

# **Unwrapping our Christmas presence.**

## **A series of three Advent meditations.**

### **1. The Journey**

#### **Luke 2:1-5**

*In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.*

It is only in Luke's Gospel that we find any details of Mary's and Joseph's journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, and the details are sparse. Yet over the last two thousand plus years, this short passage has been expanded upon, with depictions of Joseph walking and Mary on a donkey on many Christmas cards, despite there being no mention of a donkey in these verses. Many traditional nativity plays also include a donkey in the telling of the story. The journey has become an important part of the Advent story.

Although Luke tells of a census being the reason for the journey, some historians do cast doubt upon that version, but there may be other reasons why Joseph made the decision to travel to the City of David, Bethlehem, the place of his birth, taking with him his heavily pregnant young bride to be. Whatever the true reason, the decision to make such an arduous journey would not have been taken lightly.

The distance between Nazareth and Bethlehem, depending on the exact route they took, was about 97 miles. Bethlehem sits well over a thousand feet higher than Nazareth, and the route would have crossed the foothills of Jerusalem, difficult terrain with much ascending and descending. It probably took somewhere between a week and nine days. There would have been risks, bandits and wild animals.

By the time Mary and Joseph were getting near Bethlehem she was most likely in labour. It would have been too easy to give up, but they had their sight fixed upon Bethlehem.

As we journey through Advent, we too should have our sight fixed firmly on Bethlehem, moving forward in expectation of the wonderful light that is coming onto the world.



This is a photograph of part of the route between Nazareth and Bethlehem. For a few minutes each day, use this photograph to help with your meditation. Study the picture for a couple of minutes, and then, ensuring it is a safe environment in which to do this, close your eyes and imagine yourself on that road.

Picture yourself walking along that road. You may be alone or with others. Feel the stones under your feet. Hear the crunch as you take steps. Look around at the hills, the trees. Immerse yourself fully into the landscape and walk on through it along the road.

If thoughts of other things, such as Christmas shopping, or the need to write Christmas cards, or anything else distracting come into your mind, deal with the thought, then let it go and come back to your journey. Place yourself once more on the road, feeling the stones under your feet. Perhaps you may see a bend up ahead. What is round that bend? Walk on and find out.

Maybe you will see other people on the road. Greet them and walk on. If you feel weary, find a place by the road to sit, perhaps on a rock or under a tree. Rest a while, and then continue your walk, sight firmly on Bethlehem, the destination and all that will be there.

Take about 15 minutes in total to study the photograph and place yourself in it, on that road. You can look online to find other photographs of the road, to place yourself in another part of the journey if you like.

This is your opportunity to, each day, remove yourself from the busyness of Christmas preparations, away from all the hype and advertising, and place yourself into the Advent story. Quietly unwrapping your Christmas presence and moving towards a place of wonder.