Book One

THE KING HIDDEN

Chapter One

PREPARATIONS

By Stephen H. Funck, April 15, 2021

THE QUESTION

The little girl crawled into bed and snuggled up to her mother. It felt so good.

"Mommy, who will take care of us after you die?"

"Mary, you are right to be concerned. We don't know how long I have to be with you."

"James said since father is not rich and has six children, the only one he would be able to marry would be someone no one else wanted. Someone who would not take care of us like you do. We are all afraid."

"I understand. The only thing I know is that God says He loves us with an everlasting love. He watches over the orphaned and those cast down."

"James also said the prophet decreed that God 'will swallow up death for ever; and God will wipe away tears off all faces.' What does that mean?"

"It sounds like there won't be any more death, nothing to cry about."

"What about people who already died?"

"Do you remember what we pray every Sabbath in the Amidah?" [1]

"That is long. I don't know it all."

"Listen and say the second blessing with me. 'Thou art mighty forever, O Lord: You resurrect the dead; You are powerful to save. Sustaining the living in loving-kindness, resurrecting the dead in abundant mercies, You support the falling, heal the sick, set free the captives, and keep faith to all that sleep in the dust. Who is like You, master of mighty powers over life and death. Who may be compared unto You, the King who brings death and restores life and causing salvation to spring forth. You are trustworthy to revive the dead. Blessed are You Lord, who revives the dead.' What does the Lord, do for the dead?"

"He revives them."

"Every time you say those words think of me. The Psalmist says he will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. The courts of the Temple hold all the people in Israel. God's courts in heaven are much bigger. They hold everyone."

"I love you. I don't want you to die. I'll never forget you."

"Mary, I will never forget you either. I will never stop loving you. You are my precious daughter. A mother can never forget her children."

"Mommy, I'll never stop loving you. I want Daddy to marry Mary so she can take care of us. She's my favorite. She has my name."

"I don't think that will happen."

"James said her father is rich and would never agree."

"He would want her to marry someone like he is."

"Salome and Jude are angry at God because you are dying. I am too. We pray and pray and pray. God doesn't care."

"They shouldn't be angry at God. Getting sick and dying are normal. It happens. Sometimes God rescues. Sometimes He doesn't. He knows."

"He cares even for those He doesn't rescue?"

"Yes."

"It doesn't feel that way."

"Blessed are You Lord, who revives the dead. We will praise Him forever. Even if He would heal me now, I would still have to die later."

"What is it like when you die?"

"I don't know. No one does."

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[1] Amidah http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/867674/jewish/Translation.htm http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amidah There was widespread belief in life after death, in an angelic, spiritual, ghostly condition. Some expected their physical body restored. The Amidah is in the Supplements.

"How long will the ladies from the synagog come to take care of us?"

"I don't know. Daddy will have to find someone."

"Salome and I are too little to do all the work. Salome wants to marry a rich man and have servants do the work and wear gold jewelry."

"That is not something good to desire. I have been praying that God will lead Daddy to a good woman to care for you. You could pray too."

"Why? He didn't heal you when we prayed."

"Never give up. Father Abraham prayed for a long time before Isaac was born. We prayed for a long time before God sent Moses to rescue us."

"Maybe God will heal you and you'll stay with us."

"Maybe, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't make plans for tomorrow. Maybe Messiah will come and make everything right. We still have to do what has to be done each day."

Sophia had asked before and kept asking the ladies from the synagog to pray that the God of Heaven, the Father of all, would lead Joseph to a good woman to care for her children. They all agreed to pray. Sometimes Sophia would have them with her as she prayed that God would lead a good woman to her children. They were as encouraging as they could be with Sophia, but outside they would shake their heads. A poor man with six children did not make a desirable husband, even if he was highly respected, hard working, and pious.

THE TWO MARYS

"Miss Mary, I like you. You are my favorite of the ladies who come to take care of us. You are always busy. Even when you are talking with me, you are spinning or making flour or beer. Some of the ladies just sit. They don't even talk much with mommy or us." [2]

"Mary, it is still good that they care to come and do what they can."

