

**LA POSADA BELÉN**  
**(The Bethlehem Inn)**

**December 24, 2006/Christmas Eve Morning/Pastor Joyce Anderson-Reed**

What would the birth of Jesus have been like if it had happened in La Paz, in the year 2006? Have you ever wondered? Maybe it would have gone something like this:

Hi. My name is Rachel and I'm the owner of a motel in La Paz, La Posada Belen. A couple weeks ago it was just crazy around here. The weekend of the Baja 1000. An off-road race that runs from Ensenada to La Paz. Every hotel in town was jammed full. People willing to pay the most outrageous prices to find accommodations. Profit wise, it's one of my best weekends.

But the most unusual thing happened to me that weekend.

Friday morning I got a call from a young man named Joe. Said he needed a reservation for that night. Lucky for him, I had one room left. A double. But I could only hold the reservation until 4pm. He said they'd do the best they could. Their mode of transportation wasn't totally reliable.

Since I was filling out the reservation form, I asked what the make and model of his vehicle was. He paused, then said, "2002 Donkey." A 2002 Donkey? I repeated, not sure if I'd heard him right. "Yes, that's correct." Now, I knew a lot of cars: jaguars, cougars, pintos, mustangs . . . but I must admit, I'd never heard of a donkey.

Can you give me a credit card number to hold the reservation, Joe?

"Actually, no. We were going to pay in cash."

And then he gave me some sob story about his fiancé Maria being pregnant, and being desperate for a place to stay. I must admit, it was a creative story. Some people would say anything to get a room the weekend of the race. "Look, Joe, I'll hold your room until 4pm. That's the best I can do." And I hung up.

But the kid's voice nagged at my conscious. What if his girlfriend really was pregnant? He had sounded somewhat sincere. And if they got here after 4pm, what was I going to do?

I thought about calling Jean and Dave at Flor de Cardón to see if they had any extra rooms. But then I remembered that a group of investors from the Middle East had booked their place. Jean was ticked off because they kept leaving their Camel cigarette butts all over the terrace, even when Dave kept asking them not to smoke.

And Milton and Susu at Casabuena were booked with the Shepherd brothers, a team sponsored by Quaker Oats. There was a whole herd of them.

Well, they just better get here by 4pm, or their tough luck.

Four o'clock came and went. I re-booked the room. People had been calling all afternoon looking for a vacancy. At 7pm, Joe shows up. And, to my amazement, his fiancée Maria *was* pregnant. But the weirdest part yet: she was on a donkey! A real one!

They were dressed in homespun cotton and serapes. Looked to be about 15 and 16 years old. I figured they must be paceños from up in the mountains. Who else would come riding into town on a donkey? But Joe's English was passable. Said he'd learned it from a missionary who'd stayed in his village for 3 years.

I didn't know what to do. I knew the hospital wouldn't admit her until she went into labor. I didn't have any rooms left.

"Please, can't you do anything?" Joe pleaded with me. "Just a place to lie down with some blankets? We don't need much."

Something about the kid's eyes was getting to me. And the girl looked utterly exhausted, although there was a serenity about her that I envied. Hours before my kids were born I was screaming and sweating, and quite literally a mess. Not her though. Quiet and steady as a rock.

I thought about the storage shed out back. We think the previous owners had used it to house animals considering what it'd smelled like when we cleaned it out. Now it was full of boxes and odds and ends, but maybe I could carve out a space for this young couple. They'd be out of the wind. I had some old mattresses, warm blankets I could spare.

“Look,” I said to Joe, “All I’ve got is on old shed out back. I think it used to be a stable. I’d have to clean some stuff out of the way, but you’re welcome to stay there. I wouldn’t even charge you.”

Joe’s face broke into a huge grin. “Really! O Señora! Que padre!”

So I hollered for Angel, the young man my husband and I had hired to help run the place. Angel was appropriately named, for he really did have the voice of an angel. He walked around the place singing and humming all the time. Angel came running from a back room, and took in Joe and Maria in a curious glance. I explained the situation to him, asking him to stack stuff out of the way in the shed. I invited Joe and Maria to rest in the lobby while I went off to find the extra mattress and spare blankets.

Angel and I created a cozy space for them. I piled up a stack of pillows for Maria to lie back against. I still felt guilty about putting a 9-month pregnant teenager in my shed, but at least she wasn’t huddled on a street corner somewhere. We tied the donkey up outside the shed.

Angel and Joe were talking a mile a minute in Spanish. I gave up trying to understand them, just glad that everything seemed to be working out. I discovered that they hadn’t eaten in hours, so I went to the kitchen to find some soup and tortillas.

Joe was so gentle with Maria. He spoon-fed her the soup, calling her “Mi Querida” and “Mi Amor” the whole time. It was obvious they were deeply in love with each other. It made me happy for their baby.

By 10pm, they were fed and settled in. I left Angel in charge of the front desk for the night. And I headed to my private rooms to get some much needed rest. My husband was out watching the race. I had no idea when he’d be home. I told Angel to wake me up if Maria went into labor. I wanted to make sure she got to the hospital. The thought of her giving birth in my shed made me shudder in horror.

I slept fitfully, tossing and turning. I kept dreaming of Joe and Maria, worried about them, their baby, what was going to happen to them. Finally, at 4am, I got up to make some hot tea. I decided to check on Angel at the front desk to see how the night shift was going. And maybe, if I was really honest with myself, to check on Joe and Maria.

The front desk was abandoned. Angel had put out the sign that reads “Back in 5 minutes.” I wondered if a guest had had a problem. I went on to the kitchen to heat up water for my tea. The kitchen looked out over the back yard, and that’s when I noticed the dim light glowing from the shed.

