

That is the punishment bestowed upon an unwed pregnant woman who is deemed unfaithful to her betrothed.

When he says "Let's keep it quiet,"

He means he'll write the necessary legal things on the necessary legal papers

so that our town won't kill me.



Does he have the power to protect me?

He's as poor as us  
No influence or gold  
No strings he can pull  
What if he-  
What if it gets out?

How will this plan work?  
If he says this child is his  
I'm still a damaged woman to give birth before I wed  
And if we still separate  
won't folks assume someone else was in my bed?

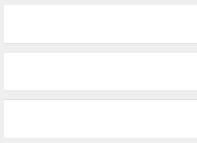
I have to get out.  
I have to get out before I start to show.

To the market  
No  
To find mother  
No  
Gosh  
I know what she'll say  
How do you explain this to your mother?  
How do you explain this to anyone?!  
Joseph was my safe place  
What do you do when you're locked out of your safe place?  
Where do you go?

Dear one, I pray you will never understand this feeling-  
but I felt trapped in my home  
quarantined inside my own compound.  
Can you possibly imagine that?

Nothing stays quiet in Nazareth.

"Mary!"  
"I heard the news."  
"Who's the father?"  
"The Son of God? Aren't you fancy?"  
"Hey Mary, I need to speak with an angel. Can you hook me up?"



Anyone who's ever been canceled knows it isn't the trolls that get at you so much as your friends.

"You should be so lucky to have a man like Joseph. How could you mess this up?"

"Why can't you just tell me the truth?"

"You've brought shame on our house."

"We're just so disappointed in you."

"I feel like I don't know you anymore."

Dear one – they drowned out my memory of the angel's voice.

I used to replay his words over and over in my head-

*you have found favor with God*

but I could no longer believe them

and what good is favor with God if everyone else hates you?

What good is favor that doesn't come with favorable circumstances?

What does it mean and why does it matter?

Turns out nothing matters.

I get to be dramatic. I'm 12 to 15 years old. Check your sources.

But seriously!

It doesn't matter that I've tried to be good

I'm not perfect, but I mean I really tried to be generally as good as I could

I always baked extra bread for my friends

helped my mother and sat with my father

and for what?

It doesn't matter how well I loved Joseph

or how well I listened

or how brave I was when a literal angel came to my literal room

-it all fell apart!

Dear one, nothing's guaranteed in this world except suffering.

There's only surviving.

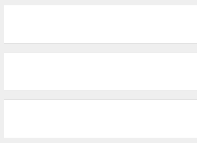
And why?

What's the point?

What's the point?

What if there's no point?

A heart beats inside me in spite of me.



I disappear into sleep, silence, and sugar.

Winter turns to spring.

My brother finds a wife.

My mother learns the lyre.

Time doesn't wait for me.

I am like a statue, frozen, except for my stomach,  
stretching to make room  
for something sacred  
even still

Like I said – the mornings were the worst.

How do you get up for your life when you don't want to get on with your life?

Dear one, have you ever stopped recognizing yourself?

I used to be the first one up, first to the sea, first to the chores, first to greet the crusty neighbor and first to welcome my family to a new day.

But shame sits on you like a bag of sand.

Your foggy, fractured life pulls into focus

and there's not a single convincing, compelling reason to welcome another day of it.

Well, except for whatever piece of God threatens to be born in you.

And the fact that you can't puke lying down.

"Morning, Mary."

"Hey there – how are you – good to see ya – Oh, sorry, I'll get out of your way."

When people got over the initial shock,  
and we sailed across the sea of "I'm sorry's and prayers and heart emoji's"  
when my body proved to be irrefutably pregnant with *someone's* child,  
we entered a new phase.

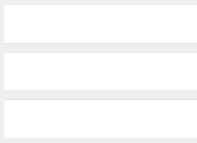
A worse phase.

Where no one knew what to say.

Not even my mother,

my brother,

the few friends I had left.