"They make bread but they don't spin much."

"Bread and beer have to be made all the time. They spin for their families, but it can be put off for a while."

"Ladies spin and grind all day long."

"It has to be done or you wouldn't have anything to eat or clothes to wear."

"Salome said she was surprised you knew how to spin and weave, since you have a servant girl."

"I like helping people. Young mothers have a lot to do, so I spin for them. Judith helps my mother. You know she is getting old."

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[2] Spinning and weaving, Joseph's family of eight would require four hours a day to clothe in addition to the hours on making bread http://www.bibleinterp.com/opeds/dig357924.shtml Grinding grain, Grindstone http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Querns Beer was a common drink. It did not keep and had to be made fresh every few days. Wine was much more highly regarded. It was cut 4 to 1 with water. They knew water alone was not safe to drink. The alcohol kills the germs in the water. Many translations have "strong drink" for beer. Until the alchemists invented distillation it was not possible to make anything stronger than wine and beer.

Beer "Did the Ancient Israelites Drink Beer?" Biblical Archeology Review 36:05, Sep/Oct 2010 http://www.bib-arch.org/bar/article.asp?PubID=BSBA&Volume=36&Issue=5&ArticleID=4

"Your mother and father were old when you were born." [3]

"Yes, they prayed for a very long time."

"Miss Mary, we are all worried who will take care of us after mommy dies."

"Yes. Your mother and the ladies have been praying that God will lead a good woman to you."

"We try to pray too. We prayed mommy would get better, but she has gotten weaker and weaker. We pray for a nice lady but everyone says the only woman Daddy can get is someone no one else wants."

"Your father is very well respected. He would be an excellent husband."

"Would you marry Daddy? I would like that. You are so good to us."

"I can not say my father would agree to that."

"James said your father would want you to marry someone rich like he is."

"My father will decide what he thinks is best."

"I'm going to pray he decides to have you marry Daddy."

Little Mary told her mother that she had asked Mary to take care of them after her mother died. Her mother told her she should not have done that. Despite what her mother said, little Mary kept on asking Mary but didn't tell her mother. Mary did tell her mother Ann what little Mary had said. Ann knew Sophia had asked all the women from the synagog to pray for a good woman for Joseph. Ann was elderly and not able to help Sophia. She did pray that God would send a good woman for Sophia's children.

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[3] Joachim http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joachim http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_of_James
Ann http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Ann Protoevangelium of James

The oldest writings about Mary and Joseph's families are reflected in this. They were leaders in the early church for generations. Some readers will recognize this as their own understanding, others will find this new. There is no "proof" the oldest is accurate. There is less reason to think later ideas are better. The most recent idea is that the brothers and sisters of Jesus mentioned in the Bible are later children of Mary and Joseph. The society had a class structure. Mary's family, cousin married to a priest, was upper class. Joseph was a laborer, common man. Marriage across class lines was very unusual.

see http://katachriston.wordpress.com/2011/06/07/richard-j-bauckham-on-the-relatives-of-jesus/

Joseph http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Joseph Jesus is identified in the as the son of a tekton and a tekton himself. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tektōn Tekton has been traditionally translated as "carpenter", but is a rather general word that could cover artisan - craftsman or builder. A worker was in the bottom social class. A peasant who owned land ranked higher. Employment was by the day or job and in between a man worked on his own. There was much building going on. The Temple alone when it was finished laid off 18,000 men and 1000 draft oxen.

The men and boys were always in the synagog services[4], but it wasn't felt it was as important for women to be there. Mary and her parents Joachim and Ann were always there, dressed in their best, wearing their gold jewelry. After Joseph and Sophia moved to Nazareth[5], Sophia came all the time. They brought all their children along, dressed with what they had.

