

Remembrances
The Story of
The Holy Family

Past Life Recollections of
Marie Fox O'Brien

A List of Books

Marie's Story - An Extraordinary Odyssey

Channeled Books

Martin's Original Writings
Revelations
The Divine Nature of Man
Lessons
A new Endeavor
Concepts
Prayers

Past Lives

Moses
Zorah
Rose
Joseph II
Edam the Elder and Saleh
and Inga - Pala - Bana
Peter and Ann
Romulus
Remembrances-The Holy Family
Martin's Life Remembered

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Introduction

It is some months now since I first knew that about two thousand years ago I lived as Mary, wife of Joseph, mother of Christ. This knowledge came to me as a revelation through my teacher Wanda, angel of God, sent to me in the sixty-sixth year of my life to be instrumental in leading me to an awareness of many things beyond the ordinary.

By the time this revelation came, I had been well prepared for it. Over a period of months, I had been told many extraordinary things by both Wanda and Martin. I first knew of Martin and Wanda in May of 1991, and my awareness of them came first through the ouija board in the hands of my two sisters, but shortly later, after a period of several weeks at most, I was hearing the words of Wanda and Martin directly. There was never any question about which of the two was speaking.

Martin from almost the very beginning had an air of majesty about him. He lived his last life as Martin Phee in Chicago. He was in that life the father of a friend, Liz Martin, and he died in 1974. It was Liz that

Martin first spoke to through the board. Very quickly Martin became a central part of my life. I was first told that he was God's strongest angel, and I had many manifestations of his power. Gradually it was revealed to me that Martin would write of many things through my pen to reveal to man the mysteries of life and death, of God's plan for man. I was told that I was in eternity Martin's soulmate, that we had shared many human lives, and that we had been separated in this life to do what Martin called from the beginning "this holy work."

During the course of Martin's writings it was gradually revealed to me that Martin was really God, that God had repeatedly visited the earth in the guise of man to teach the lessons of love. The implications of this revelation for me as Martin's soulmate were clear, but so difficult to accept with my limited human understanding that for some time I chose not to think about it. Martin had not at that time written directly of my role in these repeated visits of God to earth.

Although I had been well prepared, it still came as a shock that morning when I knew

without a single doubt that I was being told that I had lived as Mary. I was dazed after the revelation, and Wanda said to me, "You know, but do you believe?" I could not say at once that I did. As I sat there, trying to know the completeness of my faith in what I had been told, I felt a surge, a strong physical surge, in my heart, and I knew that I had been given the faith to believe this extraordinary truth without the shadow of a doubt.

Some few weeks later Wanda said to me, "You don't think much about your life as Mary, do you?" My response was definite. "That was then. This is now." I thought that was the end of it. Little did I know it was the beginning. Wanda went on to say that part of Mary was still in me, that in my brain all the memories of all my previous lives were stored, that I had only to make the effort and I would recall those days.

By this time, Martin was writing daily, sometimes more than once in a single day, of personal things. Always he expressed his love for me and asked that I express my love for him and he spoke often of our work and what he wished of me. His origi-

nal writings were completed in October, and I was, as I had been told to do, putting them on the computer. Wanda wrote often at that time through my pen too. It was on Wednesday, November 20th, 1991 that Martin wrote:

"Tell me again, my love, of your love for your son. It is important that you make a great effort to remember that life we shared. Take time often to abandon other activities and try to recall anything you can about your life as the mother of Christ. It will come to you little by little with an effort on your part and constant awareness of the need to recall everything you can of that life. I know you are trying to remember the joy rather than the sorrow, but it is all one. Do not try to discriminate. Be open and receptive as you try to remember."

Wanda had told me earlier that I must make this effort and would urge me very specifically to stop what I was doing and try to recall. Once I was privileged to see the face of Christ on his way to the crucifixion. He turned to me and looked at me directly with eyes of infinite sorrow. I tried to run toward him, but I was held back and then the vision ended. The sorrow I felt was in-

tense.

On Friday, the 22nd of November, Martin again asked me to lie down and remember. I did, and when I was finished, Martin wrote:

"That is a beginning. As often as you can, do just that for however long the memory stays. Each time summon back the last thing you saw, in this case Joseph going to the door as you waited in the street. Do not be concerned. It will come."

And then again on Sunday, the 24th:

"You do well, my love, with your remembering. It will all come back to you in detail, but gradually. Do not force yourself to go too far at one time. Each time you make the effort to remember, a little more will come to you until in the end you will have a complete picture."

Martin constantly encouraged me in this remembering. On the 25th:

"You must trust yourself absolutely in this remembering. You must in no way doubt

the rightness of the pictures and thoughts that come to you. Do not try to make them conform to any preconceived ideas which you may have. At all times keep your mind and heart open."

And on the 26th:

"Today, if it is possible, write of your memories of the Christ child, your son. Put down each detail as you go over it in your mind. Keep in mind what I said earlier about not being concerned about preconceived ideas and teachings. Your insights have validity above all other writings. It is important that these be recorded for a later date. Do not be concerned in any way with anything except exactly what you see and feel, and each day try to remember further."

I did not write that day, nor the next, nor the day after that, which was Thanksgiving. Although Martin wrote his tender messages of love on those days he did not speak of the need for me to write, but on Friday he wrote again of this:

"You do know, my dearest Marie, of my wish that you make every effort to remember your life with me as the mother of

Christ. Do you not know that all of these memories are stored in your brain? You have been told that and you must believe it. They can be retrieved. I know that you have thought that hypnosis or even self hypnosis could be used, and perhaps you will want to try one or the other, but for now, set aside short periods several times a day when you can be quiet and alone and let your mind go back to those days of love and wonder. You have indeed made a beginning, but only a beginning, and there is much work to do. I can help to some extent as I have in the past, but the work involved in this remembrance must be done by you. Trust that I will help." And later that day: "There is no room in your heart for doubt. Do as you have been doing and memory will build on memory. Try to recall the words you spoke. Try to recall my words, my dearest Marie. Think now, for a few minutes more of our talk as we walked. Do you remember why you feared my leaving?"

And then, finally, miraculously, I wrote as Mary, Mother of Christ, This is what I saw. This is what I heard. This is what I wrote:

"We are walking aimlessly and you are telling me that you must leave, that the world is ready to hear you speak of the need for love and brotherhood, of the need for all men to treat each other with kindness. I am afraid for you. Selfishly I do not want to lose you. Selfishly I love having you close to me, loving me always, comforting me when I need comfort, speaking to me of your beliefs, your convictions. But beyond that I am afraid. I fear that the world will hurt you, will misunderstand your gentleness, will reject and ridicule your teachings, your idealism. I fear to say this to you. I fear hurting you myself. I cannot bring myself to express my misgivings, and so I listen, and you sense my hesitation, my misgivings, and you speak to me of the need the world has to hear of the power of love, the absolute need for love. You speak softly, persuasively, but passionately, of how you can and must change the world. And I cling to you physically, knowing all the while that I must let you go, that I send my heart with you wherever you go, that I will miss you beyond imagining, but I know that there is no other choice for either of us."

When I had finished writing, Martin wrote:

"Reread what you have written, my dearest love, and know that it is the truth. Think again tomorrow as you did today and write again of what you remember. Do not at any time let uncertainty creep into your mind. Your memories when they come are strong and true. You will need to write much and often of them in the months to come. Do not count on order or logic. Listen to your heart at all times and respond. There is no limit to what you can remember and no limit to the comfort it will bring you. There is much unhappiness you will need to remember and relive, but there is also abounding joy to be recalled and relived. At all times I am in your heart."

And so it began. I never rewrote that first remembrance to fit in with the rest of the writings in sequence or in tense. It stands by itself as a beginning to this writing. The next few memories I wrote of were brief and fleeting, but within a few days I was remembering well and writing at length. Each morning when I was free of distraction, generally early in the day, I would lie down and consciously try to recall my life as Mary. Sometimes I would remember all I

was to write that day before I took pen in hand to put these memories on paper. At other times I would start writing as soon as I began to remember and continue until the memories faded. The words flowed in both cases without hesitation from the first word to the last each day. I visualized to some extent. I could picture streets, houses, rooms, to a lesser extent people and faces. I was sure of the words spoken. I relived the emotions, sometimes intensely, sometimes less so.

After a few days Martin spoke to me further of what I should expect:

"Wanda has spoken of your next writings and she has told you of their significance. She has also spoken of my promise to you that never will you be asked to give more than you can. I know full well the extent of your devotion to all that I ask of you and I am more than content with the knowledge that this undertaking will bring you great joy and satisfaction.

It will be clear to you as we go along how I wish to proceed. Some of the time I will ask you to remember and I will help you to remember and you will write guided by these memories. At other times I will ask

you to take your pen in hand and will speak directly of this life we shared. There is no cause for concern if you feel that your writing is not what you would like it to be. You can change and amend and correct at a later time with whatever additional knowledge or feelings you have acquired. For now it is important to make a strong beginning, and this day is ideally suited to that. There should be no distractions and you, my love, bring your full share of trust and love and devotion to this work, this holy work. The world will rejoice in all that comes out of this work we do, my beloved, and the world will know in full measure the extent and immediacy of God's love and God's presence in this world. And now, my love, let us begin. Take your pen in hand and let my words be heard."

Then Martin wrote the extraordinary words that begin this story of the Holy Family and appear here as the foreword and prologue. These are the words of God spoken through my pen exactly as he spoke them, changed in no way.

All through the writing Martin continued to encourage and explain. On Thursday, December 5, he wrote:

"I want to write now, though briefly, of what you can expect in the coming days and weeks. I know that this writing of your life as Mary is unanticipated by you. There was no need to tell you in advance, I felt, but now you have some concept of its importance to our work. I will ask you to remember as often and write as often as you can, leaving no day without some recalling and writing. As I told you, the remembering will get easier and you will be able to be more specific as you were hoping to be. Do not at any time go back and read critically for error. There will be extensive rewriting on this book as opposed to my writings which need minor editing where they need anything at all. By its nature the parts of this story will be episodic, not, as you have already seen, necessarily or even desirably in chronological order. There has been some order in the past few days and this will continue to some extent, but if it is easier for you to recall chunks of time out of sequence we will do it that way. You can tell from this afternoon that you are beginning to get emotionally involved in the retelling and this will favorably affect the writing. When you feel like stopping, stop. Do not force yourself to

write further than is easy for you. Do not set specific goals. It will all come and it will come more and more easily. Generally I will write directly in the early morning and I will count on you to recall and retell during the course of the day. Again, there is no specific time frame that cannot be met easily. 'Time is on our side.'"

And indeed my emotional involvement grew each time I wrote. I felt intense grief writing of the death and funeral of Joseph, an intense and lingering grief. I was surprised at how completely I was possessed by these feeling of deep sorrow and how hard it was to dismiss them. Each time I read the words I wrote then, the sorrow returns and I mourn.

Martin continued to remind me to trust what I was hearing and writing. On December 14th he wrote:

"My darling, I have told you more than once that you are hearing correctly. I have told you not to reread for error. Please believe that I am in your pen and that I will not permit error or omission. You know this in your heart. Do not let any doubt enter your mind, now or at any time. "

And on the 19th:

"First of all, my love, do not be affected by the fact that the truths you remember are not consistent with commonly held beliefs. You knew from the beginning that there would be some variance, and I have told you and told the world in my introduction to this book that what we write is the truth, and if it differs from what has been believed down through the ages there should be concern only in accepting these new revelations as truth, unvarnished by those who were not writing from direct knowledge and unchanged in any way for any purpose. This book is indeed a book of revelation and that is its purpose, to tell the world of the simplicity of the life that Christ lived, of the love he felt for his mother and her mother and Joseph at all times, and of his growing awareness of his mission in life, to tell the world of the absolute necessity of love, and in the end to offer all he had ---his life -- as a token of his complete love for man. There is no real conflict here, my love, and I know that you are not distressed by these differences, but I want you to go further and to rejoice in your sure knowledge of the truth of things as they happened in this story. You were

there, my love, with me at my birth and at my death, and all the years in between are a history of love shared, shared both within and without the family. Joseph is a key element in this story. His role in the life of Jesus and Mary has never been truly told. It is time it is."

Early in the writings I was not as pleased with the sections I wrote compared to those Martin wrote, and Martin hastened to reassure me. On January 6th, a little over a month after I first started remembering and writing, Martin wrote:

"You are truly a goose, as Wanda once told you, to be so dissatisfied with yourself and your writing. What you are remembering I have told you over and over is correct in every detail. Do not feel you are fabricating at any time or introducing your own concepts. When you reorganize and rewrite these remembrances you will re-remember each incident and see it again in your mind's eye, and you will be able to add or change as you wish, but you will be surprised, I think, at how little you want to change when the time comes." He urged me further:

"Whenever you begin to write, try to re-

member the feelings of that moment in time, that experience. Try to relive emotionally as well as factually. When you are transcribing think of how you felt as you read and reread. It is difficult I know, at times, but you were overcome by emotion at the memory of the death of Joseph, so you know it is not only possible, but not difficult at all, if you let yourself delve completely into the process of remembrance."

A few people read this manuscript as it was produced and one or two remarked on the similarity of style between the two sets of remembrances. I was amazed. To me they were very different, Martin's far superior to mine. In response to my thoughts on this Martin wrote:

"You are doing better than you think. Why were you so surprised to be told that our writings sound similar, perhaps identical? Do you not know that our minds are one in this holy work? That your words are my words and mine yours? Do you know this now, my love? I am in your pen and you are in your pen and it is one. That is hard for you to accept, my love. I know that. Think on it and I will speak of it later."

As Martin had promised, the remembering and writing got easier and easier. Sometimes I would leave my mind completely open to the memories that came. At other times Martin would suggest in some way what I should concentrate on. "Think of a happy occasion," for example, or once "Your heart is pounding. What are you remembering?" And the memories would come and I would write. Some of the time I wrote in the present tense, sometimes in the past, and in some sections I switched back and forth. In the interests of consistency I have revised the use of tense to the past throughout the story. Martin's words speaking of his life as Christ are not changed or edited in any way. They are printed exactly as they came through my pen.

One other thing that needs explanation is the name "Yehwah." From the very beginning I thought of my child, known to the world as Jesus, as Yehwah. This was his name to me at all times. Only once in my writing did I call him Jesus, though Martin refers to himself as Jesus. At first I spelled the name Yetvah and then partway through the "t" softened to an "h" and the "v" to a "w". The sound is not very different. I was

concerned, however, that this name might not be correct for publication, and I asked Martin to tell me his wish in this. He wrote in response: "Don't concern yourself with changing the name of your son. That is how you remember it and that is how it should be. It is not too hard to explain this in your introduction."

I knew as the story drew to a close that I would be asked to remember the crucifixion and write of it, and for weeks I dreaded this. On February 16, Martin wrote:

" Little, as I have said, remains to be written in the story of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph -- three equally significant members of the Holy Family insofar as the message of love given and received is told in these pages. Do not, my love, be so concerned with the sorrow of your son's death. Think rather of the glory of the love that this death represents and glory in your part in this expression of love, for you are much of this experience, my mother, and the world has long celebrated the greatness of your sacrifice and suffering. Be not concerned about the details of seeming contradiction you

have uncovered. I asked you for your trust and I ask you again. Do not doubt. There is no error in these pages, nor will error be attributed in the end. Know always, my love, that you are guided in what you write, that the remembrance is yours and mine both, shared then and shared now. I love you, my mother, as I loved you then, fully, completely, trustingly."

During the night, in the early hours of Wednesday, February 19th, I had a mystical experience that I knew was preparing me for this writing, the account of the death of my son. I felt the ecstatic presence of Martin, of my God, a soaring joy, and I saw myself at the foot of the cross. I laid my cheek against the pierced broken feet of my son, and an overwhelming sense of peace and joy possessed me. The ecstasy of my love for Martin and my love for my son were one. I knew what Martin was telling me, and the next morning Martin wrote:

"You know from this morning that you will be asked to write of those hours at the foot of the cross, that you will relive those hours, and that although there may be pain involved it is outweighed in every way by

the glory of our oneness, my mother of all eternity, that you share fully in the glory I speak of, and that you are at all times a full participant in this great gift to man. I know how hard it is for you to comprehend and that you cannot fully understand, but I ask that you accept and believe and open your mind to this truth. I love you, my dearest mother. I love you, my dearest spouse. I love you, my dearest daughter. It is all one, my dearest, the most total of all loves. Listen for my voice in the early hours tomorrow for this holy writing to begin. I will fill your soul with love and light, my dearest, and you will write freely of this beautiful death we shared so fully. I want, my dearest, for many reasons, you to write of my death next and then later of what went before. Do not, my love, be disturbed by this prospect. It will be glorious, I promise you, and we will know the beauty of our holy union at all times as you write and relive those hours."

Martin awakened me early on Thursday and I wrote of those hours I spent with my dying son, my beloved child. The account speaks for itself.

There is no more fitting ending to this in-

roduction than Martin's words to me on March 31st.

"I will ask you later today or this evening to write further in the story of your Yehwah. I know I have said that little remains to be written and you have sensed these omissions. Do not in any way permit yourself to forget the glory in the sorrow, my mother, the absolute joy of love shared, the total brilliance of that death and resurrection, a true beacon in the darkness. It has lightened men's paths for centuries and it is the intent of this holy work to remind all men in all places at all times that the word that emerges over and over again from this story is the word LOVE. Let it be emblazoned in the annals of time for all time. No other word is necessary. Love embraces all. It needs no explanation beyond the admonition that to love is to act in love at all times under all circumstances in all ways. Nothing else is necessary. God has no other demand, and you, my love, must tell this to the world through the words of your son, your spouse, your father, your true love of all eternity." The next morning Martin wrote of his walk in the garden and

his arrest by the Romans, and the story was complete.

Aptos

May, 1992

Forward

There is much that has been written about the life of Christ, some of it divinely inspired, some of it pure unfounded fiction. There has not been, until now, a true story of the relationship between Christ and his mother Mary. Much has been written of Mary narrowly, focusing upon the birth of the Christ child, a few incidents in his childhood and early adulthood, and most about Mary at the time of the death of Christ. There has been little written of the relationship between Mary and Joseph. As part of God's plan for man, more will be written of all these things, beginning with the conception of Christ in the womb of Mary and ending with the death of Christ on the cross.

These writings will be of two types. There will be remembrances written by the present incarnation of God's spouse of all eternity, who was the mother of Christ in that life. There will be remembrances inscribed by the present incarnation of God's spouse, but these will be the remembrances of Christ Himself, most recently incarnated as Martin Phee, who died in

1974. Both of these sets of remembrances provide a picture of what has become known as the Holy Family, Jesus, Mary and Joseph. This is a story of love, a love both inspired and inspiring, the perfect love of a family blessed in every way, a family united in love of each other and love of God the Father.

At each point in this story there will be revelations which differ from commonly held beliefs. The telling of this story is in no way intended to be disruptive to existing beliefs, but rather to expand man's understanding of the ways of heaven and God's plan for man. Do not in any way doubt these words. Their truth will be made abundantly clear in time. Their value to man is in adding to his understanding of the truth. Little else need be said in introduction to this tale. It speaks for itself.

Prologue

There is nothing ordinary in this union, this marriage between Mary and Joseph. This is a union planned by God and executed through his servant Ann, mother of the child Mary, though mother only insofar as her womb nourished the child. Ann is Mary's mother in total love. She is blessed with the knowledge that this child she bore so obediently is conceived of God and is God, that this child is destined to herself bear a child that is conceived of God and is God, and that this child of Mary's shall be the Son of God on this earth for a brief existence marked at each moment by a love so overpowering that all who are touched by this life feel the force of love given and are in turn moved to love given. From the beginning this child is God Himself, come to earth of his own free choice to show to a world that needs it desperately the overwhelming power of love given and received, the absolute total necessity of this love, the joy that this love affords the giver, and the comfort that this love affords the receiver.