I panicked. “Oh my gosh, she’s in labor!” And I rushed out the back door towards the shed. It wasn’t until I was half-way there, that I heard the music. It was Angel. I could hear him strumming a Spanish lullaby, his voice soft and haunting. I stopped momentarily, letting the music wash over me. The night was cool, the sky pitch black with a sprinkling of stars. I felt my skin pinprick with goose bumps. What was going on?

I approached the shed door cautiously and pushed it open carefully. I stepped inside. And caught my breath. The baby had been born! It was wrapped in a bright serape, cuddled against Maria. Joe was curled up beside her, staring in wonder. I saw a pile of sheets bundled in a corner where they had attempted to clean up after the birth.

I couldn’t speak. I couldn’t believe that this young woman had given birth in my shed. She seemed comfortable and relaxed. If she was in pain or discomfort, I couldn’t tell. I knelt down beside the mattress. Maria looked at me, and our eyes locked.

I cannot describe the incredible joy I saw in her face. It radiated from her. It was tangible. I could feel it shimmer from her to me: dancing, lilting hallelujahs! This woman is extraordinary, I thought.

“Se llama Jesús,” she told me. “His name is Jesús.”

And then she let me hold the baby. I took him from her arms and felt a pure, jolt of love zap my body. My eyes must have widened, because Joe chuckled and said, “You feel it too, no?” And I nodded. Extraordinary, amazing love. He seemed just like a normal, newborn baby. And yet. I gazed into his eyes. It was like staring into eternity. A glimpse of timeless wonder where the only thing that existed was love, was God.

For several moments I couldn’t even think, couldn’t speak, couldn’t move. Then a blast of cool air came in as someone pushed the shed door open. I handed Jesús back to Maria and turned to see who was here.

It was the Shepherd brothers! They were still covered in the dust and grime of the race. One or two looked like they'd already started to celebrate, if you know what I mean. They crowded in as best they could, the ones in front kneeling down beside the mattress, the others hanging back by the door. What in the world were they doing here?

"Why are you here?" I asked, totally baffled.

"We came to see the baby," one responded.

"But how did you know about the baby?" I asked.

"Angel told us. He called a little while ago with the Good News! Said a miraculous birth had taken place in the shed behind Posada Belén, and that we had to come right away. So here we are."

I looked over at Angel, who was still strumming the guitar. He grinned at me. "Babies are meant to be celebrated! I had to call someone! Besides, who else would be awake at four in the morning except the racers!"

I laughed. "Who indeed!"

A few minutes later, I decided that someone better return to the front desk. So I slipped out of the shed and returned to the motel. My head was whirling with everything I'd seen and heard. I stopped off at the kitchen to make my tea, and then settled in at the front desk to cover for Angel. The front doorbell jangled, and I looked up at the security camera.

There were two men standing outside in expensive Italian suits with turbans on their heads. Who in the world was this?

I pressed the intercom. "May I help you?"

"Um, yes. We're here to see the baby."

"The baby?" I repeated dumbly.

"Yes! Yes! We saw the star and came to see the baby."

I pressed the button to let them in. This night was getting stranger all the time. The men turned out to be two of the guests staying with Dave and Jean. They'd been up on the roof, star-gazing, and had noticed an unusual star hovering over this part of town. Dave had mentioned that it looked like it was over my place, Posada Belén. So one of them had called here, and Angel had told them about the baby.

I started to take them to see the baby, when one interrupted me. "First, we want to pay their bill. How much does this couple owe you?" He reached in his pocket, took out his wallet, and began to thrust a wad a bills in my face.

"Nothing, nothing," I stammered. Although I must admit those 50 dollar bills looked tempting. "I'm letting them stay for free."

"Really?" He turned to his companion. "Maybe we should stay here next time!" he joked. "Then we will give the money to the couple. They can use it to buy things for the baby."

I took them out to the shed. Somehow, they too squeezed in and knelt down to worship this child.

Eventually, everybody left. Angel came back to the desk about 6am, and I decided to go back to bed too. The sun was just beginning to streak the sky with red and gold. I woke up at 9am and decided to take Maria and Joe some breakfast.

I walked out to the shed to see what they might like, but no one was there. I blinked. No baby. No Maria and Joe. No blankets. No mattress. No donkey. Everything was back in place. In fact, had they even been here at all. Had I imagined the whole thing?

I went back outside. No, here was the rope that had tied the donkey. And there, on the ground was solid proof that the donkey had indeed been there.

I found Angel just about to head home for some much needed sleep.

"Where are they? What happened to them?" I asked him.

"Oh, they packed up and left about 8am. They said to thank you for your generous hospitality. I cleaned everything up and put it away so you wouldn't have to worry about it." He yawned and I sent him home.

I went back to the front desk and sat down. And that's when I found it. A silver cross lying on my registration book. There was a scrap of paper beneath it.

“Gracias por su hospitalidad. Dios le bendiga. José, Maria, Bebe Jesús”

I stared at the cross in fascination. A baby and a cross. There was a mystery here. Something I didn't entirely understand.

But I'll tell you one thing: that night changed my life. Hope, Peace, Love, Joy. All spilling from my heart because of the birth of baby Jesús. And what about Angel, the Shepherd brothers, the investors from the Middle East? They were all changed too. It hadn't mattered that some of us were rich; some poor. Some of us educated; some of us not. Some of us Mexicans; some of us foreigners. Some of us male; some of us female.

Our hearts had all been united, through the love of one incredible child.

I opened up my registration book and scribbled down their names:

José, Maria, Jesús. Room: The Shed. Paid in Full . . . with Love.

*For God so loved the world  
That he gave his one and only son  
So that whosoever believes in him  
Shall not perish  
But have everlasting life. (John 3:16)*

Amen.

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