Ann came from a family of singers in the Temple. The women singers there had been replaced by boys.[6] Ann sang at home and in the synagog. She started a women's choir at Nazareth. Sophia sang with them. Ann's daughter Mary started singing when she was small. Wherever she was, she would be singing. In time, she began making up songs of her own[7] and was quite skilled on the Psaltery[8]. She was quite a favorite in town.

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4 Worship was outdoors as was school. We think worship and school are indoor activities. They were not for a very long time. The worship at the Temple was outside and everyone stood. Only the priest went inside the Holy Place in the Temple in Jerusalem. The High Priest once a year went further into the Holy of Holies. The other gods lived in the temples, people went inside briefly to pray before the statue. Jewish synagogs seem to have begun with groups in Babylon during the captivity when they could not go to the Temple https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Synagogue Some groups began to move inside homes, then had special rooms and finally special buildings. One of the earliest synagog buildings found was built in Capernaum shortly after the time of Jesus. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capernaum .

5 Nazareth http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazareth

6 The Temple: It's Ministry and Services byAlfred Edersheim Chapter 3 http://philologos.org/__eb-ttms/default.htm

7 This was a time with many new psalms. The first 89 Psalms are uniform in the Dead Sea scrolls after that there is diversity in number and order. "The general consensus seems to be that the Psalter canon had not been entirely fixed at this point" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Great_Psalms_Scroll https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Development_of_the_Hebrew_Bible_canon

8 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psaltery The music scholars think sounds the closest to the music of the Temple is from the MarThomast Churches of South India. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Thomas_Christians There was a Jewish community https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cochin_Jews and active trade. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indo-Roman_trade_relations See the History section in https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mar_Thoma_Syrian_Church The church claims to date from the disciple Thomas and has kept the most ancient forms of worship. http://marthoma.in/musicgalleries . What we have in old Jewish or other Christian music is known to date from later.

Since Ann had Judith to help, Mary was able to sit behind the boys at school as they learned their lessons[9]. The fathers of the students, Joachim also, would give something to support the teacher. Some of the other girls would come at times, but they had chores to do at home and their fathers did not pay the teacher. Mary loved to learn and loved to sing.

Joachim thought very highly of Joseph and his family. Mary, his long awaited only child, was the jewel of his heart. Still he would have loved to have four fine sons and two daughters like Joseph had. Joseph usually went down the hill to Tzeppori[10] to find work. He preferred to work at home, teaching his sons. Nazareth was small and poor. There weren't enough tables and tools needed there for him to earn a living. Joseph's oldest, James, was becoming a fine young man, Joachim kept looking for jobs he could hire him for. It was a way of helping Joseph's family. Joachim, like his brother in Cana, was a merchant, and the wealthiest man in town. However, he was not above using his wealth to help the people in Nazareth when it was appropriate.

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9 There is little clear information of synagogs, schools and teachers at this time. What we have comes from hundreds of years later after major reorganization in the society. The later writings describe a highly organized structure that must have evolved from earlier diverse practices. What is described here is common across many early cultures and still today in Islamic third world villages. There was a wide diversity of local practice. I had a teacher who met a teenaged Jewish boy from Yemen in the 1950's. He had memorized the entire Old Testament. His local village was more primitive than Nazareth. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maktab

The teacher, sometimes an older man who could no longer work, would chant a section of scripture in Hebrew. The boys would repeat it, until they had it memorized. The music of the chant helped. By the time the boys no longer came to school, most of them learned the Torah, Psalms, the Prophets, and even other writings. Along the way, they learned the sounds for each letter and how to read. Since they already knew what the scripture said, it was not too hard to see how the letters made the sound of the words. The letters were only consonants without any breaks between the words. The vowels were not written. They had to figure out how to separate the letters into words and what vowels were needed. One thing that made it easier was that the whole scriptures only used about 800 different words. Since they spoke Aramaic, a related language, time in class had to be spent learning how to translate the Hebrew. The teacher was supported by the gifts from the parents. Classes were often outside under a tree, when no fieldwork needed to be done.

