

**WHEN**

**SUDDENLY**

by Linda Ensley



Christmas is a time of preparation. We decorate, bake and buy. We begin in November and by the first week of December our homes are glowing with soft lights and beautiful reminders that this is a special season as we look forward to the celebration of the birthday of Jesus. A tradition in many Christian homes is to set up a nativity. We bring out the porcelain, wood or plastic figures and set them up in an attractive fashion. In the center, there is baby Jesus. We stand back and remember in awe the gift that God has given us.

But this Christmas story goes far beyond the manger in Bethlehem. The birth of Jesus is a historical fact, not a legend or a children's story. The Bible records this event in several places, but the most familiar is the account in Luke, chapters 1 and 2.

Mary was a real person, a teen aged girl, going about her everyday life, looking forward to the day of her pledged marriage to Joseph, **when suddenly** she was thrust into a life she would have never imagined. An angel appeared and announced that she would have a child and that child was the Son of God.

Joseph was a young man, busy preparing a home for his soon to

be bride **when suddenly** he discovers that she is pregnant and he knows that he had no part in it. He is devastated and is considering breaking their engagement **when suddenly** an angel visits him in a dream and tells him to take Mary as his wife. He is told that this child is the Son of God and that he will name him Jesus.

Imagine the turmoil in the lives of these two people, not to mention their families and the entire town of Nazareth. Mary knew she was a virgin, yet she was pregnant. Would people believe her story? Joseph had chosen Mary because he saw in her righteousness and virtue, and now she is pregnant. Should he believe what the angel told him in the dream? But as the gossip spreads around the town, these two young people do as God has directed them. They marry, but Matthew 1:25 tells us "he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son." This could not have been easy for either of them.

**Then suddenly** they are told they need to go to Bethlehem. So in the last stages of her pregnancy Mary had to leave her family and everything that is familiar to her and journey several days over rough country roads to reach Bethlehem.

Their journey is drawing to a close, **when suddenly** Mary realizes she is in labor. The drama continues as they discover there is no place for them to stay. Finally they are given some shelter and a little privacy among the cattle in a stable. How Mary must have gasped as she entered that dirty, smelly, fly infested stable to give birth to her son, the Son of God. But Jesus couldn't wait for things to be all neat and tidy, He was ready to enter the world now.

Isn't that just like Jesus? He doesn't wait for us to get our lives in nice neat order, clean and smelling good. No, He comes to the dirty, stinking stables of our lives and makes them new. Look what He did with that old stable. He has transformed it into beautiful paintings, ornate stained glass windows, touching pageants and much more. What made the difference? It was the presence of God. **When God touches the ordinary He makes it extraordinary.**

The stable is not the only thing transformed. Let's look past the manger to the cross. Nothing could be uglier. It is a symbol of pain and death; and yet, because it was *His* pain and *His* death, in our stead, it has become to us a thing of beauty.

So remember, Jesus still comes to the dirty, smelly stables of our lives and transforms them into something beautiful. Invite Him into the struggles, the heartache, and the confusion that comes with each **"when suddenly"** and see what He will do for you.