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Today's Health for the Empowered Woman

THE NATIVITY

For the billions of Christians in the world, the feast of Christmas is over, the trees are down, the gifts are put away and we settle into the long winter. However, twelve days later is the Epiphany—coincidentally the day this is going to press, and means the presentation of Christ to the Magi- the Wise Men. It also means a sudden realization or comprehension of the larger essence of meaning. So, having a personal epiphany I decided to deviate from the usual article on women's health and the politics thereof and to analyze the miraculous birth of a baby two thousand years ago in a cold manger at night with minimal to no sanitation. Those of faith acknowledge that the birth of Christ is a miracle in its own right but as an obstetrician steeped in the medical marvels of the 21st century, I find it fascinating to contemplate the difficulties encountered at that time. Let us first accept as fact what is written in gospel and then consider the ramifications. Pregnancy at term is difficult time for a woman- the large uterus makes walking and sleeping uncomfortable. With that in mind consider riding a donkey across primitive roads at a time in history when there were few roadside amenities. Women took no prenatal vitamins then, had no testing, were not aware if there were twins or not, had no idea of the position of the baby and had diets that were probably not as favorable in protein content as today. That Mary and Joseph were returning home to be counted in a census makes one wonder what kind of supplies they carried. There is no mention of an accompanying midwife or other female companion and men at that time were usually barred from the actual birth. There is some debate among biblical scholars if the birth occurred in a barn or in a cave but either scenario is rather grim. No lights to see by, no clean bedding, no antiseptic conditions and, in fact, the real danger of tetanus contracted from animal manure were daunting impediments to a successful outcome. We are aware that there were herbal remedies administered to post partum women then to decrease bleeding but one wonders what was available to these two lone parents. Imagine Joseph's fear and trepidation in delivering his own child with no female guidance! And today we panic over fetal heart rate tracings, intravenous fluids, etc. There very much needed to be a gathering of the Heavenly Host to insure a successful outcome, so successful that the baby went on to become the most historical personage of our time and, to the faithful, the Son of God. Even non believers would have to admit that conceiving, carrying, and delivering a baby under such austere conditions is a miracle unto itself.