For the number of Hebrew words see http://www.adath-shalom.ca/rab_ii.pdf pages 10 and 11.

Scrolls were very expensive. A set for the whole scriptures took a year to copy and a year just to make that much leather or papyrus to write on. Small synagogs might own one small short scroll. They could trade them with neighboring synagogs for other scrolls. The men who knew the scriptures best were recognized and admired.

The following refer to scrolls from later times that had much more stringent rules that increased the cost and time needed to copy. The Torah, five books of Moses is less than one third of the Old Testament - Tanach. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tanakh http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What_does_a_Torah_scroll_cost http://cranfordville.com/IBC%20Cologne/BibleSession12.pdf http://www.chabad.org/library/howto/wizard_cdo/aid/351655/jewish/Torah-Scroll-Facts.htm

10 Tzippori Sepphoris http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tzippori

MARY and SOPHIA

One day as Mary was spinning, Simon and Jose brought in a couple pigeons they caught for their mother. Sophia thanked them and said,"Boys, you take such good care of me. I am so happy to have such kind and thoughtful sons."

Jude beamed as he replied, "We want Miss Mary to fix them for you, so you can get stronger."

"You make me stronger just by how you care for me."

Mary turned to the boys and asked, "Boys, do you know how to pluck and clean the pigeons? If you do, then I can make some pigeon soup." The boys grinned as they ran from the room to prepare their catch for supper.

After the boys left to clean the birds, Sophia said, "Mary, you are so good with my children. You are their favorite. I love to watch how you take care of them."

"Your children are very polite and pleasant."

"But they are always arguing with each other."

"Childish squabbles. They have to stretch their wings."

"You didn't have any sisters or brothers to argue with. How did you stretch your wings?"

"You saw me when I was little. I would sit on the edge of the students. The boys would tease me and the girls would complain that I was around the boys instead of doing girl's work. I learned not to mind."

"Well, you learned women's work anyway. I haven't been able to spin or weave. If it wasn't for you we would be running out of clothing. James outgrew his tunic, and you made him a larger one."

"He needed it."

"I am so concerned what kind of woman Joseph will end up with. My children are so precious, yet who will be willing to care for so many from another woman? All I can do is pray."

"All the women are praying, and your children pray. Little Mary asks me to take care of them."

"She didn't," Sophia exclaimed in disbelief. "I told her not to do that. Please forgive us."

Mary smiled. "It was a compliment. She is very sweet."

Mary was a young woman of much prayer. She prayed for Sophia, her children, Joseph, the other people in Nazareth, her parents - especially that they would be blessed in their old age, the leaders of the synagog, all the sick, the women as they awaited birth, the blind, the crippled, the rulers and those they oppressed, the people of Galilee, Judea, the Temple, Chief Priests, and Sadducees, that God the King of Heaven would deliver, redeem, rescue, bring righteousness, justice, and that all people would see His glory and praise Him in peace. Her prayer was based on the Amidah from the synagog and she mentioned the names of those she knew. She would pray while she spun, wove, or ground grain, which took hours each day. Sophia's request to pray for a good woman to care for her children lay heavy on her heart. Little Mary and the other children made that request very real and personal.

Yet her father and mother had legitimate expectations for her future. She had no right to interfere. It was her father's proper authority. Joseph was a poor man with six children, a laborer. She knew her father had plans for her to marry well. She knew he had already been talking with the fathers of promising scholars and priests from prominent families. She was to be the wife of a great man. Her children would be in high places. She was to be greeted with respect wherever she would go and welcomed into the homes of the powerful. Her father and mother would look at her marriage as the crown of life. They would praise God for the richness of His blessings in the sight of all people.

The more Mary prayed for Sophia, the heavier the question lay on her heart. She had grown very fond of her children. Little Mary kept asking her to stay. There wasn't any woman who would be found who would be good for them. Fathers wanted to marry their daughters to men without prior children. She had seen what happened when stepmothers took over. What kind of woman would agree to six?

"Sophia, you asked we pray for a good woman to take care of your children."

