

Jesus, a Brother to the Poor



Jesus grew up in Nazareth, a small peasant village of no more than 400 people set in a small basin surrounded by hills. There is evidence in Nazareth of limited terraced agriculture as well as pasture fields. The community drew water from what is called today "Mary's Well". Families in Nazareth likely knew what it was to be hungry and thirsty.

Just six kilometers (3.7 miles) north-northwest of Nazareth was the wealthy, sophisticated, and predominantly Jewish city of Sepphoris. That city was destroyed in a political feud in about 4 BC -- the approximate date of the birth of Jesus. Herod Antipas moved there shortly after his father's death and made Sepphoris his capital.

According to tradition, Sepphoris was also the original home of Mary's parents, Joachim and Anne (or Anna). The Crusaders built a huge Church of St Anna in the 12th century, possibly on the site of their home. Some archeologists believe that the rebuilding of Sepphoris may have attracted the carpenter Joseph and his wife Mary to settle in Nazareth when they returned with Jesus from Egypt. This major building site, 50 minutes' walk from Nazareth, would have offered Joseph many years of employment.

Jesus was the son of a carpenter. Carpenters in that day were often people that were displaced from their ancestral agricultural land and forced to work a trade to survive. It is not a stretch at all to believe that Jesus may have worked with his father in Sepphoris as a migrant worker. Herod Antipas was rebuilding the city while Jesus was growing up just 6 kilometers away in Nazareth. Josephus reports that the rebuilt city became known as the "ornament of the Galilee".

Sepphoris was one of two major cities in Galilee during the time of Jesus. The other was Tiberias. Both were established by Herod Antipas, and Jesus did not visit either of these cities during his public ministry. It appears that his ministry in Galilee was focused on towns and villages.

Jesus lived his life among the poor, as one of them. We are not surprised, then, to hear him say to the righteous as he judges and separates the sheep from the goats: "I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in

prison and you came to visit me.... I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” (Matt 25:35–36, 40).

Jesus is a brother to the poor. He puts himself in the place of the poor and marginalized and accepts service that is offered to them as if it were offered to him. Even more than accepting this service, he separates the righteous from the unrighteous based upon it. Acts of service to the poor are acts of righteousness received by the King himself. They are not only good deeds that help the hurting, but genuine acts of worship that bring honor to Jesus.

Jesus is not standing among the rich and sending us to the poor. He stands as one of the poor, a brother to them, and is calling us to Himself.

Through the Million Village Challenge, Transform World is responding to Jesus’ call to action.

To learn more, visit our website at www.millionvillage.org.