**Alsager to Bethlehem: Will you journey with Jesus this Christmas?**

**The Posada Figures**

This Christmas our Mary, Joseph, Jesus and sheep figures are going to be popping up in front gardens all over Alsager, so we invite you to keep an eye out for them. We’re using these figures to help us think about the long journey taken by Mary and Joseph that very first Christmas from Nazareth to Bethlehem - and the even longer journey Jesus made from heaven to earth to be born as one of us.

This journey has been celebrated for many centuries in Latin American countries with the traditional festival of ‘Las Posadas’ (meaning inn or shelter). Borrowing that idea, we’ve using our Posada figures in Alsager to draw us into the experience and think about what it felt like to receive the news the angel Gabriel brought to Mary, to pack up belongings and walk for days, to be turned away with the baby due any time because there was no room; so let’s begin at the beginning…

Mary and Joseph lived in the Middle-East around 0BC. Mary was a young Jewish woman from a small village called Nazareth. Mary, who was probably aged around 15, was engaged to be married to the carpenter Joseph when she was told by the angel Gabriel that she was going to become pregnant by the Holy Spirit. This was quite a shock! The angel said that the baby would be a boy and he was to be called Jesus, because he would rescue us and become the Saviour of the world.

Joseph needed some persuading – by another angel – that Mary had not been unfaithful to him, but he agreed to marry Mary and look after the baby as if he was his own. You can read these stories in the bible in **Luke 1 v 26 – 38** and **Matthew 1 v 18 – 25.**

At the time Israel was occupied by the Romans and when Mary’s pregnancy was well advanced, they had to travel to the city of Joseph’s ancestors, Bethlehem, so they could be counted in a census. The journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem was about 70 miles as the crow flies, but to avoid hilly and dangerous routes, they probably travelled between 80 – 90 miles during the course of a week or so.

The bible does not tell us how they travelled – as a poor family they might not have been able to afford a donkey. There were many other travellers on the same road, so perhaps Mary was able to ride for part of the journey at least on a borrowed donkey or in a cart. We do not know exactly when they arrived in Bethlehem or how long before the baby was born, but we do know there was no room or them at the inn. The word “inn” can mean a lodging house or a guest room. Tradition tells us they found shelter where the animals were kept, probably a cave under a house. It was in these difficult surroundings Mary gave birth to her baby. Again, we do not know whether she had help, we just know that when Jesus was born they wrapped him in swaddling clothes and in place of a crib they laid him in a feeding trough – a manger. You can read about this, and the visit from the shepherds in **Luke 2 v 1 – 20**.

We hope you enjoy seeing our Posada figures around and about, and as we journey together towards Christmas, perhaps we can spare a thought for Mary and Joseph on their journey. On Christmas Day, think of the newborn child who, although he had such a strange and humble beginning, would grow up to be probably the most influential man who has ever lived. And Christians believe that he was actually God.

Some questions you might like to think about after you’ve read the Christmas story

* Do you like going on long journeys?
* What do you think Mary and Joseph talked about as they walked?
* How do you think they felt arriving in Bethlehem and there was no room for them?
* How would you react arriving somewhere new and there was nowhere for you to stay?
* What makes their journey a special one?
* Does their story make you want to live differently?

**Posada Prayer**

O God,

who made yourself known as a child,

born in poverty a long way from home,

we ask your blessing upon the Posada journey of Mary and Joseph among us this year.

As we journey with them towards Bethlehem,

may these figures play their part in opening our hearts to each other and to you,

to bring your love, your hope, your peace

to our community this Christmas-time.

Amen.

**How can I find out more about journeying with Jesus?**

Jesus isn’t just for Christmas, he’s for each and every day!

Christians believe that his birth at Bethlehem was part of God’s plan to rescue us from the mess we get ourselves into, and restore us into the family of God.

And that plan is for every one of us regardless of age, background or gender.

We have regular courses for people who are exploring faith and would like to know more.

If you’d like to find out details, or if you want to us phone for a chat about faith do get in touch through this website.