"They are so precious to me. I can trust God to take care of me. May I praise Him forever. How can I do that if my children are destroyed?"

"I have seen it happen."

"It won't even cross Joseph's mind until after I am gone. I am afraid he will pick up the first woman he finds. He won't even be able to think of who would be good."

"The more I pray the more I feel God would want me to."

"That is ridiculous. You are going to be a fine lady in a great home."

"I don't think I would enjoy that if your children are destroyed."

"Your father would never agree. He is going to have you marry someone great."

"I know."

"Well, if he won't agree, it can't happen."

"Maybe God can change his mind."

"You mean, we need to change what we are praying for: not for a good woman, but for a father to agree to have his daughter care for them."

"Nothing I could say would make him agree."

MARY AND JOACHIM

Joachim was sitting on the flat roof looking over the view. Nazareth was on the top of a high hill with the broad Jezreel valley on the south, the hills of Samaria in the distance. Tzeppori was to the west , Cana to the north. He built the home so he could look in every direction. Mary brought him some dates and figs she had prepared and sat at his feet as normal. "Father?"

"Yes, Mary"

"You know Joseph's wife is dying."

"Yes, it is a great tragedy. Sophia is a fine woman. His children are a delight. James is growing into a fine young man."

"You look for jobs he can do for you."

"The family needs all the help they can get. But I have to be wise in what I do. Too much the wrong way does not help."

"The people respect you for your thoughtfulness."

"The King of Heaven has blessed me. We praise Him and care for His people."

"That is why I have something to ask of you."

"You never ask me for anything. What could you want?"

"You have always given me more than I could have hoped for."

"People say we spoil you. It is supposed to be bad for you, make you selfish, but it didn't."

"You are kind to all. Righteous. I like to be your daughter."

"What do you want me to do for you? You have never come to me like this before."

"I have been praying."

"You are always praying and singing. What have you been praying about?"

"Sophia has asked all the women to pray that God would lead a good woman to take care of her children. She is very concerned about them."

"She has good reason to worry. Finding a good woman to take over six children is not going to be easy. No one is going to be found."

"She is at peace with God for herself. How can she be at peace for her children?"

"I do not know. Her girls are too little for the work that needs to be done. Joseph needs to find another wife."

"You said he won't find one."

"Maybe one will fall on him out of the sky."

"Maybe one has."

"What do you mean? That was a joke."

"It has been on my heart."

"You? You think you should be Joseph's wife, take care of his six children? Impossible! You live in a fine home. You are going to be married to a great man, not a common laborer. It is a terrible idea. Get it out of your head. I have already been looking around. There is a fine young scholar in Tzeppori, very promising. He will become one of the great ones. There is the son of a chief priest in Bethel, a third son. Still a chief priest. We have been talking."[11]

"I understand."

"God, the King of heaven, has richly blessed us with success. Even though I am only a merchant, it has given opportunity for advancement. You are an only child. You have a fine dowery and a good inheritance. You are a desirable wife for those in high places."

"I know."

"So it is settled, put it out of your mind."

"I have tried to. I can't."

"I won't allow it."

"Perhaps God will change your mind."

"Mary, never in your whole life have you talked to me like this. I am amazed at your persistence."

"God kept after me."

"You do not understand what it would mean to be mother of six for a poor laborer. You would be working hard all the day, spinning, weaving, grinding. Here you have Judith, when you marry you will have servants."

"The work doesn't bother me. I do it all now when I am there. I talk with the children or pray and sing while I am busy."

"You will be highly respected in a great home."

"Perhaps. The great do not seem to have much concern for their wives and daughters."

"You have an answer for everything. When did you start talking back?"

"I never had reason."

"You will have fine jewelry, fine clothes, sit with the great, be welcome among the powerful."

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[11] Normal age for marriage was 18 according to the Mishnah. http://cojs.org/cojswiki/Mishnah_Avot_5:21:_Stages_of_Life

"They may not listen to me. I probably won't be allowed to sing in their hearing. You were talking a while ago about a great one who divorced his wife so he could marry someone more prominent and kept the dowery.[12]"

"Unheard of evil."

