

“We usually watch the Christmas story unfold from the outside looking in, as we see Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, and then the wise men all arrive in Bethlehem. But what would it have looked like to be on the inside? Katy Morgan’s *The Promise and the Light* helps young readers imagine what it might have felt like for Mary and Joseph. And it leaves us hoping there will be a sequel describing what happened next!”

SINCLAIR FERGUSON, Author,
The Dawn of Redeeming Grace

“Fed up with school nativities and sentimental Christmas cards? Then *The Promise and the Light* is for you. It’s a fantastic retelling of the Christmas story from the perspective of those who witnessed it first-hand. It’s historically informed and beautifully reimagined. The result is an engrossing tale through which the message of Jesus shines.”

TIM CHESTER, Crosslands Training;
Author, *Enjoying God*

“Employing the voices of Mary, Joseph and Zechariah, Katy Morgan creates a lovely personal retelling of the Christmas narrative, carefully evoking the time and the place, and tying all that happens into God’s big story. Wonderful!”

BOB HARTMAN, Bestselling Author

“As the mom of young readers, I’m always looking for books that stir their imagination while also pointing them to the Scriptures. This is such a book! *The Promise and the Light* is a wonderful retelling of the Christmas story through the eyes of the biblical characters. If you’re looking for a family read-aloud this Christmas, or for a book for your kids to read for themselves, this book captures the wonder of Christmas while retaining the power of the biblical narrative.”

COURTNEY REISSIG, Managing Director,
Risen Motherhood

“I can’t wait to read this book aloud with my kids this Advent. As a dad, I love the engaging narrative, alternating perspectives, and fleshing-out of Christmas truths to provoke curiosity. As a pastor, I love the notes in the back that give the bones of biblical truth and historical facts that give substance to the project. How critical, in a world of fairy tales, with many good ones on our shelves, that we drive home for our kids that *this* story is not make-believe. Katy unveils the truth and beauty of Christmas—both for our kids and for their parents.”

DAVID MATHIS, Executive Editor, desiringGod.org;
Author, *The Christmas We Didn’t Expect*

“Fire your imagination with this story full of wonder, amazement, confusion and shock as you look through the eyes of Mary, Joseph and Zechariah at the first Christmas.”

ED DREW, Director, Faith in Kids;
Author, *The Adventure of Christmas*



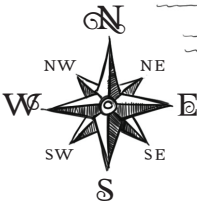
THE
PPROMISE
AND THE
LLIGHT

A CHRISTMAS RETELLING

KATY MORGAN

the**good**book
COMPANY

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MEDITERRANEAN SEA

GALILEE

SEPPHORIS

NAZARETH

RIVER JORDAN

SAMARIA

JERUSALEM

BETHLEHEM

JUDEA

HEBRON

DEAD SEA

EGYPT

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PROLOGUE

Into the Darkness

The land was burning. Every door had been battered down, every field and farm had been trampled: the vines uprooted, the crops stripped from their furrows. The streets in the towns echoed with the laughter of enemy soldiers and the wails of the conquered.

Israel had been a land of promise, once. The Israelites had been led there by their God. They had settled, grown crops, raised children, fought wars, won victories... They had been a mighty nation, a contented people. But now blood seeped through the ground and fire crackled in the air. Thousands were led away as captives. All that remained was distress and fearful gloom.

And yet...

Into the darkness came—not light, no, not yet. But a promise. It came on the lips of a messenger from God, a man named Isaiah, who had said,

“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness, a light has dawned.”

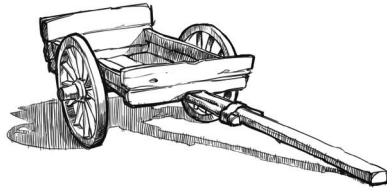
Those who heard it lifted up their eyes in hope—and wondered when the words would come true.

Years passed. Captivity ended. The people straggled back to their fields and farms, rebuilt their towns and cities, grew crops, raised children. They fought wars, too, but they lost them. They praised God, but he seemed far away. The streets still resounded with cruel laughter. The darkness remained.

The years became centuries.

Still they waited. Not all of them, no, but some. There had been a promise, and it gave hope to those who remembered it.

There was still so much darkness. But one day... one day, the promise said, there would be light.



CHAPTER 1

The First Moment of the Rest of My Life

Joseph

“Let’s go, then,” said my brother Josiah as he stowed his tools in the back of the cart. He was scowling impatiently because our father was just sitting there, not moving, not getting ready to head back to Nazareth where we lived, but reminiscing about Bethlehem instead.

“A place to be proud of,” he was saying, all misty-eyed. “The city of our ancestors since all the way back before the time of captivity—back even before the time of kings...” He shook his head. “Perhaps I should never have left.”

Josiah was glaring at me. Which I suppose was fair enough. It was my fault: I was the one who’d brought up the topic of Bethlehem. I was curious because I’d never

been there—and because now it sounded like, before the year was out, I would finally get the chance.

I'd heard the news a few hours before. I was high up on the scaffolding of the half-built bathhouse we were working on, and there was a group of old women talking below. I wasn't paying any attention to them until they all spoke the same word at once.

"Census!"

This sounded interesting. Carefully, slowly, I put down my tools, wincing as the hammer clunked against the planks. But the women below showed no sign of having heard. I leaned out towards them.