God in His wisdom chose to live as the son

of His female aspect, incarnated as Mary, daughter of Ann. God spoke to Ann of His plan and she alone was privy to this plan. She alone knew of the plan for Mary to bear the son of God immaculately conceived. She alone knew when the time came that it was God's plan that Joseph become the spouse of the virgin Mary, now with child, and that he be her spouse and protector for the rest of his life, that he love this child as his own, but know at all times that this child was the son of God come to earth to save man from destruction by bringing the message of love and peace. And Joseph, a carpenter by trade, a man of honesty and gentleness above all, of purity of heart and motive, and inspired by God's love, agreed to love and cherish Mary and her child and to hold them at all times in his protection.

Mary, in her innocence, had no knowledge of the divine spark that animated her womb. In her innocence she accepted the concept of the child as a gift from the God she loved, and she did not question further what her mother told her. At all times Mary was joyful in her anticipation of the birth of her child. At all times she prayed to her God for strength and goodness and she

was granted both in full measure.

There has been much speculation as to the exact nature of the relationship between Mary and Jesus, the Christ. Let it be known that they have been at all times the two halves of a whole, the male and female aspects of the Godhead, joined in their divinity and choosing to lead human lives, choosing to experience varied emotions and trials as did all others. There was in the beginning no awareness in Christ of his divine origin, of his mission in this life as the son of Mary, but there was from the beginning a wondrous quality about this child, an aura of holy love. There were few who failed to sense this extraordinary quality, and as the child grew into young manhood, so did his awareness of his true identity and his true purpose in life. His wisdom grew apace, and all whose lives touched his sensed this greatness.

Let it be known by all men that in the time of Christ the world was in turmoil and greatly in need of God's blessing. The world as a testing place for souls had become a world of conflict and hatreds, of men dominating other men, of intolerance and cruelty and above all godlessness.

There were those who strove to live lives of holiness, lives of seeking after the truth and love of God, but these good men and women were rarities in the world at that time. God's love was lightly regarded by either the rulers or the ruled, by either the rich or the poor, by either the young or the old. Purity of heart and motive was threatened on all sides by greed and selfishness. Man's inhumanity to man knew no bounds. Each generation seemed less able to remember their purpose in earthly existence, and God began to question man's capacity to achieve the love and peace that are essential to his destiny. He chose, therefore, to come to earth in the body of Christ, the son of God and God Himself in the oneness of the Godhead, and to live a life designed to prove to man that all goodness, all happiness, all godliness emanated from love, that love at all times was the road to peace, that love at all times was the source of joy, that love at all times worked miracles, that love was man's ultimate destiny. The life of Christ and the death of Christ is testimony to this purpose of God's will, and the world has in some part lived lives of goodness and holiness in the light of Christ's teachings, in the supreme expres-

sion of love inherent in the death by crucifixion, a death gladly suffered by Christ as the most supreme act of love that this earth has ever known. With his dying breath Christ exhorted those who loved him to embrace his killers with love, not to simply forgive them. This then, was Christ's legacy to a troubled world. Christ's life and death exemplifies the nature and power of perfect love. Christ lived and died so that man would recognize this power and incorporate it into each and every thought and action of his daily life. Some men have done this. Too many have not.

This story of the life of Christ will serve to remind man of God's purpose and of the necessity for man to reexamine this life of wonder and love and to rethink its application to his life. Christ lived and died for all men. Listen now, all men, to the full story of this life.

Mary and Joseph - The birth of Yehwah

Mary

I knew of Joseph the carpenter. I did not know him, but I knew of him. Everyone did, and when my mother pointed him out to me as the man who would be my husband I was sure that she was not serious. He seemed so old to me. I knew that he had had a wife who died as a young woman. I knew he had no children. I knew where he lived. That is all I knew of this man my mother said I was to have as my husband. I would have protested, but I knew I had to have a husband, a father for the child I knew was coming, a child that my mother told me was sent by God to be mine as a special gift. This did not seem strange to me. God could do anything. God loved me. But to have a husband, that seemed strange. My mother said that there was need for haste, that she had spoken to Joseph and told him the truth about the child and that he had agreed to this marriage, to this child, and that he had promised to be a good and faithful husband and father. He had spoken to my mother, she

said, of the loneliness he had known since the death of his wife, of his reluctance to enter into another relationship just to ease this loneliness. But this marriage, he said, would be different. He would be blessed with a wife little more than a child who needed him and his protection, a wife he would love with gentleness and caring and a child he would love and cherish as his own. He would make no demands on her daughter, he said, until she came to him in the fullness of love. He was content, he said, to wait for that.

And so, on the day my mother and Joseph chose, we went to the temple and were united in marriage. There were only the three of us there and the ceremony was simple and brief. We walked about briefly afterwards, the three of us, speaking little, until my mother took me into her arms and said that it was time for me to go home with my husband. I clung to her, unwilling to let her go, knowing that I must, that my life was now with this grave stranger named Joseph. My mother slowly pulled away from my embrace and took my hands and placed them in Joseph's hands. "Now she is yours," is all she said before she turned and walked away. My eyes filled with

tears as I watched her go. I could not speak.

Joseph took my hand and led me toward the river bank. We sat silently side by side, watching the slow current of the river. I kept stealing glances at him. I wished he would say something. Finally he spoke. He told me that I had nothing to fear, that he would care for me as though I were his daughter, that he would at all times meet all that I asked of him and that at no time was I to hesitate to ask. He spoke of the child. He said that the world would believe that the child was his, and that never would he deny this, never would he affirm it. He said that he would at all times love this child as his own and that all of his strength and faith would be devoted to us. As I listened to Joseph's soft words I knew that I had nothing to fear. I knew the beginnings of trust.

He took my hand and pulled me up, and we walked together, silent again, to the house of Joseph. I did not know what to expect and I was pleased with what I found. There were three large pleasant rooms and the furniture was much nicer than I was used to, finely crafted and finished. I ran my

hand over the top of a table amazed by its smooth velvety finish. Joseph saw me and smiled. I told him of my pleasure in his home and he responded that it was now my home as well.

Joseph brought food and drink to the table, ale for him, wine for me, bread and a meat stew, and I ate more heartily than I was accustomed to. I had a pleasurable sense of security in my new home. I looked across the table at my new husband and I wondered what lay ahead. The prospect was not displeasing. Joseph spoke a little of his work. I was still tongue tied.

We sat peaceably in the darkness after we had finished eating. Joseph said that he would teach me whatever I needed to know about the house and that he knew I would want to see my mother often. He said that I should feel free to come and go as I wished, but that he needed to know at all times where I was, that it was now his responsibility to keep me from harm. I murmured my thanks and promised to do as he wished.

Mary

I could not believe it when Joseph told me that we had to go to Bethlehem. To register, he said. The Romans had decreed that each and every one should register, and to do this we must go to Bethlehem.

"Why? Why?" I asked petulantly, "Why?" It was as if I thought Joseph responsible for this the way I spoke.

"They say it is for taxation," Joseph replied, "but I think it is more than that. The Romans like to remind us that we are a subject people and they seize every opportunity to do this."

"But why," I persisted, "must I go? Cannot you register me?"

Joseph carefully explained that the demand was that each and every man, woman, and child present themselves to the authorities in person. All must go.

I still could not believe it. Joseph had spoiled and cosseted me all these months, and I was like an overindulged child, unready to accept doing anything I did not choose to. But I had cause for this resistance. It was near time for my child to be

born. I was big, enormous it seemed to me, and uncomfortable and awkward and tired much of the time. I could not imagine making this trip now. A few months ago, yes. A few months from now, yes. But now, no.

"Joseph," I begged, "Isn't there any one you can talk to? I cannot make this trip. Not now."

And Joseph patiently explained again that we had no choice. He reminded me that I had seen the harshness of the Romans when they were not obeyed. He would do anything in his power, he said, to spare me this, but it was not in his power. He was sorry.

Instantly at this word I knew how unfair I was being to Joseph, to Joseph who had shown me nothing but love and gentleness and patience, and whose concern for my well being never ceased, never for a moment. I went to him, and he held me in his arms, the body of my unborn child moving gently between us. "It is all right, Joseph," I said, I knew tardily. "I will manage. We will manage."

He told me that he had arranged that we ride part way with a merchant caravan.

That part of the trip, he said, would not be too difficult, but they were taking a different path before reaching Bethlehem and we would have to walk the rest of the way. He had thought to get a donkey, but he knew that I would be even more uncomfortable being jounced about on that awkward beast, so we would walk, he said, and rest on the way as much as we needed.

I was sorry to leave the caravan. It was impossible to feel comfortable under any circumstances, but there was a woman, a wife of one of the traders, who was very kind to me, who took me in her care and made me easy. She was concerned that this travel might bring the baby before its time. I had not thought of that, and I shivered at the thought.

"No," she reassured me when she saw my alarm. "You are young and strong. The baby will wait."

As we were walking I told Joseph what she had said. He looked closely at my face and then his eyes fell to where the baby lay in wait.

"Don't worry," he said. "We will be home before the child comes. Your mother would not be happy with me if we weren't."

His certainty cheered me, as did the thought of my mother. She was so eager for the child to be born. It was a very special child, she said over and over, very special. The very thought of seeing home made me walk faster, but we did need to stop often for me to catch my breath and renew my energy. Joseph was never impatient with me, and I knew the greatness of his love now when his patience was being tried so sorely. He kept encouraging me with the thought that as soon as we reached the town he would find a comfortable place for us to stay for the night and I could rest and recover. Then we would register in the morning and be on our way home immediately. He would try to find a ride, he promised.

Home. The word was beautiful to me, and as I walked I pictured this home I had grown to love, with its fine furniture, its garden that pleased me so, and in my mind's eye I saw the corner of the bedroom where a tiny bed waited for a child. Joseph had made this tiny bed a thing of beauty, and the day he brought it home for me I thought my heart would burst with joy. It made the coming of the child real as no other thing had, and when I walked into

the room, each time it was the first thing my eyes sought. Indeed I created excuses to go into the bedroom so that I could stand and stare at it and imagine it filled. Elizabeth had helped me to sew some clothing and covers for the child, and she had taught me to embroider and to decorate these tiny garments. They lay lovingly folded in the crib.

Joseph became concerned at my long silence as I thought of these things and asked if I was all right. Better than all right, I said, and I told him of all the happy thoughts that filled my mind. He smiled in relief and took my hand as we walked. I looked at his profile as we walked and thought how strange it was to feel, as I did, that I had known Joseph always, and yet in fact it had been only a few short months, not even a year, since he had taken me as his wife.

There had never been a moment of regret in my heart all those months, never a day that I did not give thanks to God for this stalwart guardian and husband, and each day that passed I knew more completely the love that Joseph felt for me and for this child, gentle understanding Joseph. It was

impossible not to love Joseph. I had not expected to. I had expected to feel everlasting gratitude. I had expected to offer obedience and devotion and respect. I had not expected to love my husband as I did, more each day, secure in the knowledge that as Joseph's wife I had nothing to fear, that I lived in the warmth of his love at all times. To Joseph, I could do no wrong, and suddenly as I looked at him in the fading light I knew that to me, Joseph could do no wrong, ever.

Mary

We were walking, Joseph and I, across a sandy space. The wind was stirring the sand slightly and it eddied about our feet. In the distance we came to see the outlines of buildings silhouetted against the darkening sky, all tans and umbers. As we walked, Joseph put his arm protectively around my shoulder. He knew I was weary. Finally we reached the edge of town and walked down a street, wider than most of the others in the town, with houses on both sides. They had walls along the street we were on with openings into each courtyard. Joseph left

me standing by one of these openings to go into the house to ask if there was room for us to stay there. I leaned against the wall, my arms hanging at my sides, waiting, not seeing, not feeling, just waiting. Then Joseph reappeared, his face grave, and told me gently that there was no room for us, that the town was crowded with visitors, that we must look elsewhere. I sank to the ground and sat with my back against the wall and wept. I am so tired, I protested, so tired too tired to go further. I cannot, I cannot. Joseph tried to comfort me. He murmured words of encouragement. But I was not comforted. I was too tired for comfort, and my tears fell.

Nearby two young girls watched. After a few minutes one of them came up to ask if she could help at all. Joseph explained to her, and she said shyly that she knew of a place we could use for shelter for the night, that it was little more than a hovel, a place where animals were sometimes kept. She said that it was at least warm and clean. Joseph began to protest, but I begged him to accept this kind offer, that I was unable to go further. The young girl led us through one alley to another and along a walled garden area to an opening. Inside

the garden, attached to the house, was a small room, low ceilinged and without windows. There was clean straw piled in one corner and the dirt floor had been swept clean. Joseph and the girl moved the piled straw into a rough bed and Joseph gently helped me to it.

I sank down upon the straw, unable to stand any longer. It was scratchy even through my clothing, and I shifted uncomfortably. Joseph, seeing my discomfort, folded his cloak and put it under my head. I was moved by the gentleness of his touch and turned my head aside so that he would not see my tears. I didn't want to cry, but I couldn't help myself. I was more tired than I thought it possible to be. I listened as Joseph thanked the young girl for her kindness and asked her for food and drink if that was possible. I was terribly thirsty. She kept glancing at me. I knew she would see my tears, and I turned my head further aside, but not before I saw her nod her agreement to Joseph's request. She left.

Joseph came and sat beside me and turned my head so that he could see my face and awkwardly wiped away my tears. I could not speak. He understood my weariness

and held my hand in his as he murmured his comfort. Slowly I managed to stop my tears. I still could not speak. Eventually, I dozed. I heard the girl come back after a while, and she and Joseph spoke softly together. Then she left again. Joseph brought me water and raised me up so that I could drink. He offered bread, and I shook my head. I could barely swallow the water. The last thing I saw before falling asleep was Joseph, sitting against the wall beside me, his arms encircling his bent legs, his eyes full of concern as he watched me.

During the night I awakened. Joseph was lying beside me on the straw. It was very dark and I could just make out the outline of the doorway. Suddenly I realized that what had awakened me was the coming of the child. Nothing more than a dull ache, but I knew it was the beginning. I lay there for a long time, my fear growing like a live thing. As the light began to glow behind the doorway, Joseph stirred and awakened. He saw my distress. He held my hands firmly in his great calloused hands and promised me that it would be all right, that I would be safe. I did not know whether to believe him. I was so frightened.

All that day I was frightened as the time came closer and closer. The girl brought bread and soup and more water, and her eyes grew wide as Joseph told her about the coming child. She asked if we wanted her to get help and Joseph said no, that perhaps she could bring food later and more rags and that he couldn't thank her enough for her kindness.

All through those hours we waited for the coming of the child. Joseph tried to comfort me, to share my pain. I could tell that he was not as confident as he pretended to be. This was new for him too. This was not something he had counted on doing. This was something that my mother and Elizabeth had lovingly prepared for. I longed for them, and with each new wave of pain I longed for them more. I longed to be home in the care of those loving hands.

I began to cry. Poor Joseph. His eyes filled with tears, tears of concern, tears of frustration, tears of anguish. When I could, I told him why I cried. I told him how frightened I was in this strange place. I told him how much I wanted my mother. I told him over and over again, and through it all Joseph seemed to grow stronger. In a

miraculous way, his strength seemed to strengthen me, and between the pains we spoke of how we would love this child and how in the years to come we would look back on this day and marvel at its beauty. The word "beauty" was Joseph's word. This was not a beautiful place, I reminded him, not beautiful at all.

"The beauty I speak of, my little one, " Joseph said to me, "is not in this place. The beauty is in you, Mary, and in this child and in the love we share that he will know. Close your eyes, Mary, and see yourself in a beautiful place."

I did as he said, and I saw myself back home in our house I loved, and my mother was there with me, and Elizabeth too, and they were telling me it would be over soon, that the pain would be gone and only the joy left. I heard their words so clearly, and then I knew it was Joseph's words I was hearing. I opened my eyes and looked into his, and I smiled to reassure him. Just then the pain became so intense I thought I must surely cry out in protest, and Joseph's grip on my hand tightened. Then the next came more quickly than I expected, and again I had to fight to keep silent. Joseph

handed me a kerchief and I tore at it to distract myself. I pressed it to my mouth to stifle my moans.

Joseph started to move about, and I knew I must be close. Then in a final explosion of pain I knew that the worst was over, and I watched Joseph as he knelt between my straddled legs. His face lit with pleasure as he watched, and I knew that in an instant I would hold my child in my arms. I tried to raise myself to see, but I was too spent for the effort, and I lay back gasping for breath. I was too numb to feel the rest of the birth, and so when Joseph held up this miracle of birth for me to see I was not prepared. To my astonishment and to Joseph's as well, I burst once again into tears. And then I laughed in relief and joy when I heard the first sweet sound of my child. Joseph wiped him off and then laid him in my arms. It was a boy, as I knew it would be. My eyes were too blurred with tears to see him clearly, but I smelled his sweetness and I knew an emotion I had never known before. There was such a rightness about holding this child close to me. My son. No more beautiful words existed. From the very instant I touched him I knew his beauty, his specialness, his ab-

solite splendor.

I reached for Joseph's hand, and we sat there in silent adoration of this miracle sent to us in this strange place. It was a beautiful place now, I realized, and haltingly I tried to tell Joseph of this. He soothed me and said that words would wait. Just now, he said, it was time for me to rest, to know the joys that were now mine and his as well, and to tell this tiny child of the love that was in our hearts. And so we did, and when I looked closely at my son I knew that he was indeed beautiful in every way, the most beautiful child ever born, it was easy for me to decide. I told Joseph this and his smile said all there was to say of love.

As I held him close to me, I still could not believe the wonder of this child. I could not get enough of looking at that perfect little face. I ran my fingertips over that soft skin and fine down and my heart sang. I could not contain the tears of joy. Joseph, seeing these tears, grew alarmed. I could not explain to him. I could not speak. I shook my head as if to shake away the tears and tried to speak, but the words would not come. I was exultant, tri-

umphant, overcome with emotions I had never known before. I held my child closer and he stirred restlessly. Joseph watched me smiling, now reassured, and our eyes met in silent wonder. I wanted that moment to last forever. There could be no greater joy.

When I was able to speak, I spoke of my mother and how I wished she were here to share this joyous time. Joseph said that there would be years for her to love and enjoy her grandson and that we would see her first when we got home. Now he said, I must rest, but I had no desire to rest. I wanted nothing more than to hold this child, watch his breathing, study his perfect little features, smile as his face contorted into comical expressions, hold one tiny hand in mine and study its absolute perfection. There was no time for sleep. But sleep I did, finally, reluctantly, with my sleeping infant at my side. During the night he awakened, and I knew the total ecstasy of holding him to my breast to suckle. Again the tears of joy fell and my happiness was complete. The very air was filled with love, love beyond my wildest imagining, love that sent my heart soaring, love that bound me to this tiny child so recently

a part of my being. I could not imagine a greater love.

When I awakened sunlight was streaming through the doorway. Joseph was gone from my side. I began to be alarmed at his absence but I knew instantly that I was being foolish. Just then against the light I saw two heads. So bright was the sunlight that I could see only outlines, but I knew one of them must be our young friend. I gestured and she came into the room and shyly approached. Her eyes were wide with wonder and she knelt beside us and leaned over to see the face of the infant. I asked if she would like to hold him in her arms and she nodded excitedly. She sat cross legged and I put the sleeping child in her arms. She sat and rocked him ever so gently and exclaimed over his beauty. I told her friend that she was welcome to enter and she stole over and knelt beside her friend, bending over to see the face of the child. They spoke softly to each other of the loveliness of the infant and I smiled as I watched and listened. I was not much older than they and yet felt an eternity older. I felt blessed beyond belief. My heart swelled with pride. My soul leaped with joy. I knew infinite peace. I needed no more.