"The powerful live by their own rules. I might not be safe with them."

"Mary, you can go now."

"Yes, Father."

Later Joachim told Ann that Mary asked to be wife for Joseph after Sophia dies. Ann was appalled. The next day after Joachim left to see his brother in Cana, she vented her rage at Mary. Mary had always been a good girl. Usually an upraised eyebrow or shake of the head was all that was needed to correct her. Never in her life had she been harshly scolded, much less berated. She was heartbroken.

That evening after supper, Joachim asked her to come talk to him on the roof. She sat at his feet. "Mary, my Lily, I have never seen you so downcast. You are always quiet, but this is something else. What is bothering you?"

"Mother spoke to me today."

"About what you told me last evening?"

"Yes." Her body shook as she tried to hold the tears back.

"I am sorry. Your mother was very upset by your request. We have looked forward to seeing you married well, to having a great man as your husband, and seeing our grandchildren highly regarded, sitting in high places. Marrying Joseph would be a great change."

"Yes."

"While I was walking down to Cana and back I was thinking and praying. Joseph will never find a good woman for his children. I have seen what happens. The older boys will be alright. The little ones will have problems. I have seen girls driven away, destroyed. Little Mary reminds me of you, when you were little."

"Yes, Father."

"I am a merchant. Successful, but still a merchant. Any man with land is more highly regarded. That is why I have been buying land when it comes available."

"You hire the man who was forced to sell it, to work the land."

"Except for that one who was always drinking beer and would not work."

"I always pray for him and his family."

"May God give a miracle. I could make Joseph a land owner. No longer just a laborer. He is hard working, well regarded. James could become a scholar. He would be good. It is pride, my desire to be great that caused me to object. I did not regard what would be best. What would be the will of God, righteous." He stroked her hair as she sat by him. It has been many years since he did that. "You are right. There is no one else. It has to be done." Mary's eyes were filled with tears as he spoke. "I will talk to your mother. She will agree."[13]

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12 This occurred at the time according to rabbinic records. I did not keep the reference in my notes.

13 According to the cultural rules, a woman could not contract marriage on her own. Her father or legal representative had that power. This was not always applied to women of the lowest class, divorced or widows. Wise, strong women usually were able to work their will around the supposed restrictions.

"Thank you, father." She rested her head on his knee. She sang softly: "I had rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the LORD God is a sun and a shield; the LORD giveth grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly."

"Mary, why hasn't Joseph come to talk to me?"

"He doesn't know."

"The marriage agreement is made and the man doesn't know. When will he find out?"

"Sophia will have to tell him."

"And if he refuses."

"Then it will not happen."

MARY AND SOPHIA

The next day Mary stopped in to see Sophia. One of the other ladies was taking care of her that day. Sophia was on the bed[14] with some of the children keeping her company. Mary came in and sat beside her. Sophia said, "It is so nice when you stop in. It makes be feel that it is not a chore for you to be here."

"It never is. How have you been this day?"

"I am fine." Her face was drawn, her color pale and her breathing labored.

"I have good news for you."

"It is hard to think of anything good."

"My father talked with me last evening."

"Oh?" Her voice raising with anticipation.

"He agreed to let me come."

Sophia sighed and lay back on the bed. "I never thought he would. I hoped."

"He wondered why Joseph had not asked him. He was surprised he didn't know."

"He never would have dared to ask, even if it ever crossed his mind."

"He only thinks of you."

"Sometimes I am afraid he will hurt himself at work because he can't pay attention to what he is doing."

"You will have to tell him. It is all arranged."

"God is so good. I can die in peace."

"You are precious in His sight. 'Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints'."

SOPHIA AND JOSEPH

Joseph came from work. He took the bowl the woman had prepared. He went to be with Sophia and the children. He missed Sophia's cooking. She made everything better. "Sophia, precious, I brought some dates and figs for you and a pomegranate. I know how much you like pomegranates."

