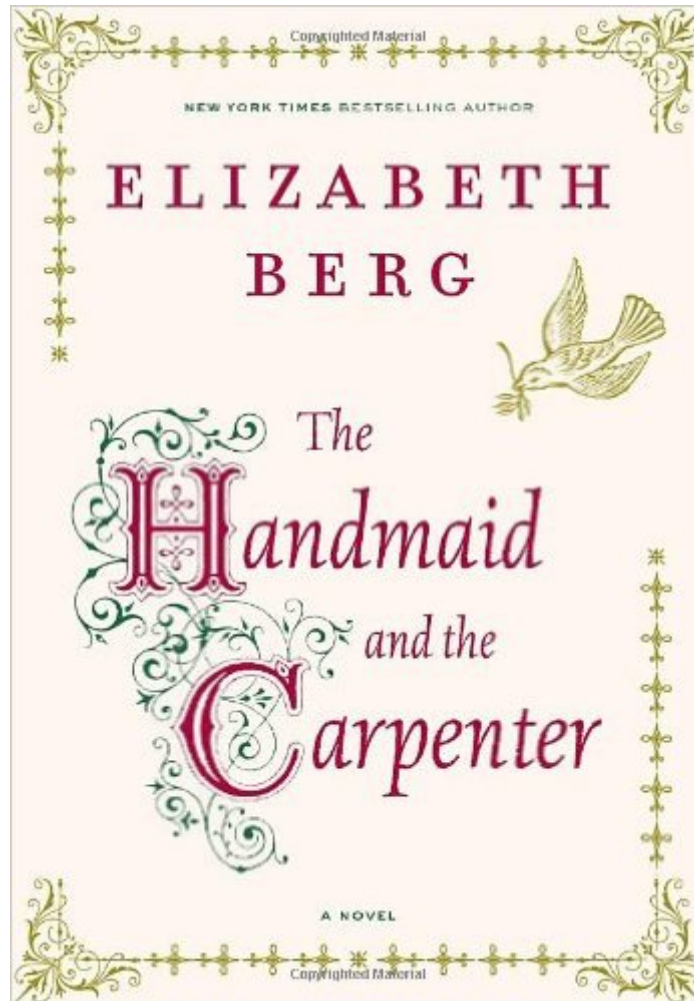


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The Handmaid And The Carpenter: A Novel



Synopsis

In this wonderful novel about love and trust, hope and belief, Elizabeth Berg, the bestselling author of *We Are All Welcome Here* and *The Year of Pleasures*, transports us to Nazareth in biblical times to reimagine the events of the classic Christmas story. We see Mary “young, strong, and inquisitive” as she first meets Joseph, a serious-minded young carpenter who is steadfastly devoted to the religious traditions of their people. The two become betrothed, but are soon faced with an unexpected pregnancy. Aided by a great and abiding love, they endure challenges to their relationship as well as threats to their lives as they come to terms with the mysterious circumstances surrounding the birth of their child, Jesus. For Mary, the pregnancy is a divine miracle and a privilege. For Joseph, it is an ongoing test not only of his courage but of his faith “in his wife as well as in his God. Exquisitely written and imbued with the truthful emotions and richness of detail that have earned Elizabeth Berg a devoted readership, *The Handmaid and the Carpenter* explores lives touched profoundly by miracles large and small. This powerful and moving novel is destined to become a classic.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I was pleased to come across an Elizabeth Berg novel in a Christian bookstore, shopping for gifts appropriate to the holiday season. Prior to spotting this novel, I had thought of Berg only as a "secular" novelist, albeit a good one, and to find this familiar name among Christian literature seemed a bonus. The topic is, of course, as old as Christianity. How to write it new and fresh? I

chose the novel as a gift for a young niece who enjoys reading and is currently in a place of spiritual seeking - and how refreshing to find such literary treasure at this season increasingly becoming known for anything but the spiritual. Would Berg succeed? I had time enough before wrapping to read the book myself, and I did so in a day, intrigued. It is not about the child born to Mary, not nearly as much as it is the tender love story between Mary and Joseph. Woven into the well known spiritual tale was a pleasing human element: the vulnerability of love, the flush of romance, the fears and insecurities of opening a very human heart to another, along with the very understandable doubts and questioning when faced with events only a divine intervention could explain away. Berg succeeds on these fronts. The tale becomes a pleasing literary backdrop to the story we know in the gospels. Mary is the strong woman with independent spirit that we would expect her to be; Joseph is the devoted and loving husband he would have to be to stand beside her, quite human in his occasional wondering about the story he must accept if he is to accept her as his wife - his doubts are ever so human, his overcoming those doubts ever so faithful. Berg's novel won't stand alongside some of the great Christian-themed tomes such as the "Silver Chalice" by Thomas B. Costain or "Exodus" by Leon Uris.

In *The Handmaid and the Carpenter*, Elizabeth Berg takes her readers into the world of Mary and Joseph--thirteen and sixteen respectively, two children of Nazareth whose lives are forever changed by a baby called Jesus. In the author's note, Berg is careful to note that the Bible is poetry and, as such, is open to interpretation. The creative license that she's taken with one of the world's greatest works pays off immensely in this carefully-told, poignant tale. The book begins with Mary and Joseph meeting one another at a wedding in Nazareth. Joseph has already begun to make a living as a carpenter and comes from a family looked as a well-off by others in their community. Mary, whose family is not nearly as favored, works with the other women of the village doing things like laundry and cooking. When Joseph chooses Mary as his betrothed, her family is honored and Mary is happy--though not nearly as pleased as she thinks she should be. She can't help but lament the loss of her youth, her freedom, and the impending sense of doom that she might be missing out on something great by becoming Joseph's wife. One night, soon after her betrothal, an angel comes to Mary and tells her that she is favored by God and, as such, will bear his child. Startled by this revelation, and the fact that she has known no man, Mary goes on a journey determined to find purpose in her life and to figure out, once and for all, if she's really meant to be Joseph's wife and--with this startling revelation, if he will even have her.

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