Gradually the babe awakened and grew restless. I took him into my arms and put him to my breast. He suckled and the girls watched enchanted. The peace of perfect silence was broken only by the the tiny burbling sounds of the child. After a while, the girl told me that Joseph had gone in search of a donkey that we might be on our way. She protested that it was much too soon for us to travel and that Joseph's concerns about being discovered and driven out were groundless. She promised that she would not be in trouble if we were found, that her father would understand. She begged me to reason with Joseph, to urge him to stay longer until I was better able to make the journey. Smiling at her earnestness, I agreed, relieved at the prospect of staying a while longer. She promised to get more food and water to meet our needs. They asked before leaving if they might bring one more friend, sworn to secrecy, to see the infant. They trusted him, they said, not to betray our presence. I told them that he could come after dark, that there was enough light from the moon and stars to see the child.

I was restless after they left and I was anxious about Joseph. I walked about the tiny

room, beginning to feel trapped in such a small space and then I remembered how grateful I was for the shelter. Joseph returned finally and agreed to stay another day and night at least. He had not yet found an animal, but he had brought clean clothing for the child and a warmer blanket to wrap him in. He spoke of the crowds in the town, of the noisiness of the streets, of the unrest among the townspeople, restive under Roman rule. He had brought some bread and some fruits and we ate as we talked. Joseph was anxious to leave Bethlehem as soon as we were registered and hoped that I would feel able to travel within a day or two. I nodded my agreement. I did not like the sound of Bethlehem.

As we spoke, shadows grew and the night came. The child sighed and slept and suckled and slept again, and we watched his every move, transfixed with wonder. Soon the two girls appeared in the doorway. Joseph removed the covering to admit the night glow, and behind the girls I saw an immensely tall young man, a shepherd, who had to stoop as he walked across the room to where we were seated. He knelt and stared at the infant with gentle eyes and

asked to take him in his arms. His hands were enormous, and the infant almost fit into his palms. He took the baby, now awake, and held him, his great hands encircling the tiny body so that their eyes were inches apart. He stared fixedly at the child's face, devouring him with his eyes, marveling at the perfection of his features, the tiny shell of an ear, the gently rounded cheek, the perfection of the tiny hands, the beauty of the eyes. When he was finished he handed the baby not to me but to one of the girls, and their three heads were bent over the child, murmuring words of praise and love. Joseph and I sat transfixed, watching this outpouring of love for our child. We smiled at each other and at our visitors with pleasure and gratitude. There was nothing more perfect than this moment. Joseph reached for my hand and held it gently in his, his eyes searching mine and finding love there.

The young man finally stood and said that he must leave and that he was grateful to us for letting him come. He spoke briefly with Joseph in the doorway and told him that he might be able to help him find a beast of burden suitable for our journey home. They arranged to meet the next day

in the marketplace at noon. With a last look at the child, he left. The girls stayed longer, taking turns holding the baby, each time reluctantly surrendering him to the other. Finally it was time for the child to be fed and they watched with gentle smiles as he nuzzled at my breast. When it was time to go, they left reluctantly, but it was late and we all needed sleep. After they left, Joseph replaced the door covering and we lay silently together, the infant between us, and knew the wonder of love and of life and we were content.

During the night the infant awakened twice. The first time he cried sharply in hunger, and I quickly enveloped him in my cloak to mute the noise lest we be discovered. He fed hungrily, and I could see just enough to know that he was staring intently at my face as he sucked. I still could not believe my good fortune. This perfect little child, my first born son, resting in my arms, taking nourishment from my body, our eyes gravely regarding each other. A profound tenderness swelled in my heart. There was no sound other than soft breathing and tiny gurgles of satisfaction. It was a moment of perfection, suspended in time. I wanted it to last forever. Joseph

groaned in his sleep and rolled over toward us. I watched to see if he would awaken, but he did not. His deep breathing began again. After he had finished eating, my son fell asleep, nuzzled against my breast, one hand gently resting on my flesh. I sat there for what seemed a long time, not wanting to leave this lovely moment. Then I carefully lay back, my child still nestled in my arms, and slept again. It was almost dawn when he awakened for the second time, and he barely whimpered before I was ready for him. He suckled lazily this time, stopping often to turn his head, then almost absent-mindedly groping about for my nipple. He was amusing to watch. I had never seen a child do this before, making such a game of nursing. I hugged him to me in delight and thought about all the wonders and discoveries that lay ahead for me with this wondrous child, my Yehwah -- for that is what I wanted to call him, my Yehwah, my first-born son, born of love, born to love and to be loved, my perfect son.

I sat there musing as the sun rose and the sky lightened, and I tried to imagine what lay ahead with this child, what the years would bring in joy and sorrow, in promises kept and promises broken, in triumphs and

tragedies, and I was overwhelmed by a sense of foreboding, a fear for this tenderest of children. I told myself that this was nonsense, that this was nothing but fatigue, of being in a strange place at such a time, of missing people and places loved and familiar. And I looked upon that sweet uplifted face and I was suffused with love for this innocent creature, this lovely being, my son, fruit of my womb. I told myself that a lifetime of joy and love awaited this child, that a lifetime of joy and love and pride awaited his mother. There will be nothing but happiness, I told myself, nothing but happiness.

That afternoon Joseph returned with a small ass and insisted that we leave that hour. The donkey was ready to go, water bags hung about his neck and a crude seat affixed to his back. His head hung patiently as Joseph helped me into the seat and handed me the child, wrapped in extra clothing against the coldness of the night to come. He went to seek our young friend to thank her and to tell her that we must go, but he could not find her and he was impatient to be away.

Joseph led us through the streets to the

square. There was a long, low building with many people lounging about outside and more lined up to get in the doorway.

Joseph found a young lad to hold the donkey for us and we joined the line waiting to enter. Inside there were two Roman soldiers seated at a table. In front of them were two large ledgers. As each person stood in front of him the soldier wrote down his name in the ledger and handed him a token. I asked Joseph about the meaning of the token and he said it was proof of registration and permitted free travel.

When we reached the table the older of the soldiers pointed at the infant and asked the date of birth. When Joseph told him he laughed loudly and poked the other soldier. He exclaimed that it was good fortune that another Jew was born just in time to be registered to pay taxes. Joseph's face registered no emotion. I held my child more closely. When Joseph had his token in his hand, we turned to leave and our way was barred by an officer who demanded to see the child. I was terrified, and Joseph put a hand on my arm to calm me. The Roman looked fierce, but when he saw the child his face broke into a smile and he gently

stroked the child's face with his forefinger. He wished us a good journey. As we left I asked Joseph why there were so many people thronging both inside and outside the building, and he said that he had been told that some citizens were having problems obtaining tokens and that they could not leave until they did so. He said that he did not fully understand the problem but that hearing of it had made him anxious to leave Bethlehem immediately.

Joseph gave a coin to the lad holding his donkey, and I walked by his side as we turned back to the edge of town. As we approached our place of shelter we saw our young friend standing by the gateway peering anxiously in both directions. When she saw us she gave a whoop of joy and ran toward us. Her face fell when she heard that we were leaving, and she asked if she could carry the child and walk a way with us. Not for a moment did she take her eyes off the infant as she walked along. She begged us to stay longer, and Joseph gently explained his concern, his anxiety to be at home as soon as possible. At the edge of town we stopped and her eyes filled with tears as she handed the child back to me. We embraced her and both of us told her how

grateful we were to her for her care and help. I wanted to take her with me. Joseph helped me to mount the ass and we set off for home. She stood and watched us out of sight, waving now and again.

The desert was calm, and as night fell and the stars appeared there was an eerie light, almost a phosphorescence in the atmosphere. When we were tired we stopped, fed the donkey, and ate ourselves. The baby was good and ate hungrily until he was satisfied. Joseph held him for a while as I walked about, and then we lay together with our child between us and slept under the brilliant sky. The silence was total. The earth was at peace.

As we traveled, I thought about Joseph. I looked at him and saw his strength. I have known this strength for many months now, I thought. He has given me comfort when I was sad. He has given me strength when I was weak. He has given me faith when I doubted. He has above all given me love. He has at all times been tender. He has at all times been undemanding. We have lain side by side all this time and never has he been other than kind and gentle and giving. He has accepted this child as

his, though he knows it is not. He looks upon this child with eyes of love, of adoration even. He wonders at his beauty. I know that Joseph's love will nourish this child, I know that Joseph will at all times be a loving and generous caregiver to this child. He will teach him his craft. He will teach him the games that all boys play. He will teach him goodness and honesty and generosity in full measure, and all our lives will be made richer and more joyous by Joseph's goodness. In his modesty he does not see himself as others see him. In his charity he sees the good in all others before himself. He tries always to be pleasing. I love Joseph. It is impossible not to. My mother chose wisely in him. He has never said that he does not believe what she told him. He has never said that he does. I have never asked. I will never ask. It is enough to know the comfort of his presence and to know the love he feels for this wondrous child, this gift from God.

Mary

It was dusk when we got home, but I begged Joseph to take me first to my

mother's house. I needed to see her. Joseph made no protest. My mother gasped when she opened the door and saw us standing there. Then she enveloped me and the baby in her embrace. Once again I could not hold back the tears. Elizabeth, attracted by the commotion, came to the doorway. We stood there for a few moments laughing and crying in turn, and then my mother gently took Yehwah from my arms and led us inside. She wanted to know everything, and I started to tell her but I could not speak through my tears. My mother insisted that I lie down, that I was too exhausted for words and that we would talk later. I lay down gratefully and my mother placed my child at my side. I slept almost immediately lulled by the sweet sound of the voices from the other room.

When I awakened some hours later, my mother was sitting at my side. She insisted that I must stay with her for a few days until I regained my strength, that Joseph had agreed and that I must now sleep again. Joseph had fetched the tiny bed he had made for the child and Yehwah slept placidly in it by the side of the bed. I sat up. I could not believe that I was really home, here in the comfort of my mother's

love and caring. Again, the tears came. I began to wonder, I told my mother, if I would ever get over crying. She soothed me and said it was natural at such a time, that I would be cheerier in the morning. Just then Yehwah awakened and my mother watched as he fed. For the first time I felt truly grown up in my mother's presence, and I listened pridefully as she spoke of the loveliness of my child and her pride in me.

It was a miraculous time, those first few days after Yehwah's birth. Joseph spent much time with us and when I felt able I returned to the home I had grown to love even more than the home of my childhood and we began our life together in this house I had come to so recently and which I had come to love so completely that I could not imagine any other home.

The child was the focus of all our lives, and for weeks there was a constant stream of visitors to see this child newly home from Bethlehem. The story of his birth was known by all, and all of them spoke of how beautiful a child this was. Some who came were friends I had made close by, but most were friends of Joseph's come in love of Joseph to see his child. And they

brought gifts and offerings of all kinds in welcome. I loved these visits. I loved having words of praise for my child. I loved seeing Joseph's pleasure in these words.

My mother was with me much in those days after our return, helping me in every way and teaching me much that I did not know. She took great pleasure in holding her new grandson and rocking him and crooning softly to him melodies I remembered vaguely from my childhood. I almost envied her these moments, base as that thought was, for I wanted nothing more than to hold this child close to my heart at all times, to know the wonder of his warmth. He slept much, as with all infants, but when he was awake I sought excuses to pick him up, to feed him, to clean him, to soothe him, to talk to him. I surprised myself. I found myself talking to him as my equal, grown person to grown person, It was a constant dialogue at times, and I would know the foolishness of it and I would stop for a while and then start again, supplying both the questions and the answers from my full heart.

"Are you hungry?"

"Of course you are hungry."

"Do you want to go for a walk?"

"Of course you do, but let us get dressed first."

"Do you think that Joseph will be home soon?"

"I hope so too."

It was foolishness that filled me with delight, and as I looked into those wide unblinking eyes I was sure I saw understanding. Even my mother, who knew much about infants, said his good nature was extraordinary. The days flew by and each day I felt the tug on my heart grow stronger. The first time he smiled at me I thought my heart would break with joy. That night when Joseph came home I was bursting with news of this triumph and when he picked up the babe as he always did as soon as he got home, he was rewarded with a dazzling smile. Our joy was complete. You would think that this was the first infant who ever smiled to judge by our behavior. We were like infants ourselves in our delight.

And so this child filled my life and Joseph's with love. Each day seemed happier and more fulfilling than the one before, and I feared in my heart that this happiness was

too great to last, that this perfection was beyond nature. But with each passing day I knew the fullness of love that defied description, and I knew that nothing could ever change this love, this gift of love, and that this child had transformed all our lives and that we existed in the beauty of his being.

And how fast he grew. Soon he could sit up by himself, but even before that he liked to be propped up into a sitting position so that he could see everything. And when people spoke to each other in his presence he would look intently at the speaker and then switch his gaze when the next spoke and then back again, as if he were comprehending every word. This amused Joseph, and he liked to play games, moving about as he spoke, watching Yehwah's eyes follow him until he was silent and then switch back to me as I spoke. If there were more than the two of us, Yehwah was equally intent on each speaker in turn and, listening, he would wave his arms about as though desperate to join in the conversation.

Soon after he sat by himself, he began crawling about the floor, and I watched amused as he would, head down, bump into

the furniture, into the wall, and then he had a way of pushing himself back into a sitting position and gravely studying the offending object or wall. Then he would shake his head and start off again in another direction. Soon he was able to lift his head and look ahead as he crawled and the collisions stopped. Almost as soon as Yehwah could sit up, Joseph began to carry him around on his shoulders and Yehwah squealed with delight at this adventure. Joseph would walk about the streets in this way and when he stopped to speak with someone he encountered Yehwah would grow impatient to be on with the journey and he would squirm to be put down to crawl in the dust of the street as Joseph talked. Joseph and he would arrive home, the child covered with dusty dirt and Joseph abashed at having permitted such a thing. It grew to be a joke and we began to set water jars in the sun each morning to warm the water for the nightly ritual of the bath. Joseph would hold his son on his knees and I would sponge off the grime, clucking my disapproval at the two bad boys and as Yehwah grew older he began to understand the pretense and he and Joseph would exchange glances and try not to

laugh.

It was a disaster when he began to walk. Nothing was safe. He began as most children do by pulling himself up on pieces of furniture, a chair, a low table, a bench, and holding on he would edge his way as far as he could go and then reach for the next piece, sometimes succeeding in tottering to it, sometimes falling, but always he was tenacious. There was no such thing as giving up and as he practiced, nothing was safe. The first time he knocked a piece of my precious pottery to the floor, breaking it into two uneven pieces, I cried out in anger and Yehwah looked at me amazed. He had never heard anger. I was contrite immediately, but it was too late. He burst into tears and cried inconsolably. I snatched him from the floor and walked about the room telling him I was sorry and trying to console him, but it was a long time before he stopped sobbing and I felt a stab of real physical pain when he looked at me with his tear streaked face. It was a while before I lost my temper again.

In these months after our return from Bethlehem my life settled into a pleasant routine. I would visit my mother's house

daily, first carrying my baby and later when he was older with him toddling at my side. It was not far and yet my mother did not come to my house unless she was asked. Her respect for Joseph did not permit her to. She feared intruding, although Joseph assured her that she was at all times welcome and wanted.

There was quiet pleasure in these visits with my mother. She delighted in Yehwah and he in her and when he was able to speak, they spoke gravely to each other as though adult to adult and she delighted in his questions, though some were beyond ready answers. Always Yehwah questioned. You could see his quick intelligence at a very early age and his great interest in the people around him. He wanted to know everything. My mother was concerned that he was old beyond his years and that he was too sober a child entirely. But there was great joy in Yehwah. Great love and great joy. He was the center of all of our lives.

Often Elizabeth joined us, and later her child became Yehwah's playmate and close companion. Elizabeth was clever at needlework and she taught me to sew and em-

broider. I was never as clever as she, but I grew to enjoy using my hands. My mother taught me to make bread in the new oven that she had in her rear courtyard and to keep the fire burning to have just the right temperature. Joseph enjoyed this bread and made much of it each time he spoke with my mother.

It was a pleasant time of love and friendship for me and for Joseph it was also a time of hard work. He was constantly busy and his son spent much time watching him work. Yehwah would sit quietly for hours watching his father's fine craftsmanship and asking questions, always questions, about how each piece of wood was fashioned. Joseph made him a small knife and gave him pieces of softwood to carve and shape and there was no end to the pleasure in this for Yehwah.

At times my mother expressed her concern about Joseph's happiness. She felt somehow still responsible for this marriage. I assured her that Joseph was content with his family and told her to ask him herself. She protested that she would never do that, that such a question would be intruding, but she still looked at me in a questioning

way each time she inquired about Joseph. Eventually she became persuaded of the truth of what I said and asked no more questions.

Elizabeth was not so easy. She spoke often and firmly about her feeling that I should have another child. She said that she herself wanted another child and that she hoped that God would grant her wish. She was not able to leave the subject alone and brought it up over and over again. I smiled and nodded and said nothing. There was time enough for that later, but not now.

These months and years were wondrous years for all of us, years of love, years remembered with joy.

Mary

What did I love about my child? Everything, of course, but when I try to remember step by step and stage by stage, certain things emerge. From the very first moment of his birth I loved his beauty, almost luminous that perfection of face and expression. Always smiling, always content, from the very beginning seeming to want to

communicate. I remember early sounds of joy, long before intelligible speech. I am sure he must have cried, like all babies, but it must have been rare. I don't remember it at all. I do remember my mother's saying that God must have forgotten to teach him to cry.

I remember that as soon as he could walk he would rush toward people. Stranger or not, it didn't matter. If he were not held firmly in my grasp he would break away from me and rush up to the nearest person and throw his arms about their legs. Some of them did not like it, were taken aback. Most were delighted and bent down to hug this friendly stranger. And then his joy was complete. Another admirer. As he grew older he was a little more discriminating, but always openly affectionate. Joseph, who was not by nature a demonstrative man, was totally disarmed by his son. In a day when such behavior was rare, Joseph cuddled his son as an infant and spoke to him in gentle words of love, and when he was old enough carried him everywhere about town astride his shoulders. They were a familiar sight, and Yehwah regretted the time when he grew too tall for this treat.

I remember too this child's capacity for absorption. He would spend hours from an early age playing by himself with the simplest of toys, creating stories, I thought, when I heard the childish sounds from where I watched or worked. At other times he would play in total silence, absorbed completely in an inner game. And when he began to speak it came in a deluge, as though he had been storing words against the day they could pass his tongue. We all marveled at his speech, and strangers stared unbelieving when they heard the talk of this tiny child. He never tired of talking when there was someone to answer his questions, and there was no end to his questions. They tried my ingenuity from the very beginning.

As he changed from a little boy into a big boy, I feared that he might cast off these winsome qualities, but he did not. His affectionate nature was clear to all. He never grew embarrassed at displays of affection and emotion. His questions changed in nature, but never did his mind cease to be inquiring, never was it satisfied with half answers or half learning. His beauty and luminosity stayed with him, and his eyes were extraordinary. He could mesmerize

with those eyes. He was at all times caring of all he encountered. There was nothing he would not do to help wherever help was needed.

So I am making him sound like a perfect child. Well, he was. Loved by all, radiating goodness, remarkably sensitive, giving by nature. I keep thinking looking back that there must have been something lacking, something negative in all those years, but if there was, and I doubt it, it has been lost to my memory. This was my child.

