

“I Hope He is the One” by David W. Lloyd

**12/24/2006 by David W. Lloyd: I
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A Sermon by David W. Lloyd
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I Hope He is the One

Here is some hay and fresh water for you, donkey. Eat it and rest for another few days, and then we will head home to Nazareth. You deserve a few days of rest for carrying her here safely, especially in her condition. Did you know she was pregnant? I think that the baby will come tonight. I don't know where we will put him – maybe in your manger, eh? Then you will have to eat hay off the ground for a few days. Maybe she will be able to walk more on the way home, but maybe not.

I do not know why I am talking to you. Maybe it is because you have such big ears. Moreover, there is no one else I can talk to about it. I cannot even talk to her about some of it. It is so confusing and there is so much that I do not understand. Nonetheless, I know that she is right, that somehow it is all

about love – our love for each other, for God, her love for this child that will come any night now, God's love for the two of us, and even God's love for more people than just the two of us.

I do not know when I first became aware of her. Of course, I would see her at the well or helping her mother do laundry or shopping on market days, but she was just one of the Nazareth girls. Then one day I noticed that she was no longer a girl, but a woman. I knew she was from a good family – her family comes from a line of priests that go way back. However, what I really noticed was that she was serious and quiet, and she looked beautiful to me, as if she was in love. Who was she in love with? I had not heard anything that even hinted that she had eyes for anyone. So one day I dared to talk to her. She responded politely enough – I could tell she was raised well – but she did not flirt or talk as if she considered me as a potential suitor. Instead, she listened quietly to what I said as if she was listening for else, something I had not said and she talked quietly about ordinary things with a little hesitation, as if waiting for someone else to join in. It was odd, as if she was used to hearing heavenly voices in all her ordinary conversations. I thought, she talks to God and listens to God. Then, out of nowhere the thought suddenly came to me – she talked to God as if she was in love with God – and I knew right away that it was true. She was in love with God! Another thought suddenly came to me: that I loved her.

Well, I did not know what to think or what to do then. Was she so in love with God that she would never marry? On the other hand, would she marry, but only a priest or rabbi? Or would she consider me, a worker, as a potential husband? We talked most days, but I still did not know, and I had to know if there was any hope for me. So finally, I asked my father to

ask her father to marry her, and the answer came back, "yes!"

For a month, it was wonderful! Just to see her, talk to her, plan our wedding day. Then one day she seemed reluctant to talk to me; I could see something strange in her eyes: confusion, but something else too, something like excitement. I could not understand it. Had I done something to make her believe I did not love her? Worse, did she have second thoughts about whether I was suitable? Then she went away for three months to Judea, to visit a kinswoman, her father said.

When she returned she avoided me, and I could see in her eyes that same excited look, but the confusion seemed to be replaced by sadness. I could not take this rejection. The woman I loved, and was going to marry, no longer wanted to be with me. Finally, I said to her, "Come, Miriam, we must talk. This is driving me insane. Have I done something to displease you? Do you no longer want to marry me? Tell me." She agreed to talk, and we sat quietly under the sycamore tree at the edge of Nazareth so that people could see that we were behaving properly but they could not hear us. Then, she began.

She said that she loved me and would always love me, as she loved God – fully, completely, with no reservations. She said that she still wanted to marry me. Then she started to cry. She took my hand and told me that she was a virgin; she had never been physically close to a man in the way that leads to having intercourse. I knew that, of course, it is what I would have expected of a girl of her family, but I was shocked to hear her speak of it to a man. Then she told me that she was pregnant. I tell you, donkey, it was a knife into my heart. I could not breathe. I jumped back and she cried harder. I am sure some people saw this.

She pleaded that I must listen to her, that it was not what I thought. Then through her tears, she told me this unbelievable story: how an angel had come from God, saying "Greetings, special one. The God of Israel is with you. You will conceive and bear a son and to name him Yeshua. This child will become known as the "Son of the Most High" and will become king of Israel and will rule forever." She claimed that she told the angel she was a virgin, but the angel just said that the Holy Spirit would come over her and she would become pregnant, and that is why the child would be called holy, the Son of God. She said she did not believe it, but the angel seemed to read her thoughts and told her that her kinswoman Elizabeth, who had prayed for a child for so many years and was too old to bear a child, was now six months pregnant. She said the angel looked right into her eyes and said, "The promises of the God of Israel are always true and never fail." She looked at me, and in that way she had of expressing deeper things, she said, "I told the angel, 'Hineini, here I am, the Lord's servant. Let God's will be done as you have said.'" She said she thought it was all a dream, even though she had not been asleep. Then she received news that Elizabeth was indeed nearly six months pregnant and so she had gone to see for herself.

She said that the moment she arrived, the baby moved in Elizabeth's womb and both of them cried for joy. She told me that she suddenly sang praises. She did not even think of them herself, that God gave her these words:

"My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me- holy is his name.

His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.

He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.

He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers."

Why did these words come to her? What does this mean? She does not know, nor do I. It makes no sense. Donkey, I look around and I do not see the proud being scattered, or rulers being brought down from their thrones. I do not see the humble lifted up. I do not see the hungry fed and the rich sent away empty. No, what I see is Herod, the one they call the Great, building all his building projects around the country to impress the Romans and Greeks, and ready to kill anyone – man, woman, or child – that he suspects will be a threat to him. When he dies, another king will take his place. There is always someone ready to be king, to rule over others. Moreover, there is this foreigner, a Roman whom Caesar appointed, with all Rome's legions supporting him, ready to crucify thousands at even the smallest hint of unrest. I see tax collectors grown wealthy from squeezing another coin from me, and priests at the Temple who have never missed a meal. The poor, we will always have them with us. God is helping Israel? Now?