"Thank you Joseph. It is a feast just to look at you."

He cut the pomegranate and offered her a piece. She took it and nibbled on it. "Do you need something to drink?" She motioned for the cup and drank a bit.

"Joseph, please eat while I rest. You work hard all day. You need to eat."

"Sophia, I have no appetite for food. I love you. When I am cutting wood, I think and pray."

"God has good in everything. Hold me." She was so frail in his arms, he was afraid she would break.

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[14] Everyone slept in the same room, straw, hay cushioned the floor. http://www.internationalstandardbible.com/B/bed-bedchamber-bedstead.html http://www.bible-architecture.info/Housing.htm

"I will never see anything good in losing you. You are life to me. I will never stop loving you."

"Even when I am parted from you, my love will never die. God is the everlasting God. King of Heaven forever and ever."

"It is hard to think good of God." Joseph said.

"He is my comfort, my hope. He says He is redeemer of Israel, rescuer from the pit. I need that."

"When will His promises come to pass? Will we see it?"

"He has saved our children. He has filled my heart with peace."

"I didn't know our children needed saving."

"After I am gone, how long will the women keep coming to care for them?"

"Something will be worked out."

"A laborer with six children, what can you get?"

"I don't want to think of it."

"I know, so I have been praying."

"Sophia, you are so wise. How can I live without you?"

"All the women have been praying for a good woman to take care of our children."

Joseph slowly, haltingly said, "You would ask them to do that. A good woman to be found to take six. If I was rich, servants would take care of them. You work hard every day. I should have thought of it. I should have been looking, but how could I look for someone? I should have been thinking of the children. What will become of them without you? It is even more reason to despair. I don't want to think of it."

"God rescued me from despair. He has sent someone good."

"He has sent someone to take care of our children?

"The best."

"You are the best."

"She loves them and they love her already."

"She has been here?"

"You know her."

"I do not know anyone like that."

"She has been praying for a good woman to care for our children. God led her to herself."

"She is from Nazareth?"

"She has been taking care of them and taking care of me."

Joseph stops. He is puzzled. Who can she mean? "Mary?"

"Yes."

"She is just a little girl."

"She has grown up."

Joseph was stunned. Mary came to help Sophia with the babies. She was Joachim's daughter.

"Impossible. Her father would never agree. She is going to be married to someone great. She would never marry me."

"Her father has already agreed."

"Who asked him? When?"

"Mary."

"It is not done."

"It is already settled."

Speechless, Joseph looked at Sophia resting in his arms. She smiled happily at him. His heart was so full of love for her. He kissed her and caressed her. She was so frail, so tender and so wonderful.

The news spread quickly. The children were amazed and delighted and so full of wonder at their mother. As she had grown sicker and sicker, they had been more and more grieved. Her pain was theirs, weighing them down. They knew their future was dark although not in the same way as their mother's. They had always known Mary. She was all their favorite, but she was Joachim's daughter and they were Joseph's. She was high. They were low. The people of Nazareth were astounded, but very happy for Joseph and his family. Even more still were they awed by Joachim, Ann, and especially with Mary. Among Joachim's associates, and the leaders of Galilee, he became known as a fool in his old age; a man who had forgotten who he was and stepped over the line. Fortunately his younger brother Samuel was taking over most of the business, so little damage was done.

One evening shortly after the decision was made, the children gathered in bed around Sophia, each one touching her, even if all they could reach was a foot. She talked with each child. "James, you are so much like your father. Strong, pious, and a wonderful student. When one is gifted by God, be careful not to be proud, do not look down upon others, use your gifts to help lift them up."

"Simon, you are quick to get ahead, and easily offended. It is good to be offended for those who are weak, and cannot defend themselves. Do not take advantage for yourself."

