THE BIBLE IS FOREIGN

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Category: Observations

English speakers are fortunate; we have more translations of the Bible available to us than anyone could reasonably study in a lifetime. However, the fact that we have easy access to the Scriptures in our language can make us forget that they are essentially a very foreign series of documents. They written a long time ago in a country far, far away.

This makes life difficult for us; like it or not, we tend to read the Bible through our own cultural spectacles. It is easy to make the Bible fit into our own setting, rather than to make the step to read and understand it on its own terms.

One example of this is the Nativity story. So often we see Joseph as a noble, but disorganised bloke who dragged his heavily pregnant wife off to a strange city; only arriving there at the very last moment. His poor wife had to give birth alone and lonely in an animal shed.

However, if you look at this story through 'Eastern eyes', it is rather different, as Rachael Pieh-Jones shows:

> ***Joseph, a man of courage and faith****, realizes that his fiancee is in serious trouble. She could be stoned any day by the villagers because she is pregnant and not married. He is not required to bring Mary along to be counted in the census because she is a woman but he decides to tie his name to hers, tie his reputation to hers, and saves her life by taking her out of the village until the baby is born and emotions can simmer down. Who knows if they walked or rode donkeys but there is a distinct possibility that they rode in a cart. In any case, they arrived in Bethlehem before the day of Jesusâ€™ birth. The Bible says: While they were there the time came for Mary to give birth. The Bible does not say: the moment they arrived they frantically pounded on doors.*
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> ***He is wise, planned ahead, and is a hero.Â*** *Not merely a background character, indistinguishable from shepherds in most nativity scenes.*

Rachael goes on to paint this lovely picture:

> ***Mary didnâ€™t give birth alone.****Â No place in the Bible is this written or implied. More likely she was surrounded by women. A midwife, Josephâ€™s relatives, neighbors. Shepherds came and found the child and his mother and left rejoicing because not only had they seen Grace and Mercy in the flesh, but they had seen a woman and child well-cared for and surrounded by caring women. Otherwise, they more likely would have praised God for that Grace and Mercy and then said:Â What are you doing here alone and cold?! Come with us, our women will care for you!Â No way would they have left a young mother and infant in that state and left rejoicing.*

One of the great advantages of living in a different culture is that it gives you eyes to see new things in the text of Scripture. Go on, read the whole post; give yourself a treat.

I wrote a bit more about the Bible being foreign here.