I was thinking on this when Miriam continued, sobbing now. She said that months had gone by and she did not have her monthly issue and then yesterday morning she felt sick in her stomach when she awoke, and she knew it was true. She too will have a child, as the angel foretold.

Then I started crying, too, but in tears of rage and shame. I could not believe such a story. No one could. I stalked off, leaving her crying alone there. I am sure that people saw it and gossiped that we quarreled. For a week, I avoided all contact with her. How could I look at her and not hate her for her deception? I looked at every man in Nazareth, wondering if he was the one. I even looked at the two Roman soldiers who come through every week, wondering. If I knew who it was, I would have killed him. I could not eat, I could not work, I could not sleep. How could she lie to me? She had looked so innocent and to be so devoted to God. She had wronged me, but I could not bring myself to tell anyone. I still have not told anyone. If they knew, people would stone her to death for adultery, as a lesson to every woman in Nazareth. I know that the hypocrites here, the ones who claim to obey the Torah but who sin against God and against their fellows, would be the first to pick up a stone. So finally I thought I would quietly end the betrothal, and let her go live somewhere else, maybe Jerusalem or maybe in one of the Greek cities.

Then I had a dream, in which an angel appeared and confirmed what Miriam had told me, almost word for word. I tell you, donkey, I woke up not knowing what to do: even though she swore it and the angel in my dream said it, I was not sure I believed that she got pregnant by God without a man. How could we live down the disgrace in this small town when people

started seeing her swell with child? Nevertheless, I love her. I did not know if somehow she was telling the truth, but I love her and wanted to believe her. Then I thought, the rabbis have told me many times about the strange ways of God, how He opens the wombs of aged women; how He helped our ancestors escape from Pharaoh, how He kept the lights burning during the first Hanukkah. Donkey, I am ashamed to say that it was not until then that I realized how I had just been thinking of myself. How hard this must be for her! She could not tell her parents or her friends. She is risking death and has trusted me with her secret because she loves me. I realized the sins of my pride and my anger may have been greater than her sin, if indeed she had sinned. Therefore, I went to her home, and in tears asked her to come live with me as husband and wife. She came; I am not sure why she forgave me, although she said it is because she loves me the way God loves all of us.

At first, we did not sleep together as man and wife because I listened to the dream and then she became so pregnant we could not sleep together. She looks more beautiful every day to me, but there has been lots of gossip, as I knew there would be. One of my friends came up to me and winked, and said, "Couldn't wait, eh, Yosef? Is she as good in bed as she is beautiful?" I hit him, and told him never to say this to me or to her again. She knows that I have gotten all these comments ever since she began showing, but she says nothing, only, "Remember, Yosef, God will forgive them the way I forgave you, because God loves all of us. She says nothing about what she must endure when she hears the voices behind her back, whether she forgives them, but I think she was relieved when we finally left Nazareth to come here.

It took us a week to get here, as you know, donkey. Surely, you heard us talking, wondering about this strange set of

events. She tells me repeatedly that this child will be the one. This child will be the instrument of God. This child will bring us hope. This child will make the prophecy come true. I look at her, donkey, and I wonder whether she knows it is true, or whether she is just hoping it is true. Each time she says it, her face takes on a special radiance and I see that she is in love with God again and she is the girl I fell in love with all over again. She tells me, "Yosef, this child is God's gift to us, to help us love each other more deeply and to love God more deeply, through all the disappointment, through all the sorrow, through all the anger. This child is a gift of God's love, and not just to us, but to all who believe in the Holy One of Israel."

You know, donkey, sometimes I think she is right. I know that she knows more about God than I do. For example, just the other day we were talking about being faithful to God and I asked her if she kept the commandments, and she replied, "Yes, both of them." I said, "Both? I thought there were 10 of them, or more than 600." She said, "They come down to two: to love the Lord our God with all your mind, and soul, and strength, and to love our neighbor as yourself." We were passing through Samaria then, and I said, "Are these my neighbors?" She thought for a moment and then said, "Yosef, if you fell and injured yourself now and one of them came to help us, wouldn't you think he was acting neighborly?" Well, I had to stop and think about it because the idea had never occurred to me that a Samaritan would help a Jew. She had a questioning look but she was smiling at me, and I thought, "She will teach the boy to be kind to strangers."

On our journey here, we saw a farmer sowing out in his field. As usual, most of the seed fell on good ground, but some fell on the path and some fell on rocky ground and some fell in

weeds. She said, "That farmer sows the way God loves us – generously, knowing that some of his love will not take root, but that most of his love will find welcome in our hearts." I thought, "She is right, she knows how God loves and she will help the child develop fertile soil for love in his heart."

Today I was registered for the tax so we are free to go back to Nazareth, but she is in no condition to go back home, even on your gentle back, donkey. It is nine months now since this angel appeared and this baby is ready to be born. I think it will be tonight. A few minutes ago she winced and said, "That was not a kick!" and she got that expectant look on her face. I asked if the baby was coming now, and she laughed and said that even I should know that first babies are born at night. She went into the inn to ask if there is a midwife nearby.

So we wait a few more days for this child, and we wait for God's promise to his people to come true. As I stood in that line today, looking at those sneering Romans, I thought, I am tired of this. I am ready for this child and I am ready for God to act, to fulfill his promise. I hope God will hear our cries and be merciful to Abraham and his descendants. I hope Miriam is right, donkey. I hope that this child will be the chosen one, the one that brings the day of the Lord. I will wait for him to grow to become a man, and until then I will hope.