There were times when I knew his full wonder. I remember when he was barely two, a toddler anxious to explore the world. I should not have left him alone for a second, but I did. It was our custom each morning to go into the garden, and Yehwah would play by my side as I worked, sometimes pretending to work with me and more often than not managing to disrupt my work completely. I loved these mornings. That particular morning while I worked I heard someone at the street door. "Stay there, Yehwah," I said as I left to see who it was. "Don't move." I was gone only a few seconds. I know it was not much longer than a minute, but when I got back

he was gone. My heart stopped. It could not be. I ran to the alley and looked both ways. He was not there. Could he have come into the house without my seeing him, I asked myself? I ran into the house and it took only a second or two to know that he was not there. I was beside myself. I ran into the alley and started along the way, stopping to look into each courtyard. Nothing, until I came almost to the corner. I knew this courtyard. All the children were warned to stay away. Always there was a large dog chained to the doorstep, and he would snarl and bark at passersby and bare his teeth if anyone stepped into the courtyard.

Even before I saw I knew where Yehwah was, and I held my breath. I was only a little reassured by the silence. As I stood in the entryway my breath quickened and my heart began to pound. There was Yehwah, sitting beside the great dog, patting him and stroking him with great joy, and the dog lay there unprotesting. I started toward them and the dog raised his head and growled. I stopped.

"Yehwah," I called softly, "Come here. Come to me." Yehwah looked at me and

pointed to the dog, a great smile lighting his face. He stood up and the dog rose to his feet. I took a step forward and the dog growled again.

"Come, Yehwah, please." I could hardly speak. There was a great roaring in my ears. I stooped and held out my arms. Yehwah threw his arms about the neck of the standing dog and the dog turned his head lazily to lick the child. Then he came into my arms and the dog watched silently.

I do not remember getting home. I know I ran. I know I cried in relief. I know I puzzled Yehwah with my tears. Never, I was told later, had this dog permitted anyone but his owner to approach him. There was much talk of the danger he presented to the unwary. The picture of Yehwah and the dog playing together peaceably stayed in my mind for many years, and each time my heart pounds I am reminded of that day.

Mary

What did I feel about my son? Pride, first of all, always pride. I was proud of him as an infant, so beautiful in all ways, a joy of a

child. No one could see him without commenting on his beauty. No one could observe him without commenting on the goodness of his behavior, the evenness of his temper, the delight in life that all his actions and expressions reflected. And as he grew, pride in his accomplishments. His speech was pure and beautiful to hear, eloquent from an early age. He was quick to learn always and thirsty for knowledge. He was gifted in discussion and argument, always with modesty when speaking to his elders, always with enthusiasm, never with intolerance. He was never judgmental, but always exploring, always eager to understand and sometimes frustrated in his attempts to know the unknowable. I cannot remember a time when Yehwah did not fill me with pride.

Concern. I was often concerned about my child, as all mothers are, of course. Yehwah was so open, so trusting, so vulnerable, it seemed to me. I tried at first to make him realize that the world was not a place where trust could be absolute, that he should be careful about people, but I gave up quickly. It was so completely his nature to love and to trust that he was incapable of understanding, or at least of accepting,

what I was saying. For years I worried, needlessly, fruitlessly, that the world would not treat my Yehwah gently, and perhaps it did not on occasion, but I never knew of it, and never did my child act in anything but total love and trust. I do not say that he was always understood, but there was a quality about him that seemed to shield him from life's rebuffs, from ridicule, from the casual cruelty that often marks human contact. My son never understood my concern, never accepted it as valid. Not that we ever argued about it, but he pushed it away in such a gentle way so often that gradually I realized its uselessness.

Love and joy. It is impossible for me to separate the two. From the moment of his birth -- perhaps from before -- this was a child of love and joy. There were no dark moments in this regard. It was a love and a joy widely shared. Joseph and my mother were always central to this love and joy. Each of us loved and rejoiced in Yehwah in our own special way, and all our love combined to create a cocoon of love in which this child grew and thrived and returned this love given in full measure at all times. And this love and joy which centered in our family radiated outward and touched

many lives, long before Yehwah became a teacher.

Wonder. Perhaps the last thing I need to talk about. Of course from the beginning I knew that this child was God's child given to me with love, but I did not know why and I did not know how. So I would look at my child, always with pride and love and joy, but often with wonder as well. For a long time I pushed from my mind the miracle of his birth. In a sense I know I did this because I loved the ordinariness of our life, the simple pleasures, the company of one another and of those we enjoyed in worldly ways, the simple activities of everyday living. It was hard for me to imagine anything changing this good life we led. I liked the ordinary. But as Yehwah grew, I knew I could not forever pretend to myself that this was an ordinary child. Not that he did not do ordinary things -- he did as every other child his age -- but he also said and did extraordinary things, and I knew with a growing certainty that this child, sent by God, given to me and Joseph and to Ann in trust, was indeed a child of wonder, and that I could not pretend otherwise. He was not an ordinary boy. He would not grow into an ordinary man. That much I

knew and no more until the day that Yehwah spoke to me of his knowledge of my secret and his awareness of God's plan for him. From that day forward I knew in my heart that extraordinary things lay ahead for my child.

Mary

I remember rocking, rocking, rocking, endlessly rocking in the chair Joseph had made for me. First with an infant so tiny and helpless that it could not hold up its head and had to be supported to suckle. Then, almost without my noticing the time passing, with an active flailing infant, struggling to be free of his bonds, ready to leave my firm grasp, and then grown weary, settling into the crook of my arm and sleeping peacefully with a full stomach. Those were peaceful times. The child was the center of our lives. The minute Joseph came through the doorway his eyes would search the room for Yehwah. If he was asleep Joseph would stand over him, transfixed, and gaze at the silent child until I reminded him, often sharply, that his food grew cold. If Yehwah happened to be crawling about the

floor, as he often did as he grew older, I would watch amused as this great hulk of a man got down on all fours and crawled around as if he were an infant himself. I had never heard of such behavior. Men did not act this way. But Joseph did. And he spent hours fashioning toys out of wood scraps, toys that delighted Yehwah and that cluttered the house and exasperated me when I found them constantly underfoot. As soon as he could grasp a ball, Joseph made him a perfect sphere, polished to a sheen, and Joseph patiently taught him to release his grip and to roll that ball along the floor or along the top of the table. Joseph had infinite patience, returning this ball, making Yehwah ecstatic with the triumph of recapturing and then returning the ball in an endless game of pleasure. There was never enough of the child for Joseph, and there was never enough of Joseph for the child. As soon as he was able to sit upright without assistance, Joseph took him on his shoulders and walked about the streets. Yehwah, astride his father's shoulders, rode as if in triumph. And the triumph was Joseph's. He knew no greater pleasure than to greet all he encountered with this precious cargo in

his care.

As Yehwah learned to speak, I rejoiced in the quiet conversations we would have during the day. His questions were endless. My answers were the best I could do, but "why?" followed "why?" and I was always relieved when Joseph appeared and I knew that instantly Yehwah was his. With Joseph, Yehwah did not feel the need, if that is what it was with me, of constant questions, of serious interchange. With Joseph, he became a creature of total joy, of boisterousness, of laughter, of game playing, of pretense, of challenges offered and accepted and met.

As Yehwah grew, the bond between him and Joseph became a marvel to me, and we would spend hours speaking of the wonder of this child who had sparked in Joseph's heart and mine a love we never dreamed was truly possible in its perfection and in its intensity. And I knew all the while that as my love for my child grew and swelled in my heart so did my love for Joseph, that best of men, that best of husbands, that best of fathers. Gentle Joseph, my Joseph, father to this child of God, selfless in his devotion, a perfect soul. I hugged my good

fortune to me those precious years and I knew in my heart that I was blessed among women to know this love, this goodness, this total caring.

Mary

From the beginning Joseph and I disagreed about the little knife that he gave to Yehwah. He was still a baby in my eyes, but to Joseph he was becoming a boy and he longed for a knife. He watched Joseph work with wood. He loved the toys Joseph fashioned of wood. He saw the miracles that a knife could create. And he wanted one.

I rarely disagreed with Joseph, and he rarely disagreed with me. On all things we were of one mind. But this was different. Joseph argued that there could be no harm in it, that he would teach Yehwah the correct use of a knife to work wood, and that he needed to learn what he yearned to learn. In my mind's eye I saw the quick rush of blood and the thought horrified me. Then I looked at my child and realized that Joseph was right about that at least. He was no longer a baby.

Although Joseph and I were careful not to discuss our differences, rare as they were, in front of Yehwah, particularly this difference, it was not hard for him to determine that Joseph was willing for him to have the knife he coveted and I was not.

Yehwah did not wheedle. He looked at me with trusting, pleading eyes and asked, "Why, Mother? Why can't I have a knife?"

I told him I was afraid of his hurting himself. "I won't " he said, "I will be careful." I said that he was too young, that he had other toys, that I was still afraid that he would cut himself. He said no more, but his eyes were still pleading. Joseph said no more either, and once or twice I caught Yehwah looking at Joseph with those pleading eyes and Joseph shaking his head gently in denial. I knew it was about the knife and I knew I would give in.

Yehwah was overjoyed and begged to be with Joseph in the shop more than ever. "He will lose interest after a while," Joseph assured me. "He will get tired of spending so much time with me. You have not lost your son." Joseph's humor was always gentle. This was as close as he ever came to chiding me.

It was not much more than a month later that it happened. The knife slipped. It was that simple. I looked up from my gardening one day and there was Yehwah holding out his hand to me, holding back the tears, a fresh cut along the side of the palm. It had bled, but not badly. It simply needed washing and covering. I picked Yehwah up although he was getting heavy to carry and took him into the house murmuring comforting sounds. His eyes were wide. I knew he feared losing the knife. Finally he said that it didn't hurt, that it was only a little cut, that he would be more careful.

I knew it was only a little cut, but I knew too that it could have been a big cut. After I had put a cloth on the cut, Yehwah was content to play quietly on the floor, and as I watched him I wondered how completely it was possible to shield this child, or any other child for that matter, from the risks that life involved. I shuddered to think of what might have happened with that little knife that he loved so, and I knew that I had to live with that possibility, that I had no right to put my peace of mind first. I wondered how many more times I would know that my child was beyond my protection. I feared there would be many. I did

not relish the prospect.

Jesus

I was always envious of the older boys, even when I was barely able to walk and talk. I wanted above all to be older than I was, to be able to be free of all restraints and to be part of those who seemed to me to have so much freedom. I was anxious to grow up. I think perhaps all children feel this way, but I did not know that at the time. Having a knife was part of growing up, and when I asked Joseph about it I was sure that he would give it to me without question. I waited expectantly for his answer. He stopped his work and put his hands on his hips and regarded me gravely, as he always did before he spoke. He said that this was a serious request, that he alone could not grant this request, that I had to ask my mother for permission, but that he would add his voice to mine. We asked that evening. I could not believe it when my mother said no, absolutely not, absolutely no. There was no further discussion, she said, absolutely no.

I was disappointed when my father said

nothing. He looked at me and I at him and I could not read his eyes. I looked at my mother, but she would not look at me.

It was not long after this that I got my knife. I cherished this knife. It was a symbol to me, though I did not know what a symbol was at that time. It meant invulnerability. It meant that I was trusted. It meant that I could feel as old as I wanted to feel, that I could say to others, "Look, this is my knife. Mine alone. My father is teaching me how to use it. Would you like me to teach you?" It was my first taste of power, and it was sweet. My father counseled me about carelessness and I listened carefully, but I did not think I could ever err with that knife. I was sure I could not.

The day I erred was not a day I like to remember. It did not hurt, not at all, but I felt I had betrayed my father with my carelessness and I knew that my mother would not be pleased. I wanted to hide my wound from my mother if I could, but my father after looking at it and seeing that it was not at all serious, told me that I must that instant go home and tell my mother the truth. I did as he said I must, not willingly, but knowing that whatever my mother said

I must tell her that I was sorry, that I did not mean to cause her worry. I was so afraid I would have to give up my knife.

I never knew the words that passed between my mother and father that evening, but I was allowed to keep my knife, my talisman, my charm, and in the end it marked a change in my mother's attitude towards me. No longer was I an infant in her eyes. I sensed that she knew how desperately I needed to keep that knife, to be trusted with the responsibilities that went with it, to be grown up in my own eyes. I am sure that it caused her a great deal of worry, but she said not a word. Joseph, my father watched me more closely, but he too never referred to that day afterwards. Of all the milestones in my young life, this was one of the sweetest.

Mary

I did not hear them when they came in. I was sitting on the floor playing with Yehwah, rolling his precious ball back and forth to him. The door was open against the warmth of the day and my back was towards it. When Yehwah looked up from the

game and started to scramble to his feet I turned and saw them. They stood just inside the doorway, two of them, tall and threatening in their uniforms, one older and one younger. They said nothing, just stood there looking about the room. I grabbed Yehwah to me and held him close. My heart pounded with fear. Yehwah struggled to get free.

"Let him go," the younger one said. I shook my head in refusal and he took a step toward us. I loosened my grasp and Yehwah got to his feet and with a beaming smile, arms outstretched, ran toward the soldiers. The younger one who had spoken crouched and with his finger gently stroked the child's face as he stood in front of him, his hands on the soldier's knees. The older one spoke harshly and nudged his companion with his foot.

"There," he said, pointing to the back rooms. "You search there. I'll take this room." The young soldier rose to his feet and turned Yehwah around gently and nudged him toward me. I rose and raised my child in my arms. He did not want to be held. I went to the chair and sat and rocked and held him firmly and I watched. The

soldier went about the room, wall by wall, moving everything to look under and behind. He examined the underside of the table, each stool, and each chair. He moved everything on the corner shelves, each dish, each mug, each pot, each vessel. He lifted each bit of clothing lying about and shook it. He went to the firepit and prodded about the ashes, sending cinders into the room. He looked at me and asked me to stand, and then examined all parts of the chair. He turned it over and ran his hands over the bottom of the seat. Then he gestured roughly that I was allowed to sit again and joined the younger man in the bigger bedroom.

I dared not move. By now Yehwah had quieted and lay in my arms, his eyes fastened on them as they emerged and with barely a nod crossed the room to the door. At the door the younger one turned and pointed at Yehwah. "I have one," he said, "about that age." And then they were gone. I waited until I could no longer hear their footsteps and went to the doorway still clutching my child to me. I saw them turn into a house part way to the corner. I covered Yehwah's head with my cloak and ran with him to Joseph's shop.

Joseph was smoothing a piece of wood and put it down when he saw me. My alarm was clear. In a rush of words I told him what had happened. "Why, Joseph? What were they doing? What were they looking for? They took nothing."

He made me sit and took my hand in his. "Weapons," Joseph said. "I have heard that they are looking for weapons. I have heard that the Romans have come to be afraid of the people's anger."

"But, Joseph," I protested, "Why our house? We have no weapons."

"I know, Mary, and I don't know why. Perhaps it is because I speak to so many people. They know nothing so they are suspicious of everybody."

My heart froze. "Will they come back, Joseph?"

Joseph stood and walked about a minute. "I don't know, Mary. I don't know if they will be back." He turned and lifted me to my feet, the child held between us. "What I do know, Mary, is that I am here to protect you. No harm will come to you or to Yehwah. I promise you that." He held us tightly. I did not understand how he could make such a promise, but I knew Joseph

did not promise lightly.

It was a few days later that Joseph spoke of leaving. We were sitting after the evening meal. Yehwah was asleep and it was a peaceful moment until Joseph spoke. He said that there was much talk in the town of the searches the soldiers had been making. He said there were rumors, no more, that weapons had been found, that people had been seized. There was great unrest. Joseph stood up and walked across the room and stood with his back to me.

"Mary," he said, "I think we must leave,"

"Leave, Joseph?" I could not believe my ears. "Leave for what? Go where? Why?"

"There is danger, Mary," Joseph said, still not turning around. "It may be that this danger would not touch you and Yehwah, that you would stay safe from harm, but I cannot take that chance."

He turned to face me. His features were drawn with pain. His eyes were anxious. "I have thought much of this, Mary, believe me. I do not feel that you are safe here any longer. We must think of the child, not ourselves. He is our special responsibility. You know that. I promised to protect you. How can I do it if I am not with you every

second of the day and night? You know that is not possible. So we must take Yehwah and go to a safe place."

I was stunned and a cold fear began to possess me. I protested that this was our home, that we could not leave it, that the Roman soldiers were everywhere. Where could we find safety?

Joseph said that there had been much talk among the men of going south to a city big enough so that we could not easily be found, a city big enough so that he could find work. There was always need of a good carpenter. He said that I must decide what I needed and most wanted to take and that we would have to leave most things behind, that we would one day return and that they would be waiting for us.

My head was spinning with the magnitude of what Joseph was saying we must do. And then I thought of my mother. How could I have failed to think of her first of all? She must come with us.

Joseph said that he had already spoken of this to my mother, and that they had agreed that she would be safe staying behind. The soldiers were not fearful of the older ones. They feared the defiance of the

young. My mother would not be harmed. I could not bear the thought of leaving her and begged Joseph to reconsider. He took me into his arms and spoke directly.

"You must believe me in this, Mary. Speak to your mother. She will tell you the same thing." And so I did speak to my mother and she did tell me the same thing. And she came to help me pick and choose those things that we most needed to take with us. She fashioned a little bag for Yehwah's toys with a drawstring so that he could easily carry it, and she gave me some of her precious linens to take. "Each time you use them," she said, "you will be reminded of me." As if I needed such a reminder. We worked silently together that last day, and she kept casting long lingering glances at Yehwah as he played on the floor. We both dreaded the separation that lay ahead.

She stayed to share our evening meal and to see Yehwah to sleep, sitting by his bed and speaking softly to him. Before she left she pressed into Joseph's hand some of her small savings and when he protested she said that he could return it ten fold on our return. Joseph smiled at the jest and stopped his protests. He held her to him

and thanked her gravely and then he left the room as we said our good-byes. I tried not to weep. I tried to smile, I tried and I failed. I clung to my mother and begged her to go with us. I told her how much I needed her. She hugged me to her wordlessly. Then as she turned to leave she said, "This is the best way, Mary, and it is only for a little while. You know how I will miss you, but you must go and I must stay. Take care of God's gift to you." And then she was gone. I could not move. I could not feel. I was lost.

It was before dawn that Joseph awakened me and whispered that we must be underway. I dressed hurriedly and then awakened Yehwah and dressed him. He was ready to play and babbled happily as he was being dressed. We had prepared food for the journey and I gave him a piece of the hard-bread to chew on as I went to find Joseph. During the night, he told me, he had packed our belongings that we were taking with us into the sacks and had carried them to the edge of town where the donkey stood hidden and tethered and guarded by a friend of Joseph's. Joseph urged me to look around to insure that he had not over-

looked anything. It was hard to see in the semi-darkness, but I could find nothing that had been forgotten. Joseph picked up Yehwah and swung him to his shoulders, then swung the remaining sack up under one arm and reached for my hand with the other. Yehwah squealed with delight and he held firmly to Joseph's head as Joseph stooped to get through the doorway and onto the street. I stood behind for a moment, took one long last look about and murmured a fervent wish that this home would be kept safe until our return. Then I closed the door behind me and followed Joseph down the street.

We saw no one. We were silent until we reached the edge of town and stopped. Joseph whistled softly and a shape emerged from the darkness. He shook Joseph's hand and reached up to caress the child. I could not make sense of their low murmurings, but the figure turned away and disappeared once again. Then he returned leading a laden donkey and handed the lead rope to Joseph who, in turn, handed it to me.

And so we set off on our journey into the unknown. I was less fearful than I thought I would be as I watched the familiar form

of Joseph in front of me, our sturdy Yehwah content as always to be riding on Joseph's shoulders. The sight gave me comfort, but I turned for one long last look at the place I had called home for all of my life. Then I hurried to catch up.