Divorce was a dirty word.  
They danced around me like a merry-go-round-  
circling me with the corner of their eye  
to see if my sadness was over yet  
waiting for me to dictate where conversation goes next.

“Mary, we thought maybe we’d move your bedroom to the back room now that...  
well now that... you know... you may be here for a while ... and or who knows, I mean  
who knows, anyway, how about a chair? Sit there.”

You can say it!  
You don’t have to hide from it.  
It’s not like I’ve forgotten about it!  
In fact it’s sitting on me like a bag of sand, so  
honestly I would feel *less* crazy  
if you would say to me,  
“Hey, that sand bag looks heavy,  
wanna talk about it?”

How do you help people stop pretending around you?  
How do you invite them to ask you?  
To see you,  
let your grief breathe  
and welcome all of you into the room.

On the cloudy Tuesday when the visitor arrives, I go to the back of the house.

The only thing worse than seeing people you know is seeing people you don’t.  
I could not rise up to the surface for small talk.  
I sat still in the shadow.

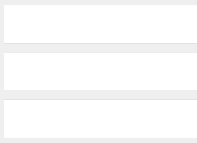
“I bring word from your sister, Elizabeth in Ein Karem. She wants you to know she is  
with child.”

My mom laughed.

“Elizabeth? That must be someone else – my sister, Elizabeth is turning 60 years old.”

“She told me you would say that and so she sent me with this –“





“Her necklace. How can this be?”

Sometimes in the middle of the fog,  
a hand pierces through.  
A door cracks open.  
A whistle signals.  
An invitation, addressed to you.

The fog doesn't lift. And it's still so hard to move.  
But, dear one, in these moments, you must.

“Mary, what are you doing?”

I'm going to see Aunt Elizabeth!

“It's a three-day journey!”

Well, then I'd best begin it!

Not sure why I was going or  
what I was expecting to find,  
perhaps a change of scenery  
I hear that can help.  
An escape  
maybe she has a hammock  
or Hulu  
or at least  
some plans to make the days go by.

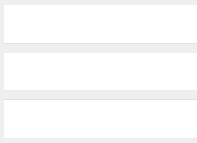
But the angel had mentioned her name  
and while her situation was not exactly the same-

“Mary! Would you look at me? Look at you!”

I still thought it might be good if I came.

“Oh, Aunt Elizabeth, it's a rather impossible thing!  
“I've got one of those myself.”

“I want to know everything. But first, how about some tea?”



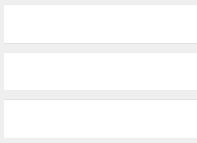
Dear one, they recorded most of what came next.  
Our days together, the songs we sang.  
I did! I sang. Can you believe it?  
Elizabeth sang to me every day,  
she sang for me, most days.  
And then one day I hummed.  
And then one day I sung.  
I was still scared. And still sad. And I sang.

There can be so much at once.

They recorded my song and they recorded Gabriel's next appearance  
(a few months late, if you ask me!)  
how he spoke to Joseph  
and how Joseph returned to me  
and they recorded our journey to Bethlehem  
our search for a bed,  
our escape from an evil king-  
it never got easy.  
They recorded my child's arrival  
and the way the world welcomed Him  
and also threatened Him,  
and therefore, the way we needed men and women to say yes to Him  
inside them  
again and again.

Maybe it does matter.  
Extra bread and kind aunts.  
Maybe there is a point,  
you just don't get there in a straight line.

They wrote our story down,  
well as much as they could,  
but dear one, when you read it  
how they wrote it  
my middle  
my whole mess in between  
miracle announced  
and miracle fulfilled  
it reads so darn quick on the page  
but oh, it did not feel temporary when I was trapped there.



You couldn't skim it when you were stuck in it.

You met me in my middle  
and undoubtedly, I'm meeting you in yours.  
It isn't the end.  
That's not how middles work.  
But if you're inside the impossible,  
in the fog,  
and under the sand-  
something is taking shape.

Hope is with you, whether or not you can be with it.  
Like a song you can't sing yet  
keeping you company  
for as long as this lasts.