

JOSEPH and MARY

I.

**WE WERE NOT CLOSE IN AGE.
SHE WAS MY LATE WIFE'S NIECE, NOT MUCH OLDER
THAN MY OWN SONS AND DAUGHTERS.
BUT SHE CAME FROM A GOOD FAMILY
STRONG IN BELIEF AND IN FEAR OF GOD.**

DESPITE THE AGE DIFFERENCE, I LOVED HER FROM THE START.

**AND SOON WE PIOUS CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM
IN THE PRESENCE OF OUR GOD AND OF HIS PEOPLE
ENTRUSTED OUR LOVE AND OUR LIVES
TO HIM AND TO ONE ANOTHER.**

**THERE WAS A SMALL CELEBRATION FOR OUR FAMILIES AND FRIENDS;
WE COULD NOT AFFORD TO BUY WINE
FOR ANYTHING BIGGER.**

**MARY MY BETROTHED, I WHISPERED AS WE DANCED
I LOVE YOU MORE THAN I CAN SAY.
BUT I, A MAN WHOSE HANDS HAVE BEEN ROUGHENED
BY YEARS OF CRAFTING THINGS FROM WOOD AND STONE,
HAVE NO GIFT FOR MAKING SONGS AND POEMS
TO SPEAK WHAT IS IN MY DEEPEST BEING ...**

**SHE SMILED, AND I FELT SURE
THAT THOSE THINGS THAT WERE BEYOND MY POWERS TO EXPRESS
SHE ALREADY KNEW, AND I WAS GLAD.**

II.

**WHAT CAN I SAY TO YOU WHO READ, WHAT WORDS
CAN A POOR MAN FIND IN OUR ANCIENT LANGUAGE
TO BRING CLEARLY BEFORE YOUR EYES AND INTO YOUR HEARTS
THE FEAR, THE SHAME, THE UNSPEAKABLE DISAPPOINTMENT
THAT CONSUMED ME LIKE SOME COLD AND BITTER FIRE (STUPID WORDS)
AS BEFORE MY EYES AND THE EYES OF THE VILLAGE
MY MARY CHANGED SO SURELY IN BODY AND IN SPIRIT?**

**I AM NO MAN OF SUBTLETY IN WOMAN'S WAYS
BUT, ALREADY FATHER OF FOUR, I RECOGNIZED THE SIGNS.**

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**I CALLED ON THE LORD FOR SOLACE; HE DID NOT GIVE IT.
NO NIGHT PASSED THAT I DID NOT CRY MYSELF TO SLEEP.**

III.

**THE DAY SOON CAME, AS IT HAD TO,
WHEN SHE AND I SPOKE OF ... HER CONDITION.**

**SHE HELD MY HAND. NEVER ONCE
IN ALL THE TIME WE TALKED
DID HER EYES LEAVE MINE.**

**I SPOKE FIRST. *MY BELOVED MARY*, I SAID
*I DO NOT WISH TO CAUSE YOU PAIN
OR EXPOSE YOU TO THE PRIESTS
AND THEIR HATEFUL STONES PRESCRIBED BY LAW.*
YOU HAVE BROKEN MY HEART, I SAID,
BUT I STAND READY - GOD FORGIVE ME - TO BREAK THAT VERY LAW
AND FOR YOUR SAKE ALL WILL BE KEPT QUIET.
MY UNCLE IS A SCRIBE IN CAPERNAUM,
A GOOD MAN WITH A KIND HEART.
HE CAN MAKE THE ARRANGEMENTS
SO THAT NO HARM COMES TO YOU.**

**THANK YOU, MY DEAR JOSEPH, SHE SAID SMILING THROUGH TEARS,
BUT THAT WILL NOT BE NECESSARY.
I HAVE SINNED NEITHER AGAINST YOU NOR AGAINST GOD'S LAW:
ONLY LISTEN AND BELIEVE WHAT I AM ABOUT TO TELL YOU.**

IV.