Jesus

It was cold and dark. In the little light there was I could see vague shapes and outlines. It was so cold. I was beginning to be frightened. Then through the darkness I saw a shape coming toward me. She picked me up in her arms and carried me to the doorway. In the main room she took me and wrapped me warmly in a heavy sheet and then held me close as she crooned a lullaby. My fears disappeared. I knew I had been dreaming and I told my mother about these frightening dreams. I told her that I was being chased by the bullies that congregated regularly at the end of our lane, that they wanted me to give them the knife that my father had fashioned for me and that I had refused. Then they started to beat me. Then I awakened, shivering with fear. When I woke I couldn't remember

where I was. We had moved here so recently that the house was still strange to me, the town still frightening.

My mother listened to my dream and rocked me as she held me close and reassured me that I was safe from harm, that she was always there to protect and love me, and that a knife was, after all, just a thing. If they took it, my father would make me another one. I asked my mother what I should do if this really happened as I dreamed and she said that at all times I should stay safe from harm, to do as they said. She said soon I would make friends in this new place and that before long I would have so many friends with me at all times that I need not be frightened by the big boys ever.

I did not really believe that I would make friends. I did not think it possible. This was such a large place, so many people, so much activity and noise. My mother, I thought, was not too pleased to be here either. We had traveled for a long time, sleeping at night and walking and riding by day. I could not count the cold nights we had slept on the sand, huddled together, sleeping fitfully. The dreams had begun

then. My mother and father had earnest conversations about what would happen in the new place, how we would manage. He assured her that we would find friends, would be able to live without fear, that we would be safe.

In a sense the journey was an adventure. I had never known the night. I had never realized that the world outside our little town was so vast, so threatening. We depended upon strangers for our food and water and we were not disappointed. When we arrived my father Joseph sought out acquaintances and we stayed with them for a day or two until we found this place. Now this was home, my mother said.

"How long is this going to be home?"

"I don't know" was her only reply, and although she acted cheerful I knew she was not happy to be in a strange place without family or friends. I missed them too.

My father appeared in the doorway, tall and strong, and the sight of him reassured me further. He came and sat beside us and lifted me onto his lap. He and my mother looked at each other without saying a word and my father stroked my hair back from my forehead.

I don't remember falling asleep, but when I woke it was noisy outside with the clang of metal on metal and loud voices, and the sun was streaming through the narrow window. I lay there a while listening for my mother's voice or for my father's deeper sounds, and not hearing them got out of bed and quickly dressed. It was market day and the street outside was thronged with people, hurrying in both directions. I saw my mother standing just outside the door speaking with one of our neighbors and I watched them for a few minutes before I went and tugged at her skirt. She tousled my hair as she talked and put her arm on my shoulder. I tugged at her skirt again. I was hungry and thirsty. She took me back inside and fed me bread and goat's milk, warm and foamy, and asked me if I remembered my dream and waking up. I told her I did. She asked me if I was still frightened and I said a little, not as much as before.

There was much to do during the day in this new place. I could go and watch the blacksmith. He was a great hairy man with huge hands. I would hold my ears as I watched him and back away when the flames flared up in his forge. I loved to see the metal turn bright red and watch as he

bent and turned it before it grew cold and gray. His wife became a friend of my mother's as soon as we arrived and they spent much time together. He gave me scraps of twisted metal often and I enjoyed playing with these strange shapes, imagining them into exotic creatures. I was allowed to walk to the market place which was always crowded with people, selling, buying, shouting, bargaining. My mother shopped here each day for food and sometimes for other things. There were all kinds of animals for sale on market days and sometimes entertainers who walked about and performed for small coins. There was an excitement about the market place. Things changed constantly. Sometimes I had a coin to spend and it gave me hours of pleasure to decide how to spend it. Some days my father took me with him to the market and I liked the respect with which everyone greeted him. I would get impatient when he stopped to speak of business or other serious things, and then just as I despaired of his ever stopping he would hoist me to his shoulders and I would ride above the crowds able to see far and wide. I loved that.

Above all at this time I loved to listen to

the grave talk of the adults who came to speak to my mother and father of the troubled times we were experiencing. I could tell that their concern for the safety of their children had led them to this place, that they were anxious to return home, that they were still fearful of doing so. I pretended to be busy with my playthings when the adults spoke this way so that my mother would not send me away as she had once when she saw me listening intently. I knew their alarm was shared by all. I did not understand it but I wanted to.

My father emerged as the leader in these talks. Everyone seemed to look to him for advice and when he spoke everyone listened closely. He had a calmness about him that gave comfort. I knew that comfort often.

Mary

Yehwah was my salvation during those days of exile. I could not have borne the loneliness without him. Our house was small, and he slept on a small bed in a corner of our bedroom. I can see it now in my mind's eye and I could see it then as I lay in bed. I

don't know how early Yehwah woke up most mornings, but almost always when I opened my eyes and turned to look at him I would find him wide-eyed in wakefulness staring at me. When he saw that I was awake he would break into a beaming smile and wait for the signal from me that meant he could leave his bed and crawl under the bed covers with me.

I loved those mornings when his small body would snuggle into the curve of my arm and we would whisper softly so as not to awaken Joseph. When it was time for me to get up, I would tuck Yehwah back under the covers and he would wait patiently for Joseph to open his eyes. Sometimes Joseph made a great game of this and would pretend to be asleep when he was really awake and reach over and tickle his son and then quickly pull his hand back. Yehwah would look at his sleeping father and his face would furrow with puzzlement. Soon, however, he figured out this game and at the first tickle he would throw himself on Joseph and sit astride him as he lay there. More tickling, more laughter. When I heard this laughter from the other room I knew it would be only minutes before Joseph would be dressed and ready to eat.

When the time came for Joseph to leave for work, Yehwah would throw his arms about Joseph's legs as though he could in that way keep him from the door. Joseph would pry his arms away, and when he was still small enough pick him up and throw him into the air. Shrieks of delight filled the room. Sometimes if I was dressed for the street, we would walk as far as the corner with Joseph and then return home to the tidying and cleaning that awaited.

During the morning each day we would go to the market to buy foodstuffs, and Yehwah would follow at my side as I went from vendor to vendor, occasionally demanding to be picked up so that he could see better, and he delighted in being given treats by the vendors, a sweet, a piece of fruit, a flower. Few could resist him. On the way home he would insist on carrying something, to help me he said, as though this were a solemn responsibility. When we reached home he was content to play quietly while I prepared the mid day meal and did other necessary household chores.

After Joseph left for his afternoon's work, Yehwah would crawl into my lap and I would tell him stories of home, of his

grandmother who loved him so much, of the house we had left behind and would soon go back to, of the friends and neighbors who missed us, of his father's workshop, of all the wonderful things we would do on our return. And Yehwah listened to the same stories, day after day, over and over again, never tiring of them, always begging for more. And most days as I spoke of these things, these sweet memories, he would fall asleep in my arms and I would carry him into the other room and place him on the big bed.

Left to myself, I would return to dreaming of home. In my mind's eye I could see every inch of that home I so loved. I could see every detail of my mother's face and remember the smile I so loved. I would walk the streets in memory and recite the names of all I encountered. There were many from Nazareth in this new place, of course, those who had left as we had, to seek safety for their children, but we were scattered throughout the city. Few lived nearby and those who did were acquaintances rather than friends. We did seek one another's company frequently, but for none of us did this fill the void in our hearts.

Sometimes I grew impatient with myself for my day dreaming and forced myself to count the blessings of here and now, and I knew how great was my good fortune, but I longed for home and my mother. Then I would grow impatient for Yehwah to awaken and put an end to my self concern. I would walk to the doorway three or four times some days to see if his eyes were open. I would try to busy myself with something that occupied my mind. But until Yehwah awakened, my thoughts stubbornly returned to Nazareth.

When Yehwah finally awoke most days it was time to get dressed to go to meet his father. It was our custom most days to walk to the place where Joseph worked and wait in the street for him to emerge. There was great joy for Yehwah in this and great pleasure for me. Joseph would sweep his son onto his shoulders and take my hand and we would walk thus to our home.

While I prepared the meal, Joseph and his son played their games and Yehwah's laughter was a joy always. Sometimes they would pull me down onto the floor with them and insist that I join in. There was no refusal or protest permitted. The meal

could wait.

Those times are vivid in my memory still -- a laughing happy child always, dispelling loneliness, creating joy and love, making me realize that home was more than a place, that home existed first and last in the heart.

Mary

Yehwah turned four during the exile. When I first awakened that morning I did not remember. Then when Yehwah crawled into bed with me and whispered in my ear, "Is it yet?" I realized that this was the day he had been waiting for for weeks. Every morning, "Is it yet?" and until now, "No, Yehwah, not yet."

Now I hugged him to me and whispered back, "It is today, Yehwah. Today you are four years old." His eyes grew wide with excitement. He knew what he had been promised -- three coins to spend as he wanted and one to save for another day. One coin for each year.

"Can we go right now?" he whispered.

"No, Yehwah, not until after your father

leaves and we finish our chores."

It took a great deal of patience that morning for Yehwah to lie there after I got up and to watch for Joseph to open his eyes. I heard the whoop of joy after a while and I hurried to finish Joseph's meal. The light told me that it was later than he usually awakened and I knew that he would be in a hurry to leave.

Yehwah trailed out of the bedroom behind his father, partially dressed for the street, and ready to leave. Joseph ate hurriedly. There was little sense that morning to walk to the corner with him, he was in such a rush. Yehwah's impatience to leave for the market place and the shops made me hurry through my tasks. He kept trying to help and causing further delay as I kept moving him out of the way. It was impossible to resist his pleading eyes, and so I put off finishing everything and we left for the market.

Joseph had solemnly counted out the four coins and put them in a tiny pouch for Yehwah to carry. He reminded him as he left that only three were for spending, the fourth to save for a later time. It took forever, it seemed to me, for Yehwah to de-

cide on his purchases. First we had to look at everything that his money would buy, and he explained to each storekeeper who had the time to listen that he was four today and had his own money to spend as he chose. He wanted most to buy a small animal to keep as his pet, but I persuaded him that we did not have enough space for the animal to be happy and he was satisfied to look further. In the end he spent two of his coins on toys -- puzzles and playthings, a top that spun crazily, a set of sticks for building, and a drawing of a dog instead, he said, of a real one. When he was finished getting what he wanted, he had a coin left and he said that he wanted to get a surprise for his father, something he really wanted. I thought of how often Joseph had spoken of getting a new leather strap. His old one was beginning to crack in places and badly needed replacing. I told Yehwah that such a gift would give his father great pleasure. "But are you sure Yehwah that you want to do this?" I asked. "This money is for you to buy whatever you want for yourself." "I want to," he insisted. "Please let me, Mother." So we shopped for the finest leather strap that Yehwah's money would buy -- supple enough to be tied and

strong enough to whet blades on. It was Joseph's habit to wear such a strap when he was working, long enough to tie about his waist and have the ends hang down to use in sharpening his tools. Yehwah made the final decision and with an air of great seriousness paid for his purchase. I think that purchase gave him the most pleasure.

I had already shopped for our special meal that evening and we hurried home to be there when Joseph arrived for his midday repast. During the afternoon we festooned the room with sprigs of greenery to create an inside garden and Yehwah arranged and rearranged his treasures on the table countless times.

It was a lovely time that evening. First, Joseph gave Yehwah the gift he had made for him, sets in pairs of little carved animals -- two elephants, two camels, two cats, two donkeys. He told Yehwah that he would make more later, that this was all he had time for for now. The present delighted Yehwah and they joined his other treasures on the table. They were truly lovely. Joseph was a magician with wood, and I wondered how he had found time for such loving work.

Then Joseph and I told our son, as we had on each of the anniversaries of his birth, the story of Bethlehem and of the joy he brought to us that day and ever since. Yehwah never tired of this story and insisted on each detail being told and retold. Finally he brought out the leather strap, wrapped in a piece of cloth I had given him and handed it to Joseph. I found it hard to hold back my tears at that point, and Joseph was touched beyond words. He pulled Yehwah onto his lap and held him close without saying a word for a long time. Then in a voice filled with emotion he told Yehwah that it was the best present he had ever received and that he would treasure it forever. And he did.

Mary

"We are going home!" " We are going home!" Yehwah and I were sitting quietly, I with my needlework, he with his wooden toys, when I heard pounding footsteps outside. Then Joseph appeared in the doorway, pausing to catch his breath, then rushing over, pulling me from my chair and dancing me around the room.

"Home!" he cried, "We are going home!"

I was dazed. "How..." I started to ask.

"Home," he said again, "Home."

"Joseph." I stopped still and tried to quiet him. "Joseph, tell me what is going on, What do you mean?"

He put his arms around me and held me to him and spoke close to my ear. "It is all right now," he said fiercely. "It is safe. They have gone. We can go home, all of us."

Yehwah had been watching us, a puzzled expression on his face, a question forming on his lips. Joseph released me and picked up his son and tossed him into the air.

"Home!" he said again, "Home! All of us. Home."

Yehwah laughed with delight. "Home," he repeated, "Home. All of us." I stood dazed. "Home!" The word rang in my mind over and over again. "Home!"

"But Joseph," I said, "how could this happen so quickly? No news at all for so long and now this. Are you sure it is true. Is it safe? Are you positive?"

Joseph laughed. "Would I tell you if I weren't sure? Do you think that this could be a joke? A cruel joke? No, Mary, this you

can believe. We are going home. We are going home soon."

"Tell me, my son," he said to Yehwah, "Are you glad to be going home?"

Yehwah nodded soberly. "Yes," he said, "I am glad."

"Then tell your mother," Joseph directed him. "Tell her over and over again." He placed the child in front of me and Yehwah looked up at me. "I am glad," he said.

Then the tears came. I knelt and held my son close to me. "I am too, my Yehwah. I am glad too."

Joseph stood looking at us, a great smile of satisfaction on his face. He spoke gently. "I must leave you for now. I must go back to the meeting. We must make plans. We will all go together. It will be a journey of triumph. It will be a journey of joy."

"Oh, Joseph, how soon?" I asked.

"Soon," he said. "Soon."

The word spread like wildfire. People rushed unbidden into each other's houses. "Did you hear? Did you hear? We are going home! Home!" Relative strangers hugged each other on the streets. The children danced with joy, some of them too young

to remember what home was. The men smiled in satisfaction as they watched the outpouring of emotion. Some of them brushed away tears and others let the tears fall freely. No one was more excited than Yehwah. No one was more pleased than Joseph, unless perhaps it was I. The celebration lasted most of the day. "I can't believe it!" "God is good!" "Let us be grateful." "How soon? How soon?" "We must get ready." A babble of voices, a medley of joy. Everyone was speaking at once. No one was listening.

Yehwah searched the crowd for his father and squirmed his way through the throng to reach his side. Joseph picked him up and put him on his shoulders. He waved to me excitedly as he found me in the crowd. How he has grown, I thought, since we came to this place. No longer a baby, but a little boy more beautiful to me than any other, not only physically with his fair hair and extraordinary eyes and slender build, but beautiful in his mind and spirit. He remembered little about home, but Joseph and I had spoken of it so often with love and longing that it seemed as real to him as it was to us. We spoke often to him of his grandmother and her love for him. It

would be a joyous reunion for her.

By evening the revelry had died down although the excitement lived in every heart. We spoke, Joseph and I, of the preparations that would have to be made for the journey. Joseph had been chosen as leader and it fell to him to direct the planning. But that was the morrow. Tonight was a time of quiet thanksgiving in each household, of joyful anticipation, of children too excited to sleep. Yehwah sat on Joseph's lap as we talked and listened attentively. "What can I do?" he asked over and over again. "What can I do?" Joseph promised him gravely that he would indeed be given a responsible job and Yehwah was satisfied with the promise.

We slept deeply that night, dreaming of the wonder of homecoming, of reunion. I wondered if my mother knew of it yet. I longed to see her and to feel the warmth of her embrace and to feel the surge of pride when she enfolded her grandson in her arms.

Preparations for our departure went quickly. There was no lack of helpers. The men gathered together as many donkeys and carts as they could find and the women

cooked and prepared food for the journey. The baker worked day and night baking dozens of loaves of bread. Each family was allowed to take only a portion of the household goods and clothing they had accumulated in this place, and there was much discussion about the choices to be made. Everyone was urged to carry on his body as much clothing as possible against the cool of the evenings.

The morning of our departure dawned bright and clear. We assembled just after dawn, the packing having been completed well in advance, and after a prayer asking God for a safe journey, we set out, forty families, all with children, some born in this strange place, all anxious to be home once again. Joseph advised against setting too quick a pace lest everyone tire too soon, but it was hard for most of us to heed this good advice. The faster we walked, we argued, the sooner we would get there.

It did not take long before we were aware of the soundness of Joseph's advice. There were laggards. There were children crying in protest. There were short tempered squabbles among the adults. Almost every-

one had to walk. The donkeys were already overburdened with goods and food and drink. The only one to ride was a woman who had injured her leg and was unable to walk. Joseph had fashioned a small cart for her with a platform for her injured leg, and there were comments, not all of them jocular, about the timing of her injury. "How convenient," some said. Others, "I wish I had thought of that."

Joseph insisted that we stop every so often to rest and gather strength. Each rest stop the men would play cards and check the loads, and the women would gather about in small groups, talking and some doing needlework. The children sat or played listlessly. Each time we came to a stream we stopped and watered the animals and filled the water jugs, and if there was time some of the women washed clothes. By dusk, everyone was exhausted and ready to sleep. By nightfall everyone slept knowing that the dawn was not enough hours away. The second day seemed easier, and the third easier still. Perhaps it was the knowledge that we were closer with each passing hour.

Mary

They came streaming from the town when they first saw us approaching -- running, stopping to catch their breath, then running again, men, women, and children of all ages to greet our little caravan. As they neared we rushed forward. Shouts of joy and welcome filled the air. Tears flowed freely. The men seized the bags to lighten our burdens and hurried us along to where the rest waited, anxiously peering into the distance. Joseph was surrounded by well wishers, and there was a veritable babble of voices and laughter. I walked along holding Yehwah's hand. He seemed overwhelmed by this welcoming group. They were strangers to him, some vaguely remembered, most not at all. As we walked I told him who each was and where he lived.

Ann, my mother, was waiting for us at the gate. She stood to one side, quietly smiling, and I rushed into her open arms. It was hard to leave the comfort of that embrace, but I realized that Joseph and the child were standing next to us awaiting their turns. My mother enveloped her grandson in her arms and rubbed her cheek against

his hair. She marveled at how he had grown when she held him off for a long scrutiny, and then pulled him close to her again. Then, finally, Joseph took her in his arms. There was no need for words between those two.

Joseph and Yehwah led the way to our home. I did not know what to expect. It had been a long time. Almost before I entered the room I caught the sweet scent of flowers --- flowers everywhere, their beauty filling the room. I looked at my mother and she beamed with delight. Nothing could have pleased me more. "From your garden," she said. I was unbelieving and went quickly to see. My garden I loved so was wild with bloom, more beautiful than it had ever been. It was overwhelming. My mother stood beside me as I tried to take in this wonder and reached for my hand.

"I had much help, " she said. "Everyone wanted to help. Everyone wanted you to be pleased."

Pleased! Such an inadequate word. When I had time to notice I saw with what loving care the house had been prepared for us, fresh sweet smelling linens on the beds, the furniture polished to a sheen, everything

spotlessly clean. There were no words to express my gratitude. Words were not enough.

And then they began to come -- friends, neighbors, some strangers -- all come to welcome and to provide. They brought foodstuffs and drink of all kinds until the table was laden with these gifts of love. There were children among them and soon Yehwah left to play with his new found friends. Joseph fairly glowed with pleasure as he greeted one old acquaintance after another and heard from each how he had been missed. My mother was everywhere at once. I knew in my heart that all of this was her doing. My heart filled with gratitude each time I greeted one who had been lost to me and each time I felt the gentle embrace of friendship and caring. It seems like hours before the crowd thinned and I was able to go to Joseph's side and take his hand. He looked at me and his gentle smile said it all.