It was obvious which of them had brought the news; even from above I could see the gleam of triumph in her eye at being the first to know. "My great-nephew's wife's cousin's friend is high up in the army and he says they're already preparing for it. The Emperor wants to know who is in his empire—a list of names and numbers from every province."

"So he can take more tax off us, I suppose," answered one of the others, and they all muttered angrily.

"But when will this census be, my dear?" asked another. I watched the gleam fade from the first woman's face: she didn't know. "I expect they'll announce it soon," she said, then brightened: "Very soon, if they're making preparations already."

"It'll be chaos," said the woman who had complained about tax. "Hardly anyone still lives in the places their

families come from these days. And they'll all have to go back." She seemed rather pleased about this.

Go back to where our families came from! If that was true, it meant we'd have to travel to Bethlehem, my parents and brother and I. All the rest of our family was there—and always had been, for generations, right back to King David himself. I felt excitement rising in me.

But the old women were murmuring again. I knelt down and leaned a bit further out, trying to hear. Why had they dropped their voices? What else were they saying? If I could just get a little closer—and a little bit more—

"Aaargh!" I flailed in the air, losing my balance for a moment, my hands scrabbling to find something to hold onto. Feeling the roughness of wood, I gripped the scaffolding planks with relief and scuffled backwards, breathing heavily.

"That was close." I peered over the edge again. Every one of the old women was fixing me with an angry stare.

"Eavesdropping, boy?"

"No!" I shouted, too loudly, picking up my hammer and waving it at them. "Nearly dropped this! Not eavesdropping! Have a good day, ladies!"

They tutted and moved away. I went back to work. But I was thinking about Bethlehem all the rest of that day.

I'd never been to Bethlehem. I had never travelled anywhere much, really—except to Sepphoris, where we went

every day, rattling back and forth in our donkey-cart. We were carpenters, and Sepphoris was a proper town with plenty of building work to be had, not like Nazareth where no one could afford to pay you much for anything. So my father said it was worth the journey. But that was the furthest I ever really had cause to go. Bethlehem seemed almost as far away as the stars.

“I didn’t know what I was losing when I left,” my father said, still sitting on the donkey-cart and not going anywhere. “Of course, I gained wonderful things... your mother, and the two of you... but I should have taken you back there. We mustn’t forget where we come from.”

Josiah coughed pointedly, prodding me in the back. He nodded towards Boaz, the donkey, who was standing solidly in front of us. I took the hint: pulling the stick gently out of my father’s hand, I struck Boaz on the rump to get him going. Josiah grunted in satisfaction and settled himself down in the back of the cart.

“Do you know why I called that donkey Boaz?” said my father suddenly.

“Yes, Ba—” I said, but it was too late to stop him.

“Not long before our ancestor David was born, the people had no king,” he began. “The Lord God raised up leaders here and there, but everyone did whatever they pleased. There was murder, violence—everything was rotten—people stealing from each other, taking advantage of each other, acting with great cruelty—”

“Nothing like today, then,” cut in Josiah drily.

My father ignored him. “But in Bethlehem there lived a man of strength and justice. Boaz.”

“The great-grandfather of King David,” I said.

“A man,” Ba went on, “who, when he saw a woman in need, did everything he could to help and protect her.”

We all knew the story. He was talking about Ruth: a foreign woman, not one of God’s people, who came to Bethlehem poor and almost completely friendless. Boaz helped her, and in the end he married her.

“Boaz and Ruth had a son, Obed,” my father continued, while Josiah groaned in irritation behind us, “and their son had a son, and he had a son—well, he had many sons, but the most important was David, who became our people’s greatest king.”

“We know,” said Josiah in a flat voice.

My mother’s name was Ruth, too. When Ba first called the donkey Boaz, she had hit him around the head with a cooking pot and told him she’d never felt more insulted. But the name stuck even so. Boaz the donkey was definitely strong, although I’m not sure he was a fine example of virtue and justice. In fact, he was quite lazy.

I raised my stick to tap him across the hindquarters again and he clattered forward reluctantly.

Ba turned to me. “Joseph, it’s time you thought about having sons yourself.”

“Wha—?” I almost dropped the stick.

“I mean it,” my father said. “You’re old enough to get married now. I’d like some grandchildren. Some little Davids running around.”

Josiah sniggered.

“After all,” said Ba, “one day a descendant of King David’s will sit on the throne again. Who knows which descendant that’ll be?”

My brother spluttered in amazement. “What are you hoping for—that King Herod will adopt one of your *little Davids* and make him the next king?” He laughed scornfully. “Maybe if Joseph has a particularly handsome little son, the Roman Emperor himself will make him his heir.”

“Well, of course not—”

“I think we should choose our own king, not sit around waiting for one to appear,” declared Josiah. He gazed at the hills ahead of us. Beyond them, I knew, his mind’s eye saw Jerusalem, the great city far away in the south.

“That’s rebel talk,” answered my father sharply. “The king is Herod. And he pays your wages.”

Josiah didn’t reply. Ba turned back to me. “Is there no one you’ve thought of?” he asked. “No one you like?”

I could feel my face burning with embarrassment. Of course there was. Of course there was only one person I could ever think of marrying. But I’d never confessed it to anyone.

I took a deep breath. Now was the moment. The first moment of the rest of my life.

“Yes,” I said. “I know who I want to marry.”

And when I heard what the old women were gossiping about the next day, it was the perfect excuse to go and see her.