**AND THEN MY DEAREST
TOLD ME OF AN ANGEL:**

**"HAIL FULL OF GRACE," HE SAID.
AND AT FIRST I WAS AFRAID:
WHAT COULD HE WANT WITH ME
POOR IGNORANT GIRL FROM NAZARETH?**

AND THEN HE TOLD ME...

**OH JOSEPH, STRONG AND KIND, SHE CRIED SUDDENLY
YOU ARE JUST AND UPRIGHT IN THE WAYS OF GOD AND OUR PEOPLE.
DO NOT THINK ME AFFLICTED OR POSSESSED.**

JOSEPH and MARY

***THE ANGEL SAID I WAS TO BEAR A SON
A SON SUCH AS NEVER WAS, GOD'S SON
THE MESSIAH, THE DELIVERER, THE SAVIOR
PROMISED OVER THE LONG AGES FOR OUR PEOPLE AND ALL MEN.***

***SHE WAS SILENT THEN, TIGHTLY CLUTCHING MY HAND.
I FELT NOTHING ELSE; I COULD HAVE BEEN
A BLOCK OF WOOD, OR A PILLAR OF SALT,
OR A DEAD MAN.***

***HOW LONG BEFORE I HEARD HER VOICE AGAIN
I DO NOT KNOW.
BUT NOW IT SEEMED TO COME FROM SOME GREAT DISTANCE.***

***- THESE THINGS THE ANGEL TOLD ME, SHE WHISPERED,
WERE MYSTERIES PAST MY ABILITIES TO COMPREHEND.
SO WHEN AT LAST I FOUND MY TONGUE
I COULD SAY ONLY:
BEHOLD YOUR HANDMAID, LORD.
BE IT DONE UNTO ME ACCORDING TO THY WORD.***

***AND AFTER THE KIND MESSENGER DEPARTED
I WAS TOUCHED, AS HE HAD PROMISED,
WITH A POWER ONLY HEAVEN'S WORDS CAN DESCRIBE:
I WAS INDEED OVERSHADOWED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT.***

***I CAN SAY NO MORE -
IT IS NOT FOR US TO SPEAK OF SUCH IMMENSITY OF LOVE.***

***MY SOUL WAS FULL OF PRAISE, MY JOY WAS BOUNDLESS,
BUT FOR ONE QUESTION, ONE DOUBT, ONE SADNESS:
- HOW DO I TELL MY BELOVED JOSEPH?
I PONDERED UNTIL A SWEET VOICE SPOKE TO MY HEART:
"FEAR NOT, MARY, HANDMAID OF GOD," IT SAID.
"JOSEPH WILL SOON KNOW, AND HIS GREAT LOVE FOR YOU
WILL GROW STRONGER. TRUST IN GOD
IN WHOM ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE ..."***

***SHE PAUSED, TEARS FILLING THOSE BEAUTIFUL EYES
THAT COULD NOT LIE.
AND I BELIEVED, EVEN IF I COULD NOT UNDERSTAND.***

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V.

**AND SO IT CAME TO PASS; IN THE DARK DREAMING HOURS
MARY'S ANGEL CAME TO ME. "DO NOT BE AFRAID," HE SAID,
AND TOLD ME OF THE GREAT MIRACLE, AND WHAT I WAS TO DO:
I, JOSEPH OF NAZARETH, UNWORTHY WORKER IN WOOD AND STONE
TO BE FOSTER-FATHER OF THE MESSIAH
AND TO GIVE HIM HIS NAME: BLESSED BE GOD!**

**LIKE MY DEAREST MARY, I ACCEPTED WITH UNBOUNDED JOY
THE HEAVENLY ANNOUNCEMENT.**

**BUT I DID NOT TELL THE ANGEL - I HOPE I DID NOT SIN IN THIS -
THAT EVEN BEFORE HIS VISIT
I HAD ALREADY CHOSEN THE LORD'S PATH:
THAT IN MY HEART AND IN MY LIFE
MARY WOULD BE MY WIFE THEN AND FOREVER.**

**WE CALLED OUR SON JESUS
AND LOVED HIM, AND EACH OTHER,
LONG UNSPOKEN YEARS.**

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