"Are you happy, Mary?" he asked, knowing full well the answer. I shook my head in wonder. "Can you believe all of this, Joseph? It is too much."

And so our homecoming brought to us all

the joy we hoped it would. It seemed as though we had never left.

Mary

For a while it seemed to me that every time I went to look for Yehwah he was to be found in Joseph's shop. I was not troubled by this at first. He had always enjoyed watching Joseph work and helping in small ways, but he had never before spent so much time there. I asked Joseph about it. I thought he should be playing more with children his age, but Joseph dismissed my concern, said it was just a stage he was going through, that I should not worry so about the boy. I did worry, though. It seemed to me cause for concern, but I said nothing further.

Then one day I came in from working in the garden and found Yehwah home when I thought he had said that he was spending the afternoon with Joseph. He tried to act casual, but I knew something was going on. His eyes fairly danced with excitement and he watched every move I made. I was puzzled by Yehwah's behavior but asked no questions. We chatted a bit, and when I

went to sit down and work on my sewing, Yehwah's agitation was clear.

"What in the world is the matter with you?" I finally demanded. "Are you keeping something from me, Yehwah? Is there something I should know?"

He did not answer, but I followed his gaze, and there on the table I saw a wooden bowl I had never seen before. I stood up and started toward it, and Yehwah's excitement burst forth.

"Do you like it? Do you really like it? I made it for you."

I picked it up and I couldn't believe what Yehwah had said. It was beautifully worked, smooth and polished to a sheen, and around the rim were carved tiny flower petals.

Yehwah watched my face anxiously. "Are you surprised?"

For a moment I could not speak. "It is the most beautiful bowl I have ever seen, Yehwah. Did you really make this yourself?"

He beamed with pleasure and nodded. "My father helped me and showed me how, but I did all the work. It was a secret."

"It was a beautiful secret, Yehwah, and a beautiful bowl. I have never had a nicer surprise." I put the bowl on the table and hugged my son to me. He squirmed with impatience and said that he had to run and tell Joseph what I had said.

"Tell him every word, Yehwah," I called after him as he flew out the door. I watched him to the corner as he fairly danced with excitement, his feet hardly touching the ground. I could not stop smiling when I thought of the hours and hours that had gone into this surprise, and I counted myself fortunate indeed in the love of this child, this child of surprises.

Mary

Not everyone, it turned out, had returned from exile. Some had not been persuaded that the danger was over, and though they wanted to return they were too fearful. Later, they had said, when we are really sure that it is safe. Others feared the journey, concerned about meeting soldiers on the way. Still others could not leave when the group did because of illness or infirmity. A few began the journey and turned

back for various reasons. I did not know all of this until Joseph told me. I knew some had stayed, but not why. Joseph told me that he felt responsible somehow for these people, that he felt it was his duty to return to the city of exile and persuade the others of the wisdom and safety of their return to their homes.

"But Joseph," I protested, "Why you?"

"Who else?" Joseph asked. "I was chosen leader and I did not do the job as well as I would have chosen to. So I want to try again. If they choose to stay now I will not try further."

And so Joseph made his preparations for the journey, carrying many messages to those who had remained. He kissed Yehwah on the forehead before he left and told him that he was remanding me into his care. Then with a close embrace he said good-bye to me and left. We watched him until he disappeared.

We had been home such a short time, I did not expect to feel the loneliness that came over me as soon as Joseph left. Yehwah asked for permission to find friends to play with, and I almost absentmindedly gave it, saying he must come back and tell me

where he would be. Then I tried to busy myself and shake off the intensity of my loneliness. Foolish, I thought. Foolish. I tidied. I sewed. I worked in the garden. I walked about. Then I decided that I would walk to my mother's house with some flowers from the garden. They were, after all, really her flowers.

On the way I stopped to get Yehwah from where he was playing, but he begged to stay with his friends. My mother was disappointed not to see him with me when I got to her house, but she exclaimed over the beauty of the flowers and insisted that I sit and tell her more about the days of exile. Elizabeth had lately come to live with my mother, and the three of us sat and talked as in the old days. I told them of Joseph's journey. My mother expressed concern about the hardships of the journey for Joseph. Selfishly I had not even thought of that and I felt remorseful. Then we spoke of other things, and Elizabeth of course could not resist asking about my having another child. This time my mother rebuked her for her remarks and I was grateful. My mother insisted when I left that I return the next day with her grandson and gave me some fresh bread for our evening meal.

"Joseph will be safe," she whispered when I embraced her. "God takes care of his own." Unbidden, tears sprang to my eyes and I turned away quickly so that she would not see.

When I found Yehwah, he was sitting in a circle with five or six of his friends and they were deeply engrossed in their game. I watched for a minute or so before they noticed me and could not figure out their game. Finally Yehwah looked up.

"It is a new game, Mother, a game of words." He went on to explain that each player chose a word and each of the others had to say what that word meant. Then the group decided which was the best meaning by vote.

"What if everyone votes for his own meaning?" I asked.

"That is a rule," Yehwah said. "You can't vote for yourself and you get a point for each vote you get from the others."

Each of the boys had a stick and was keeping score with lines in the dirt. I watched for a few minutes, amused at the ingenuity of the choice of words and the variety of meanings assigned each one. There was a great deal of arguing about the value of

each meaning as the votes were cast, but on the whole good natured acceptance of one another's opinion. They stopped reluctantly when Yehwah had to leave.

"Where did you learn that game, Yehwah?" I asked on our walk home.

"I made it up," he responded. "It's fun."

"What kind of words did you choose before I got there?"

"Lots of different words," he answered, "but some were harder than the others."

"What was your favorite?"

"Truth," he said gravely, "and everyone said that was the hardest because no one could think of any other meaning than 'not a lie'. I did but they wouldn't let me use it. They said it was cheating."

"What was your meaning?"

"God," he replied. "That was the only other thing I could think of. I don't think it was cheating."

Mary

I entered the house from the street. My mother was with me and she entered just

behind me. We were feeling very happy and had had a nice afternoon together, walking about town and greeting people. I told her that before she sat down she must see my garden, and she exclaimed over the number of blooms I had that late in the summer. I showed her how I had harvested the seeds for the next year. Back inside I went into the bedroom and brought out the needle-work I recently completed for her to see. I still enjoyed her praise.

I insisted that she sit in my chair and asked if she would like something to drink as I pushed under her feet the little footstool that Joseph had recently surprised me with. She settled back into the chair and said that she was thirsty and that water would suit her. After I got water for both of us, I sat with her and we chatted about some of those we had encountered in our walk, and exchanged news that each of us had about others of our acquaintance.

The time passed quickly, and my mother was about to leave when Joseph and Yehwah arrived home. I smiled with pride as I seemed always to be doing lately at the sight of them together, and I watched my mother's eyes light up when she looked

upon Yehwah. Joseph greeted her affectionately as he always did, and Yehwah went to her side. She pushed the footstool from under her feet and told Yehwah to sit by her and tell her his doings.

At Joseph's urging my mother agreed to stay to share our evening meal, a simple one I had prepared earlier in the day, and as I prepared the table I heard their excited interchange between my mother and my son and caught a phrase now and then. Joseph sat silently near them and listened. When we gathered at the table their talk barely faltered, and Joseph and I listened amused by Yehwah's outpouring to his grandmother and her gentle probing to hear more. When my eyes met Joseph's we smiled at each other and I knew he was feeling the same peacefulness as I. A great sense of gratitude filled my soul and in my heart I prayed that this family would never change. I wanted time to stop.

The minute the meal was ended, Yehwah came and whispered in my ear. I nodded and he went out the back door. My mother looked at me questioningly and I shrugged. She was making her farewells when Yehwah reappeared and thrust a large bouquet of

flowers from the garden into her arms. He beamed with pleasure, and my mother shook her head at the wonder of him. She reached out and touched his cheek lovingly as she thanked him. Then she was gone, with Yehwah to walk with her to her door, and Joseph and I went about tidying silently.

We spoke later, as we sat, of ordinary things, of the meal just past, of my mother's pleasure in her grandson, of Joseph's new work in the shop, of how I spent my day, and I was struck anew by the beauty of the ordinary when it is touched by love and caring, and as I sat and watched my husband speak I wondered what greater happiness there was to know.

Mary

I was hurrying to my mother's house to take her something she had left behind the day before when I saw the group of young boys, Yehwah among them, some distance in the street. At first I thought that they were just talking. Then as I drew nearer, I saw that they were in a rough circle with Yehwah and another boy in the middle. A

game, I thought. I had seen Yehwah with these boys before. Still closer, I realized that most of them were carrying sticks and some were brandishing them in a way that was not quite threatening, rather halfheartedly threatening, and that the boy that stood in the circle with Yehwah was holding Yehwah's arms behind his back. I quickened my pace. Yehwah did not look frightened, but he was speaking earnestly. I could not hear his words, but I could see that some of the boys were jeering at him. When I drew near, one of the boys spied me, said something to the others, and they all scattered, except for the boy who was standing next to Yehwah. He dropped Yehwah's arms and looked at me with a frightened expression. Yehwah laid a hand on his arm and introduced him to me as his friend. The boy ducked his head in acknowledgment and then left without a word.

Yehwah joined me and when I asked him to explain what I had witnessed, he said that the group was angry with him and that he was talking to them. That was all.

"Why were they angry, Yehwah?"

"Because I won't fight. They said that if I

wouldn't fight with them against their enemies I would become their enemy and I would have to fight them that way,"

"Weren't you afraid, Yehwah? There were so many of them. They had sticks. You could have been hurt. I am afraid for you."

"Don't be, Mother," he said earnestly.

"They have done this before. They never hurt me. I talk to them about why I won't fight and then they just stop. It happens a lot."

"But Yehwah," I persisted, "what if they do? You could be badly hurt. Perhaps you should not be friends with these boys."

My son was insistent. "They won't," he said firmly. "I want to be friends with them. They won't hurt me. I know."

I told Joseph that evening about the incident.

"Don't worry, " he said. "Trust Yehwah. They will not hurt him. They cannot answer his arguments. Yehwah has told me about these boys. He knows what he is doing. Let him be." Joseph proved right, of course, but it was not the last time I was to worry about my son.

Mary

I was walking from my mother's house one afternoon when I came upon the group. It was a warm day and people were lightly clad. There were perhaps a dozen people in a circle cheering and jeering in equal parts, it seemed to me, watching something. As I approached one of the youths left, and I could see two figures on the ground grappling with each other. To my astonishment I saw that one of them was Yehwah, concentrating fiercely on ridding himself, it seemed to me, of a tormenter who held his arms and pinned him to the ground. I became slowly aware that the cheers were for Yehwah, the jeers for his opponent.

I was appalled, but I could not take my eyes off those two. I feared for Yehwah. I feared to interfere. He would not like it, I knew, to be rescued by a protective mother. Just then he turned his head and saw me. He said something to the other boy that I could not hear, and the struggle was over. They both jumped to their feet and bowed to each other. The crowd started to disperse. Yehwah brushed himself off and came over to me.

"This is my friend, Mother," he said. "He is teaching me." The other boy nodded, smiled, and waved as he sprinted away. He was bigger than Yehwah and heavier in build. It had not been a fair contest.

"Yehwah?" I did not need to phrase a question.

He hurried to explain that he had asked his friend who was skilled in the art of wrestling to teach him some of his art and, he said, he was enjoying learning. I said that it looked very much like fighting to me, and that I was surprised that Yehwah would enjoy such a thing.

"Not at all," he said earnestly. "It is not like fighting at all. It is truly a sport and there is much skill involved. It will take a lot of practice before I am good, but I am learning fast. He is a good teacher, Mother."

I chided myself as I listened to him explain the fine points of wrestling and what he was learning and had to learn to be better. I chided myself because it seemed I was impossible to please. I worried if Yehwah seemed to spend too little time with children of his age, and now here I was worrying because he had chosen to spend time

doing something with a friend that I neither appreciated nor understood. Noting my silence, Yehwah asked if I disapproved of his learning to wrestle.

"No, Yehwah," I said slowly. "I am just surprised that you would choose to do this, and I don't understand anything about the sport. If you enjoy it I am sure it is all right as long as you don't get hurt."

Yehwah shrugged. Nobody got hurt wrestling, he said, or at least he had never heard of such a thing.

That night I described what I had seen to Joseph and I asked what he thought.

"Yehwah told me about learning to wrestle," he said, "and asked me if he had to tell you. I knew you would do nothing but worry, so we decided to keep it our secret for a while. Now we know secrets are hard to keep around here." He got up and came around the table and stood behind me with his hands on my shoulders. "Let him be, Mary. He just didn't want you to worry. Tell him it is all right."

So I did the very next day, but I had no real desire to see Yehwah wrestling again. I did, but it was much later.

Jesus

There were times when I was not sure about Joseph. Most of the time I knew him as a loving father, devoted to my mother, totally concerned with our welfare and well being. There were other times when I sensed a separation, a feeling that Joseph did not share completely the close relationship I felt for my mother and my mother for me. There was no question of Joseph's not caring. It was a matter of belonging. I began to wonder about other things. I became aware that I felt different from my mates, that I asked questions and had different interests from them. I began to notice that I did not look like my father in any way. I would find myself staring at his face, trying to see some similarities. There were none. I looked at his tall sturdy body and contrasted it with my slender frame and I saw no similarities. I listened to his talk, practical, business like, earthy, and I saw no similarities to my thinking and interests. It was not that I did not love Joseph. I did, fully and completely. I just did not feel like his son. I did not, I hope, betray these feelings of doubt in any way. I

worked side by side with my father Joseph day after day, in companionable silence most of the time. He was always patient with me, even at my clumsiest, and never complained when I grew dreamy and slow. I learned not to ask questions of him of things I was bursting to know and in which he had no interest. It was hard for him when I asked about things of which he had no knowledge and about which he cared not at all, and so I learned to be silent. All the while my mind whirled with inquiry and I longed for someone to talk to. My mother did her best and we shared some concerns, but I needed more. My mother kept reminding me that I was still a very young boy and that there were many years ahead for me, that I had much time to question and learn. But I was filled with impatience. Why? Why? Why? There was a "why" to everything. Why were some born rich and some poor? Why were some born smart and some stupid? Why were some tall and some short? Why were some generous and some stingy? Why were some cruel and some kind? Why? Why? Why?

I needed to find a pattern in all I observed. I needed answers and there was no one to give me answers. My mother tried often to

persuade me not to ask so many questions, to accept things as they were as the will of God, but I could not. I needed to understand the will of God. I began to think that God wanted me to ask these questions, that God wanted me to find the answers, and so I tried to talk to God. At first I failed totally. I asked and I heard nothing. I prayed to God to answer me, to speak to me, to give me knowledge. I stood beside Joseph at work and my thoughts were with the God I hoped would help me. Little by little I felt a sense of communication, a closeness with this God I had been taught to revere, this God who could be loving and harsh in turn, this God I was taught to love and fear in equal portions. And slowly I began to have a sense of knowing that all of the truth lay in men's hearts. It did not matter if a man was tall or short, rich or poor, cruel or kind. His heart mattered. His soul mattered. And all his actions were a reflection of that soul and heart. I began to regard people and try to look inward. I tried to see the souls of those about me. I tried to know their hearts. I could not always do this. It was not as simple as I first thought. Few men were purely good. Few men were purely bad. Few men were purely

generous. Few men were purely selfish. I needed to find out what the difference was between goodness and badness, between generosity and selfishness, between cruelty and kindness, not outwardly ---that was easy to determine -- but inwardly, in the heart and soul of man.

Before long I knew what I must do. I must seek the truth wherever I could find it. I knew that my destiny lay in the hearts of man and I needed to find those who could answer my questions wherever they were. I went first to Jerusalem and sought out the priests, the men of great knowledge who conducted great ceremonies and spent their days studying the holy scriptures. I spoke to them of what was in my heart. I spoke to them of my need to learn, of the questions I needed to ask, of the many things that bedeviled my mind. They spoke to me in a kindly fashion and said that I must wait, that I was too young to try to understand the complexities of the documents of religious belief, too young to be questioning the wisdom of the ages, too anxious to know too much. They counseled patience and prayer, a barrage of heaven if you will, for faith and wisdom. But they would not answer my questions. They said that the an-

swer to all questions of the soul lay in the scriptures, in the writings of the past, handed down through the ages. They said that there was no man who understood these writings completely, that some old sages had spent their entire lives reading these ancient writings and were still seeking total enlightenment. They said that if I wished to become a student at the temple I would have to return with my parents, but not for a few years. I was too young. I begged them to spend just a little time with me now, just to give me a little enlightenment so that I might progress further in my understanding. They shook their heads gravely. They said I was being presumptuous, that there was danger of false pride in my seeking to know too much too soon. They left.

There was a young man there who was studying who lingered behind as the old priests left. He looked at me and shook his head.

"Your questions are dangerous," he said to me.

I asked him how this could be since I sought only to know the truth about men's hearts and what God would have them do.

He shook his head gravely. "It is not to seek truth that we are here," he said. "It is to accept the truth as it is told to us by the ancients. It is to know the truth of our past and our traditions and to know how we please God with these beliefs and these ceremonies and these observances. That is why we are here. You seek a different truth. You will not find it here." And then he left by the same door.

Mary

I was terribly disappointed when Joseph said that we could not go to Jerusalem. He said that he had too much work to do to be away a whole week, that he was truly sorry, but that there would be another time, another year. I tried not to show my disappointment, but I think I did not succeed. Joseph said again that he was sorry and patted me on the shoulder as I stood staring out into the street. Then he was gone and I could stop pretending. I had so looked forward to this trip. All of our friends were going. There had been months of preparation, months of finding places to stay. There were many in Jerusalem who

were opening their homes to those visiting the city for the celebrations. Some would have to stay a little out of the city, but an easy distance. All would be taken care of. Meals were another thing. So much planning for food. So much cooking. So much packing. From the beginning we had said we would go. And now... I was so disappointed. I went back to my sewing, but tears blurred my sight and I put it aside.

By the time Joseph and Yehwah came home for the evening meal, I was feeling better. There would be another time. It was not important. And then Joseph told me, a quiet smile lighting his face. I could go with Yehwah, he said, and my mother. He had spoken with her that day and she had agreed that she felt well enough to make the journey, although she had not originally planned to go. Yehwah, Joseph said, was old enough to care for us on the journey and to take his place as our protector. Not, he said, that there was need of a protector among all these friends, but Yehwah liked the sound of it. "He can carry my staff," Joseph joked, "and then all must beware." Totally taken in by the jest, Yehwah protested that he had no need of Joseph's staff, and Joseph cuffed him playfully

about the ears. "I know, Yehwah," he said, "Your tongue is your weapon." And then more seriously he told Yehwah that he knew he would be responsible and that he would find someone to take his place in the workshop while he was away. I had a hard time concealing my excitement that evening. Before he went to sleep I hugged Yehwah to me.

"Are you glad to be going after all, Yehwah? Are you excited?"

He nodded. "I have wanted to go to Jerusalem for some time, Mother. I knew I would in the end." He would say no more.

It was a glorious week -- of prayer, of song, of joyful reunions, of pleasant talk, of walks around the city, of joyful pleasures. My mother and I spent much of the time together and I was concerned that she not get too tired, but she amazed me with her energy, more that I had at the end of each day. And Yehwah, true to his word to Joseph, spent much time with us and had to be urged to join the young folks in their activities.

All too soon it was time to leave, and though our farewells were heartfelt, many of us realized that we were ready to go

home. I had wondered often during the week about how Joseph was faring, and when I spoke to my mother about this she chided me for useless fretting. Joseph, she said, had managed quite well before he ever had me to wife. She joked that I flattered myself, and I took the joke in good grace, but I knew in my heart that Joseph had at least missed my presence. I knew he had missed Yehwah.