"Jose, you have been very hurt and angry at my sickness, for fear of losing me. I will never stop loving you. God loves me and you with everlasting love. Evil and death in this world are normal. The King of Heaven commands us to love Him, worship Him. He is the redeemer and savior from evil, not the cause of it. We do not know His ways, His thoughts, so do not doubt, but keep trusting and He will yet bless."

"Salome, you also have been bitter, prayers for healing not granted. Remember, your father does not always give what you want. You know we do what is best for you even when we punish you. It is for your good and because we love you. My love for you will never end. God's love is an everlasting love. It will be your responsibility to light the sabbath lights with a good heart."

"Jude, so affectionate, you bring me so much comfort, you bring love and delight wherever you go. Enjoy every good gift. When times are bad, look beyond them in hope and faith that God has good yet to come."

"Mary, my precious Mary, you are so wise. May wisdom lead you around and over every trial. When the King of Heaven did not give you what you prayed for, you did not give up, discouraged. Times will come when God might even seem to turn away. Be wise, He is wisdom and always has plans for good."

Sophia started the Shema[15] "Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thy hand, and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the door-posts of thy house, and upon thy gates."

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[15] The Shema is normally said mornings and evenings in Jewish homes. It is much more common than "Now I lay be down to sleep" has ever been in Protestant homes. This a a shorter version of what is actually said. http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/706162/jewish/Translation.htm

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shema . The Shema is in the Supplements.

After they had finished the prayer, Sophia told Joseph. “Keep holding me. It is so good in your arms. You are the most wonderful husband. I could not have asked for more. You make the words about the love of God real. When I look at you and our children, how could I ever doubt what the Psalmist sings: ‘Like as a father hath compassion upon his children, so hath the LORD compassion upon them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust.” Joseph could hardly hear her. “ But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him’.”

Joseph eyes were filled with tears. “You are life to me. I will never see anything good in losing you. I know my love for you can never die.”

“Keep holding me.”

Joseph awoke with a start near morning. Sophia had slipped away. The children looked up except Mary and Jude stayed sleeping. They felt mixed up with peace, wonder, disbelief. So this is what it was like. Now what? They were filled with love for their mother and understanding she was no longer in deep pain and suffering. The world had changed into what was to come. They touched her. Soft but not so warm. They knew they were supposed to cry and wail, but felt peaceful, fitting. Her love for them was still as real as their love for her. It was all so very strange.

The leading women came in and took over the preparations of Sophia’s body and started the funeral wailing and the flute. Joachim came along with the other men. Joseph learned the pit[16] was already dug. Someone paid for it a few days ago. Jose asked if they will be rich now that his father is going to marry Mary. His brother Simon smacked him hard in the mouth. Joseph told Simon not to be proud of what he had done. All was sad yet peaceful in a very strange way.

These are questions that were in my mind that I attempted to answer as I was writing.

How could it actually happen the way the earliest traditions portray? Mary was from an upper class family (cousin was married to a priest). Why would she marry a poor man? Why would her father agree?

Family was vital for social acceptance. James became leader of the church. Would it make a difference, if James was Jesus’ younger brother or if he was the oldest by Joseph’s first wife?

How did their lives interact with the culture and economics of those times?

How does this story affect your understanding of Mary and Joseph and what it meant for them to be called by God to parent Jesus?

The Gospels record the events of Jesus’ life. They do not include the background information everyone knew at the time they were written. This is one of a series of stories that includes that background faithful to what is known about the history and culture. I hope this provokes-in a good way-the reader to think deeply about the Scriptural account. Go to my web site for more. http://thesignofconcord.com . These are in the section titled “King of Kings”. “King of Kings Supplements” has additional information.

If you do not think this reflects the culture and historic situation, how would you tell the story?

Many thanks to my patient wife Lynne for repeatedly proofreading.

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16 “Pit” was the normal term for the grave all through the scriptures. “Tomb” were for the rich. Many who read the Bible and Psalms misunderstand what is meant when they read the word pit.

Scriptures are from Jewish Publication Society of America 1917 Version. The New Testament quotes are ESV.