

- It's two thousand years ago, and it's one of those non-descript nights, where it's not hot and it's not cold. The sky is clear, and a smattering of stars light up the blanket of black.
- You are an angel, honored to do God's work in this time and place. God has prepared you for something big, and you watch it unfold and come to fruition. You forget how your bright light and otherworldly appearance frighten others because you always become caught up in your own excitement. You make the announcement to ordinary shepherds in the field, hold your breath, and wait.
- You are a shepherd, tired from a day's work of chasing after your sheep who were particularly obstinate today. You intend to rest and regroup, but God has other plans. At messengers' urging, you head to an acquaintance's place and notice a small crowd gathering outside a stable.
- You are a foreigner from the east, not from around the area, but you have walked diligently the past several days with your peers. You carry gold, and you are still not quite sure why. You have used the night sky to navigate to this place where you are supposed to see something amazing. You love studying the stars, but you still are not prepared for whom you will meet. The star guides you to a newborn. You feel awe and wonder for no logical reason.
- You are Joseph, and you are exhausted from the past several months. Your relationship with Mary has been tested in ways you never imagined, and you have seen an entirely new side of God. God is not distant and removed, as you had always been taught as a child, but intimately involved with your life. You still have

your times of doubt and struggle, but you have made your peace--for the most part anyway. Yet the rumors and stares are hard to endure. Until you first set eyes on that baby. Then your life becomes no less complicated, but suddenly it is all worth it.

- You are Mary, strong and determined. You may be a small person with a delicate frame but you have pronounced opinions and mighty faith. You rage for justice and know God better than many of the religious scholars twice your age. You have no idea what you are doing but you take it moment by moment. You take that baby that has grown inside you and nurse him and sustain him and build him up for his important ministry work that awaits.
- You are a donkey whose home has been invaded. Your comfortable quarters have been overtaken by many humans, and the sounds of crying and murmurs and shouts of excitement keep you awake. You sense change in the air.

It's 2017.

- You are a mother without a child. You stare down at another pregnancy test, and it's negative. Again. Advent and Christmas is a time of year when the miraculous pregnancies of Mary and Elizabeth can feel like a slap in the face to those who long to be granted the same favor. It is a time of year when pictures of happy families on Facebook news feeds serve only as a reminder of what seems so far off, so impossible. It is a time of year when the baby in the manger reminds some of our friends and colleagues of what they have so long-desired, of what they have lost. It is a time of grief not expectation and celebration.

- You are a historian, remembering what was. Your children are grown, some of your dear friends are gone, and you cannot help but reflect. What will Christmas be this year?
- You are here, now. You listen to Jesus' birth story for the umpteenth time. You look at the completely lit Advent wreath. You prepare to sing Silent Night and exchange Merry Christmases with everyone. You are the one who matters. Jesus came for you, whether you bring the bravery of Mary or the confusion of the shepherds. Jesus will meet you, touch you, change you, wherever you are.
- You are the one God loves.