As we gathered to begin the homeward journey, I could not find Yehwah. He is with the young people, I was told. They will be the last to leave so that they can carry whatever is left by those older. When we stopped for the mid-day repast I waited impatiently for Yehwah to find us, and I searched the crowd from where I sat with my mother. I began to be impatient with Yehwah's absence, and my mother reminded me that it was not like Yehwah to be inconsiderate. There must be a reason, she said, for his not coming to us. She told me to be more patient. Finally I went to look for him and found him nowhere. No one remembered him on the departure. No one. I could not believe it. Yehwah was so dependable. This could not be happening. I began to know fear. I began to envision all

the terrible things that could have happened to my child. All the fearful images I had been repressing, flooded my mind. My mother tried to comfort me, but I knew that she too was afraid. He was so young, so vulnerable. I redoubled my efforts, retracing my steps, speaking once again to everyone I met. My mother joined me in my search.

Soon his name was on everyone's lips, and everyone had a different recollection of the last time they had seen him. Finally I spoke with one youth who said that he had seen Yehwah shortly before the time of departure and that Yehwah had told him he had one more thing to do before leaving the city. That was the last he saw of my son. People were kind. Finally it was agreed that one of the carts would be unloaded and that one of the men would drive me back to the city to search for my son. The rest said that they would tarry a while against our return. If we were too long, they would set out and we could find them at nightfall. As we set out on our search my terror was complete. My heart pounded. I could barely breathe. I prayed as I had never prayed. My companion was a silent man and I was grateful. Talking would have

been impossible.

We were perhaps halfway back to the city when we saw a moving figure, not much more than a dot on the horizon. I urged the driver to hurry. Poor man. He was doing the best he could. I was afraid to believe that the moving figure was indeed my son. It grew harder and harder to breathe. I begged my God to be kind, to answer my prayers, to let this be my child. Finally we were close enough to be sure that it was my Yehwah, laden with luggage, struggling to run. When we were close enough I jumped from the cart and ran to him, hugging him tightly, bundles and all, too relieved to speak. Now that I had him in my arms I didn't want to let him go. Finally I released him and his words burst forth.

"I had to go once more to the temple," he said. "I tried to find you to tell you, and I couldn't, and I asked the others to tell you that I would catch up. I am sorry if I caused you worry, but I had to go."

It was no time for questions. His eyes were filled with tears. I hugged him once again and said that we would talk later. He clambered onto the back of the cart with his burdens and we turned the cart around to-

ward home. I kept turning around to look at my son, to be sure that he was really there, really found. Now that the terror was past I was aware of its depth. I trembled at the memory of the moment I knew Yehwah was not to be found. The relief that flooded my soul told me of the intensity of my anguish. I could not bear it if anything happened to Yehwah, I told myself, I couldn't bear it, ever.

Yehwah was subdued the rest of the way home. There was much exclaiming and thanksgiving when we rejoined our little caravan, and I brushed aside the inquiries saying that Yehwah had gone back to the temple for reasons of his own and that his message to me had not reached me. There had been no need for my alarm, I said, but I knew differently. The thought of Yehwah traveling the road alone was enough to make me catch my breath. There were so many dangers these days, ones that would never occur to a child as guileless as my son. And what would I have told Joseph? I forced myself to appear calm despite a mind in turmoil, and I forced myself to postpone talking to Yehwah until we were home.

After we rejoined the caravan, Yehwah had gone directly to his grandmother. I watched as they embraced. She smoothed back his hair and laid her cheek aside his. Then she insisted that he get something to eat and drink. I reproached myself for not having even thought of Yehwah's needs, but I still trembled. Later Yehwah began several times to speak of his escapade, for that is what it seemed to me at the time, and I hushed him and said that we would speak later. He knew I was not angry, but rather relieved, that any concern was for his safety, that his return was all I cared about. He stayed close to me for the rest of the journey home, and we spoke of the pleasantness of our time in Jerusalem. Yehwah described to me what he and his fellows had done together, the sights they had enjoyed, the talks they had had, and I told him of the pleasures I had known. My mother listened to our idle talk, occasionally joining in. All of us spoke of Joseph and how very glad we would be to see him once again.

And we were. Joseph had to hear all of our stories before my mother left for her home. Yehwah walked her to her door and on his return he asked that we listen carefully to

what he had to say. I had not told Joseph of Yehwah's being lost to me, and we did listen as our son spoke of his great need to know more about the nature of man and God and of the nature of belief and of his role in this life. He described speaking to the ancients, the holy men, and to the young student. He described his anguish at his dismissal by the priests. He had so hoped, he said, to learn, to find at least a beginning of learning. Where was he to go to learn about truth if not to men of God in the temple? Why was it they said it was dangerous to ask such questions? What did the student mean by what he said? Where was he to go now? He sought answers and there were no answers to be found.

Inwardly I wept for my son, for his distress, for his longing, but I had no words of wisdom or of comfort. It was Joseph who spoke.

"You should know, my son, that to seek the truth is never dangerous. To seek to know of love is never dangerous. Perhaps, my son, it will come that you will be the teacher and that these old men will come to you and seek to know of your wisdom, perhaps the young man too. Perhaps, my son,

you will find the truth in your heart. You know it speaks to you. Perhaps you need look no further than within."

Joseph's tongue was rarely this loosened, and I looked at him in surprise and then at Yehwah, intent on Joseph's words.

"But I know so little," he protested. " I have so many questions and I seek answers I do not know."

"I am not a learned man, Yehwah. I am not a wise man," Joseph responded, "but I know how to listen. Let us speak further of this as we work tomorrow. Maybe it will help to talk to me even if I don't have the answers. Maybe it will help you to find the truths that lie within."

That was the beginning for Yehwah of a loving dialogue with his father Joseph, a dialogue which brought richness into all our lives.

Jesus

It was not long after the trip to Jerusalem that I spoke with my mother of that day and how it had changed me. No longer, I said, would I seek the truth in strange

places. No longer would I seek to find the truth in the words of others, even those older and wiser than I. No, I said, with all the bravura I could summon, I would follow my voices and seek the truth within. I would learn by observing the words and actions of those about me in every station. I would learn by speaking with all I encountered of their beliefs, their hopes, their sorrows, their joys, their triumphs, their disappointments. The learning I must do, I told my mother, was to be right here, among all those I had known since my birth.

I told her I had learned much from Joseph, that it was clear that he was among the happiest of men, and I had watched Joseph carefully always in his dealings. I had learned from Joseph the importance of justice at all times, of charitable dealings when charity was demanded or needed, and trust in others at all times. I had never seen Joseph speak in anger. I had seen him turn away wrath with a soft answer or a gesture of love. I had seen Joseph cheated without protest, and I had seen the cheater return repentant and repay his debt. I did not understand this magic of Joseph's, but it was clear that it sprang from the greatness of

his heart, his unwillingness to act in any way not loving.

I encountered many of our townspeople in Joseph's shop, I told my mother, and I was beginning to know that not all men responded equally to Joseph's kindness. Some were at first belligerent, certain that Joseph was not sincere in his trusting and his generosity, testing him in devious ways to see if he could be tempted to erupt into anger. They would find fault with work that was faultless. They would charge that Joseph had promised a lower price. They would say that the piece was not what they had ordered. They would complain about the quality of the wood. And always Joseph would shake his head gravely and agree with them.

"Perhaps you are right, " he would say.

"Perhaps I am wrong. What would you have me do?" And no matter what their demands, no matter how unfair the charges, Joseph would always assume the blame, if blame there was, and always try to please. And these people were in the end ashamed and contrite.

"No, Joseph," they would insist, " I think perhaps I am misremembering. I think per-

haps you were right after all. " And they would always converse a few minutes longer of general things, and when each one left, Joseph would turn to me with a smile and say, "He will be back. He left happy. And now, Yehwah, shall we get back to work?"

"And what," my mother asked, "have you learned from this?"

I told her I had learned that love took many forms and that all Joseph did could be defined as love. Some of those he treated as loved were not known well by him, but they were treated as though they were the closest of his acquaintances. Joseph never permitted distance. I told her that I had learned that anger and arrogance found it impossible to survive a loving response. I told her that I had learned the lasting nature of love, that never once in all the time I had observed did a single person repeat his unloving behavior towards Joseph. Not a single person.

My mother asked if I thought that these persons had continued to be unloving to others, and I said I did not know, that I still had much to learn and that that was one of the things I needed to discover.

There were, I knew, those in the town who thought Joseph a fool for his easy ways. They did not consider him a good business man. Joseph knew of their opinions, and when I asked him about it one day when I had overheard an unkind remark about Joseph, he said, "Look into their eyes, Yehwah, when you hear such statements and tell me if you see a happy soul."

And so, I told my mother, I was satisfied for the time with my quest for knowledge of the truth of man's existence. I needed in the end to know of the world outside our little community. I needed to know if it was different and how, but for now this was enough.

"I am pleased, Yehwah, that you are learning truth from your father Joseph. He has much to teach you and it gives him great pleasure that you value him. He knows that you love him, but that you value his words gives him pleasure indeed."

And so my learning proceeded. It was not rapid or as thrilling as I thought the pursuit of enlightenment should be, but I was satisfied, I told my mother. For a while I had no need to go elsewhere.

Mary

We sat across the table from each other, Yehwah and I. It was a quiet afternoon, so quiet that you could hear the buzzing of insects though none were in sight. We had begun by speaking of Yewah's work with Joseph in the shop and how pleased Joseph was with Yehwah's progress. Then Yehwah began to speak of other things. I watched my son across the table, so grave, so serious, so beautiful to me as he spoke earnestly of what he had learned of people while he was learning the skills of wood-working. His words flowed easily and his gestures were graceful as he described those whom Joseph dealt with in difficult situations.

While I listened to his words I was in wonder at how quickly this child had grown -- only yesterday in the cradle, now on the edge of manhood, old beyond his years. I thought back to the days when he was beginning to talk and his tongue could not keep up with his mind, and he would be vexed almost to tears. Now I listened as his words recreated vividly for me each person, each situation, each place he was describ-

ing. What a gift of speech this child had, and a gift of insight greater than most men achieve in a lifetime. And barely twelve.

Shortly after this, Yehwah came home one afternoon out of breath from running, his face flushed with excitement, the words spilling out of him. I put aside my sewing. I could not understand a word he was saying.

"Calm down, Yehwah," I said reprovingly. "Then perhaps I will know what you are saying."

He took a deep breath, sat cross legged on the floor beside my chair, and began. He had, he said, got into the habit of stopping by to speak to the old man who knew much of medicine. He stopped almost every day now, he said, whenever he could get away from the shop. The old man had traveled many places and studied many things and he had wondrous tales to tell. He could not get enough of these stories, Yehwah said, and I could imagine that the old man was delighted with such a rapt audience.

Yehwah had told him from the beginning about his hunger to learn all things, and the old man had waited until that day to tell Yehwah that he would teach him of his

knowledge of faraway places, of the past, of medicine, of reading, all manner of things. But, the old man had said, Yehwah must be serious. He must come every day, at least for a short time, and he must study faithfully. I was surprised. The old man was well known for enjoying his superiority as the most learned man of the town. He had never offered, I thought, to teach another his skills.

"Are you sure he is serious?" I asked Yehwah. "What would he require of you?"

"Nothing, Mother," he said, still breathless with excitement, "as long as I work hard, he said, and perhaps a little money for things I must buy. He has books he will teach me to copy and he makes his own inks and dyes and tans his own leathers and..."

"Yehwah," I interrupted, "You know you must ask your father Joseph about this. You know he needs you in the workshop."

Yehwah was crestfallen, and I added quickly, "You know how kind your father is. You know he will want to please you. If he agrees, then so do I."

Yehwah jumped to his feet. He grasped my shoulders and kissed me on the cheek.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you. I will be back soon." He left. I got up from my seat and watched him, still running, until he turned the corner toward Joseph's workshop.

That evening I watched for Joseph and Yehwah to turn the corner. When I saw them I smiled. Yehwah was walking beside Joseph, dancing with excitement and talking and gesturing with great animation. Joseph watched him, smiling, his pleasure evident, and every so often he reached over and touched his son on the arm as if to quiet him down. It has gone well, I thought, I had been sure it would. I went back to my chair and watched through the window. Just before they got to the door, Yehwah threw his arms about Joseph in a great hug and Joseph patted him on the back. Then Yehwah burst through the doorway and rushed over to my chair and hugged me from the back. I pretended to be strangling and we all joined in the laughter.

Yehwah was ebullient all through the evening meal, constant chatter about all he was going to learn, about how pleased we would be with him, about how wise his

teacher, for that is what he called him now, was about all things. He addressed both of us, turning from one to the other, posing questions and not waiting for answers. "Do you think I will learn to write very fast?"

"How many books do you think there are in the whole world?" "Do you think I will ever travel to foreign lands?" And on and on. Joseph and I smiled at each other, and Yehwah, caught up in his own excitement, hardly heeded our silence. Finally he ran out of talk. There was sudden silence.

"Well, Yehwah," Joseph said solemnly.

"Don't you have anything to say?"

Yehwah blushed and made a great business of eating. When we burst into laughter he understood the joke and joined in, and then the chatter began anew. He and Joseph spoke of the time off from the shop for studies and warned that there might be times when Yehwah could not be spared for as long as he liked. They would manage, though, Joseph said. Yehwah would have his dream.

Before he had finished eating Yehwah was on his feet. "May I?" he asked, and we both knew where he wanted to go.

"Not for long," I said, "For just a little

while. It is getting late." Then he was gone and I knew that this would be the pattern, for a while at least.

"Will you manage?" I asked Joseph. "You work so hard already. Will it be too difficult for you?"

He patted my hand. "Let the boy have his dream, Mary," he responded. "It will not be a hardship. It will be a joy." That was Joseph. We sat there for a while, each with our own thoughts as it darkened. Then Joseph said that a walk before sleep would be pleasant. And so we walked, hand in hand, and spoke softly of the day and Yehwah's dreams, and as I listened to my husband I knew I was the most fortunate of women.

Jesus

It took a number of years for me to fulfill my dream of learning. When I began studying with my teacher I was full of amazement at the magnitude of his learning. He spoke with the pleasure of reminiscence of great cities, of distant parts, of magnificent ruins, of raging rivers, of wonders he had

witnessed during the course of a long life. He told me how he had learned of medicine from a learned priest of the temple who was famous for his healing powers. He told me of the years he had traveled, stopping each time he chose to spend however long he chose, the life of a learned vagabond. He had never, he said, had time for a family, but he had many friends in many places whose children he regarded as his own. He was fond of children, he said, fonder than he was of adults. And then his eyes would mist over as he spoke of beloved friends lost to him now. I listened enraptured and I was expected to remember. Each day I would have to tell him in great detail of what he had told me of these great places he had visited. He had me close my eyes and tell him what I envisioned. If I misremembered he would sigh as if wounded and remind me of what I had forgotten. He taught me a few words in half a dozen tongues and we would have simple mock dialogues. He grew impatient only when I grew dreamy and inattentive, though this I rarely did. I began painstakingly to learn to read and write. I copied letters, scratching them in the dirt with a sharp stick, and then words, and my

teacher had infinite patience with any errors I made here, so satisfied was he with my progress. I hungered to learn enough to read a book, even a single page, but my teacher said that this pleasure must wait until my knowledge of reading was perfection indeed.

The pleasure of this learning was clear to my mother, and we were in the habit of sitting together and talking before the evening meal. Now all of our talk was the wonder of what I was learning and I repeated each night what the old man had told me that day. If Joseph came home during these talks he would signal to my mother that he wished not to interrupt, and he would join us and listen silently until I was finished. Then his face would break into a smile.

"I have never heard such wonders, Yehwah," he would often say. "Your teacher must be a wise man indeed."

Always my father Joseph made it easy for me to spend time with my teacher, and when my mother would protest that it made the hours of work too long for him he brushed aside her concern.

"I am fine," was his constant rejoinder.

"Don't worry about me."

And so the months and years went by and never did I tire of my teacher and his knowledge.

When he felt I was ready, he spoke with me in dialogue form of question and answer on many subjects. Sometimes he would ask the questions and sometimes I, and always there was learning for me in these questions and answers. I learned that there are not answers to all questions, that there is an art involved to developing understanding, and that it is sometimes tedious work. But always it was a joy, and when the old man died I was sorrowful above all others, and I walked with him to the grave with a heart full of love for this teacher who had given me life, for that is what knowledge seemed to me, the bread of life, the food of the soul as well as of the mind, and never in my life did I forget the hours of sitting at this man's feet in attentive silence as my imagination soared with his words.

Mary

My son is almost a man, I thought often in those days. Not overly tall, but slender and fine boned, so that he seemed taller than he really was, and still with that incandescent beauty that never faded. His eyes were large and luminous, piercing when he was intent, liquid with gentleness most of the time. His features were fine, his skin had an inner glow. His hair was lustrous and finely curled. When he walked in the streets those who had never seen him turned and looked after him. His speech was gentle and soft at all times. When he spoke his words were thoughtful. He was not talkative, but he was eloquent, his phrasing precise. "What child is this?" kept echoing over and over again in my mind. "Is it not obvious to all that this is God's child in a special way?" I kept looking for signs of disbelief in those who were told that this was the son of Joseph and Mary, but there were none. And Jesus was at all times the devoted son of Joseph. He worked by his side with diligence and respect. There was a close bond between those two, and my heart would leap with joy when I saw them

walking together, Joseph's arm around his son's shoulders, sometimes in earnest conversation, more often in companionable silence. There was a grace about their relationship at all times.

My mother Ann could not get enough of her grandson. There was a special bond between those two as well. He wanted to know every detail of her early life, of my childhood, of his grandfather long dead. He and my mother from the beginning had had long serious conversations about the nature of things, about how the world was run, about what people thought and believed, about God, about nature, about relationships of all kinds. There was no end to these discussions over the years, and I would sit and listen and be amused to see my mother try to answer all of Yehwah's "Why?"s. She loved these talks and rejoiced in Yehwah's bright intelligence and probing curiosity.

Finally one day he told her about the voices he had heard by then for some time and what they said to him of his destiny. When he first spoke of this, my mother's face darkened, as if with fear, and she listened to her grandson's words with grow-

ing concern. Finally as she listened, asking a quiet question now and again, her face brightened.

"You are very special, Yehwah," she told him. "Finally you know how special you are. You have not told me that this is God's voice you hear. You do not need to tell me that." She took Yehwah's hand in hers and drew him close to her. She smoothed back the hair from his forehead and kissed him. "You are surrounded by this love you speak of, Yehwah. You will never be without it. Never." Yehwah did not respond, but they sat there for a long time in a silence broken only by the street noises, and in this silence I could hear the greatness of the love in that little room.

Jesus

Joseph was an enigma to me as I grew. He was always regarded as a leader by the little community in which we lived. He was quiet and capable. He did not seek leadership. It was forced upon him. But he was not a thinker. He was not troubled by events or thoughts beyond his immediate experience. I would look at him while we worked and

wonder what thoughts were going through his mind. He would occasionally whistle as he worked, soft, tuneless whistling, with no beginning and no ending. He was a craftsman above all. His hands spoke for him. He loved his materials and he loved his work. I learned much from my father about how to do a job well, how not to settle for anything less than perfection. I learned honesty from my father. I learned to keep promises from my father. He was trusted by everyone. He was liked by everyone and loved by some. I never saw my father Joseph do a mean or selfish thing in his entire life. He was totally concerned with the welfare of others. He demanded nothing for himself. And he was the happiest man I knew. Never did I hear a single word of reproach to my father, not from my mother, not from those he worked for, not from his friends, not from strangers he encountered. He demanded nothing and got everything. He spoke little and his actions said much. At all times he loved. He loved his family. He loved his work. I was never without an awareness of this love, this giving without condition, without limit, without demand. Joseph had great dignity. He was a man of simple tastes and no pretensions. He was a

man who used his talents to their best advantage and who took no credit for anything he did.

The older I grew the more certain I was that Joseph was not my true father. I loved him as a father and I felt grateful to him for loving me so completely as his son, but I looked at him and I saw nothing of me. I listened to him and I heard nothing of me. But I was hearing a voice inside me. I was becoming more and more aware of what lay in the hearts of those who surrounded me, and I was hearing this voice tell me that this was my destiny, to look to the hearts of men and to speak to them of love. I knew as surely as I knew anything that it was my destiny to know the importance of love and to speak of this.

I did not speak of this to my mother for a long time. When I did she listened carefully, quietly, and when I was finished she held me to her and said that I must listen to my heart, that I must never forget for a moment that Joseph had been my father from the moment I was born, but that I had a heavenly father above all as did all men, but that I had a special relationship with that heavenly father, that I should lis-

ten to his voice and do as I was bidden. I had never heard my mother speak like this before. I was shaken by the implied agreement that Joseph was not, indeed, my true father by birth. I began to question her further, but she put her fingers over my lips to silence me. She embraced me quickly and then held me off and looked at me closely. "You are almost grown," she said, and then she turned her head aside. "How quickly it has happened."

Mary

I am concerned about my Yehwah. He is growing into young manhood so quickly, and he has changed so much in these past few years. I watch him working with Joseph and I know his mind is elsewhere. I speak to him and he does not hear me. He walks in a crowd and he is alone with his thoughts. He asks questions I cannot answer. No one could, I think. He is no longer interested in being with boys of his age. Their pursuits are of no interest to him. Their conversation bores him. He seeks out older minds and seeks to learn from them. He intimidates some of them

with his growing wisdom. He is too old for his years. My mother is right about that.

He knows that he is different somehow, but he does not know why. He knows he is seeking, but he does not know what. And what can I tell him? I know wherein his difference lies but it would be impossible for him to believe. Or would it? I don't know what to do. I don't know what to say. But I must do something. I must say something. I cannot let him go on drawing further and further into himself, troubled by questions for which he has no answers.

There is no one I can turn to. Joseph would do anything to help, but he is not the answer. I am worried about Joseph too -- he gets tired so easily and coughs a lot. When I urge him to work less hard he just smiles and says that he is well enough to work as he always has. At times his cheeks are flushed as though he were feverish but he is cold to the touch. Sometimes he has a gray pallor and his skin is cold and moist. I wish he would listen to me. He knows he is not well but he cannot admit to any kind of frailty or weakness. I don't know what I would do if anything happened to Joseph. I would be lost.

I put off speaking to my mother about my concerns as long as I could. I could sense her concern about Joseph. She regarded him with troubled eyes when she visited, and urged me to insist that he get more rest. She said I should force him to work less, to eat better, to sleep longer. She had all the answers, but she would never speak directly to Joseph about her concern. Always to me. I explained to her that I had tried, that Joseph insisted that he was well, that he refused absolutely the suggestion that he work less hard. He went further. He insisted on taking on even more work than he had in the past. He asked what I expected him to do if he did not work. Was he to sit around and talk with the women? I said that Yehwah could do more, that Joseph should give him more responsibility, that he was growing old enough to be responsible. Joseph just looked at me and smiled.

I knew in my heart that I was making a foolish suggestion. Joseph was always patient with his son. He excused his dreaminess and slowness in his work. He said that he was meant to be a scholar, not a carpenter, that he was not dreaming but thinking great thoughts. He said that Yehwah should

be encouraged to question, to learn, that he should be allowed to study, to use his mind, not his hands. Joseph became intense when he spoke of this. I asked what he would propose. He shook his head slowly side to side. "I don't know," he said. "I don't know." But each passing day it became clearer that Joseph was not well and that Yehwah was not happy. I knew I had to do something.

"Let the boy speak his mind," my mother said. "let him ask questions and let him get answers. He needs to know that Joseph is not his natural father."

I looked at her, horrified. "I cannot do that to Joseph or to Yehwah."

"He knows already," she said. "You know he knows."

I thought back to our last conversation. Of course he knew. How much longer could I blind myself to this reality? How could I find the words that needed to be said to my son?

"You must be truthful," my mother said. "Your son is seeking the truth and you must not keep the truth of his birth from him."

How could I explain to Yehwah something I did not understand myself? I knew what I had been told, but I did not understand it. "Help me," I said to my mother. "Help me explain to my son that the father he has known all of his life is not his father by nature. How can I do it without hurting the two people I love most?"

"You must," insisted my mother. "Your son knows anyway."

Jesus

There was little doubt in my mind about what I had to do next. The voice inside my mind was getting stronger. It was telling me that my destiny was a divine destiny, that I was sent to this earth for the purpose of changing the world, a world badly in need of change. The voice spoke with urgency. The voice told me that I would be given the wisdom to do as I was bidden. I had only to listen. I was told that I should seek out those who were unhappy and cheer them. I was told to seek out those who were sad and comfort them, those who were lonely and befriend them, those who were lacking in faith and affirm my faith to

them. I was told that all men were my brothers, that strangers in need were my brothers in need. The voice said that all times I should have the courage to speak of the love that each man must feel for his brother, of the charity that each man must give at all times to his brother in need. The voice said that my purpose in this life was to bring to a world in need this message of love, that much would be given to me and much demanded. The voice said that it spoke not of material things but things of the spirit. The voice said that all of life was a lesson in love and that all men should hear this message, and that it was my destiny to be the messenger of God, that God the Father of all men had sent me as His son to the world for this purpose and that I should seek the truth of my origin from my mother. This revelation came not all at once, but in insistent messages, brief and frequent. I felt I could not speak to my mother of these words I heard. I had spoken to her so often of my wonderings, so often of the questions that filled my mind, so often of my need to know more, and each time she had counseled patience and prayer and silenced me. But now I was bidden to speak to her. I was bidden to tell

her of this voice that spoke to me so clearly and compellingly, so constantly now. When I found her she was sitting looking out the doorway at the garden she loved so well. She was sad, and I knew she was thinking of my father Joseph. He was not well and she feared his death. She was startled when I touched her on the shoulder, and she put her hand on mine and drew me toward her. I was getting too tall to stand in her embrace, and I knelt beside her, my hand still in hers. I told her slowly and awkwardly about the voice that lived in my head. I felt foolish speaking to my mother about my destiny when I knew she expected me to follow in my father's footsteps, but as I spoke the conviction grew in me that my mother had known what I was saying all along, that she had been waiting for these words from me. Her expression softened as she listened to me and her grip on my hand grew tighter. Her gaze was filled with love, and I thought I saw pride in her eyes. I had been so afraid that I would read disappointment there, but there was none. I knew it was pride. I knew she was pleased with my words.

"You are so young, Yehwah, to be doing

this work." And then she told me of the secret she had been carrying in her heart these many years. She said that for a long time she had herself been ignorant of the purpose of my birth and life, that she had known that it was extraordinary and God-given, but that she had understood no more until as the years passed and I grew she began to know that the purpose lay in my destiny, the destiny I had sought to know almost from the beginning. She said that it came as a relief to her to be able to speak to me of these things. I asked about Joseph. She said that from the beginning Joseph had known that he was not my true father, and she told me of her mother, my grandmother, and of how she had arranged the union. My mother did not have to tell me of how faithfully Joseph had nurtured this family with his love, and I felt with a great lurch of my heart that I could never repay Joseph for the greatness of his love.

My mother said laughingly that now, finally, I was free to be the teacher that I had wanted to be since I was a small child. She reminded me of the times she had found me talking with my elders and telling them of things I thought they should know. I hugged her to me and said that first I must

be the student, that I needed to learn more of the nature of man and the true nature of love before I could be a teacher. "It will come," my mother said. "There is no question of that."

The Death of Joseph

Mary

Oh what a relief it was after all these years of carrying this secret in my heart to have my son know fully of his origin, of the miracle of his birth. I had heard that voice. I had known its insistence. I rejoiced in the freedom I had been given. I had lacked the courage to tell my son the truth and he had told it to me. What a gift. After Yehwah left me I sat for a long time thinking back over the years, remembering bits and snatches of this precious life that had been given into my keeping and I smiled often at the memories of this wide eyed wonder of a child, of this child seeker after truth. There were those who thought him bold and affected when he spoke words beyond his years, but there were others who saw in him the mystery of his being, of the puzzle this child-man presented to their understanding and who knew instinctively that this child was an inspired child. It was not easy to understand Yehwah. His peers were impatient with him and I worried that he did not seem to need their companionship.

But now, I thought, Yehwah knows. Now we can begin the new journey of understanding. I did not know what Yehwah would need of me now and in the days and years to come, but I knew I would be given whatever strength and wisdom I needed to do as I must. I feared a little my own inadequacy, but when I looked into my heart I knew I had no cause to fear. This child had been given to me by a God who loved us both, a God who had spoken to His son, a God I could trust at all times. I would speak to this God in times of need and He would hear. I would ask and He would give. We had nothing to fear.

"Come," I said to Yehwah after we had finished talking, "We must go to your father." We walked down the back alley to the corner where the bake shop stood and turned left. Joseph's workshop was a few doors down. Joseph did not hear us come in, and we watched him for a few seconds before speaking. He was bent over smoothing the finish on a table he had just completed with a piece of pumice stone. There was weariness in his movements. His strokes were slow and labored.

"Come, Joseph," I said as I touched him on

the shoulder. "It is time to come home. It is time to eat, and you should rest a little before you return."

He turned and smiled, first at me and then at his son. "Mary," he said, "you worry too much. I am not hungry, but perhaps something to drink. But I must finish this first. I promised." Yehwah reached and took the stone from Joseph's hand and began with smooth strong strokes to finish the table top. Joseph shrugged and took off his apron. He hung it on a hook by the door and took my arm. "My thanks to you, my son," he said before we left. As we walked I slowed my pace to match his, and once he drew his breath in sharply and then exhaled slowly as if in pain. I stopped and looked at him questioningly. "It is all right, Mary. I am all right. Let us go on."

When we got home it took little urging to get him to lie down on his bed. He closed his eyes and I saw again the sharp intake of breath and the slow painful exhalation. I was relieved when he fell asleep, and as I stood there watching him I could not fail to notice how much sharper the lines of fatigue were than they had been only a few short weeks ago. His face was ashen and

the bones of his face had a new fragility about them. I sat by the side of the bed and watched that dear face, so rarely seen in repose. I thought of the years we had spent together in the protection of his love, and I felt a stab of fear. He murmured unintelligibly in his sleep, and once I thought I heard him say "Mary". I sat there for a long time, and the shadows of evening were beginning to fall before he stirred. I urged him to lie still, but he insisted on getting up. "I must get back to work," he said, but he had taken only a few steps when he faltered and turned back to the bed. He lay again and I asked him if he would like something to eat and drink. He said that he had no hunger, but that he was thirsty. I went and fetched a mug of water cool from the well, and he took it and put it to his lips. Barely had he lips touched the liquid before he put it aside and handed it to me. "That is enough," he said, and lay back against the pillow. Immediately he slept again.

Nearby lived a man of great age who was known for his skills with sickness. He had known Joseph all the years we had been in Nazareth and he had on occasion helped us with minor ills and injuries. I went to him

now for help. He sat on a bench outside his door, his eyes squinting in the light of the setting sun. I spoke urgently to him about Joseph. I asked what I could do to help my husband.

"Let him rest, " he said. "Make him rest. The body will mend itself with rest." He knew Joseph's prodigious capacity for work and his tendency to overstretch his capacity. His advice was not unexpected.

"Nothing else?" I asked. "Is there nothing else I can do?"

"Rest and nourishment. That is all, but above all, rest. The body speaks its needs." He promised to come to see Joseph on the morrow to speak to him.

By the time he got there, Joseph was dead. He died as he had lived -- quietly, without protest, in his sleep. I had slept on a pallet beside his bed so as not to disturb his sleep. When I awoke I reached over to touch him and felt his coldness. I pulled my hand away and then forced myself to touch him again. Then I smelled the loosening of the bowels and I knew it was death. It was not yet light and I fumbled to light the lamp. I cursed the darkness and my ineptitude. Finally the light flickered

and grew strong. I put the lamp on the table beside Joseph's bed, and in the soft glow looked upon the face of my beloved. The lines of pain and fatigue were gone from that dear face and there was an expression of peace and repose that I had not seen for a long time. I knelt by the side of the bed, numb with disbelief and the beginnings of pain, and I took that strong rough hand in mine and pressed it to my lips. My Joseph. Gone. It was more than I could tolerate. He was my strength and now I was weak. He was my comfort and now I was bereft. He was my love and now I was lonely. I put my head down and rested my forehead against that dear cold hand and I prayed. And there was no answer. I whimpered in pain and swallowed my sobs. I don't know how long I knelt there, but it was light when I looked up. In the new light of dawn Joseph's face took on a luminousness, almost a glow, and I had a wild momentary hope that I was mistaken. He was not dead. He slept. That was all. His skin often felt cold. He slept. I cried with relief, and then I knew again the reality of Joseph's death. The numbness grew again and I did not want to move. I wanted to stay there forever.

I heard a stirring in the doorway after I don't know how long, and it was Yehwah. He knew instantly. He came to me and raised me up and held me tightly to him. He looked over my shoulder at the body of his father Joseph and said not a word. We stood there for what seemed an eternity . "Now," Yehwah said finally, "Now I will be your strength.

Jesus

I knew in my heart as I stood in the doorway that Joseph was dead. I saw my mother kneeling by his side, her head resting on his hand, her shoulders slumped in defeat, and I knew she had lost her beloved.

It was over. I would have time to think later, but first there was my mother to care for. I went and knelt beside her and put my hand over hers. She did not look up for a moment, and when she did it was with a great effort. Her eyes were deep with sorrow, shock perhaps, and her face was expressionless. I lifted her to her feet and put my arms about her and held her still. Finally she spoke. "I did not know how sick he was," she murmured. "What will I do

without Joseph? He was my strength." I held her more closely. "Now I will be your strength, " I said.

I knew then that my decision had been made for me. God had taken Joseph and made my mother my responsibility. I knew then that I would learn more about man and his nature and the true meaning of love as Joseph had learned it, by being of service, by meeting the needs of my fellow man as best I could. Joseph had taught me much of his craft, and although my skill could never match his, I was a competent carpenter. All this went quickly through my mind. Like my mother I was unable to accept the finality of Joseph's death. I could not imagine life without his gentle presence, his protectiveness toward my mother, and toward me long past the time when it was truly necessary. There was time for my grief later. Right now I had to care for my mother's grief.

I led her into the other room and eased her into her chair. She slumped and her head fell back. I was afraid to leave her alone, but I had no choice. It was too early for anyone to be on the streets and I had no one I could send for my grandmother. I

asked her if she would be all right alone for a little time while I went to get her mother and Elizabeth. She looked at me dully and shook her head. I backed toward the door watching for any further word or gesture, and once outside I ran. My grandmother and Elizabeth were still asleep and I pounded on the door hoping that they would awaken before anyone was roused by my noise. I heard footsteps approaching the door and then my grandmother's voice. I spoke urgently to her through the door of my mother's need for her, and she threw open the door and turned to go back into the bedroom all in a single gesture. In a moment she and Elizabeth were dressed and ready to leave. "Is it Joseph?" she asked. "Is he ill?" It had not occurred to me that she would not know by my urgency that Joseph was dead, and then I realized that no one knew that he had even been very ill. Not well, perhaps, but not sick unto death. I spoke rapidly as I told them the news of Joseph's death, and my grandmother shook her head in disbelief. Then she went back into the bedroom and returned carrying a small package. "Let us hurry," was all she said, and we moved quickly through the growing light to the

house of Joseph and Mary.

Mary

Yehwah led me out of the room and gave me something warm to drink. I cannot remember exactly how long we sat without speaking, each lost in memory and longing, but my son told me that he would get my mother and Elizabeth to come to be with me. After he left I went back into the room and knelt again by Joseph's side and held his dear hand in mine and looked upon that face I had loved for these many years.

"How could I not know, Joseph?" I cried to myself. "How could I not know how very ill you were? How could I have let you die? Why did I do nothing? Why? Why? Why?" My torment knew no bounds.

When my mother and Elizabeth returned with Yehwah they found me there. They knelt beside me and looked silently on Joseph's face, so beautiful in repose. They had no tears, but their eyes were filled with sorrow. Yehwah stood at the foot of the bed, watchful, concerned. His eyes were upon me when I looked up at him. No one spoke for a long time. Finally my mother

got to her feet, and Elizabeth and I followed her into the other room. We spoke briefly of what must be done. My mother had brought with her the oils and ointments she was saving against her own death and said that she and Elizabeth would prepare Joseph's body for burial. I protested that I must do this myself. He was my husband. I wanted to. They refused. My mother told Yehwah to walk with me to the draper's to get the fine linens they needed to shroud Joseph. He nodded and put his arm about my shoulders and we left. The streets were almost empty, but those we met seemed to know already. Their eyes met ours solemnly and they nodded without speaking before quickly moving on.

The draper knew. His shop was open and he had already laid on the counter his finest cloths, linens of such quality I had never seen. "These are my gift to Joseph," he said when I tried to speak of payment. He ran his hand over the counter top.

"Joseph made this for me many years ago, and when I went to pay him he would not take full measure. He said I could finish paying him later. All these years he has refused more money from me. Now I am

paying." He held out his hands to me and I pressed them in gratitude. Yehwah carried the linens against his breast as though he were carrying treasure. On our journey homeward we met more people. They all knew. They stopped and bowed their heads and waited until we were past to go on.

Elizabeth and my mother took the linens from Yehwah and told him to stay with me until they had finished. Yehwah asked me if I would like food or drink. I shook my head. I could not swallow. I could not talk, even to my son, even to my beloved Yehwah. All I could see in my mind's eye was Joseph -- a younger Joseph, newly my husband, newly a father, Joseph working in his shop, the shop he loved, perfumed by the sweet smell of freshly cut wood.

Joseph, my strength and my love, speaking often of his great pride in Yehwah, his child of wisdom and grace. Joseph, acting always in love.

Finally Elizabeth came to the doorway and said that they were finished. Yehwah took my arm and led me into the room where Joseph lay. My tears came then. I cannot describe the sense of beauty that emanated from that dear body, the sense of peace

and repose. This was my gentle Joseph. I knelt again and put my head in my hands. One by one they joined me, neighbors, friends, some near strangers to me, but all who knew and loved Joseph came to look on him for the last time, came to pray, to speak of his goodness and his love for all those he met. Each one had a story of Joseph's kindnesses, acts of love without expectation of return, acts of generosity unbounded. Things Joseph had never spoken of. Things I had never dreamed of.

They came from far and wide that day, in sorrow and in compassion, in respect and in love. I knew Joseph was well loved, but I was overwhelmed by this outpouring of loving remembrances. Even the children came, those who loved to be with Joseph in his workshop, who loved to speak of his craft with this simple man who knew only kindness. They brought food and drink and small gifts and plants -- tributes to Joseph. By nightfall they were still arriving and no one wanted to leave. They spilled out into the street and spoke softly in small groups, stopping every so often to enter the house again and look silently on the face of Joseph.

Yehwah was everywhere at once, coming to me often as I sat by Joseph, to ask what I needed, to tell me that I need not worry, that all would be taken care of. He greeted those who came to express their love and sorrow and thanked them for their generosity.

I was only dimly aware of who was speaking to me, of who was pressing my hand, of who was murmuring soft sounds of comfort. All through the night I was seeing Joseph all the days of our life together, all the days of his gentleness and giving, and when dawn came I wanted to hold it back. I wanted more time. I could not bear this day. I watched without seeing as the room emptied. Only my mother and Elizabeth were left, kneeling as they had been at the foot of the bed. Then Yehwah and two young men came in bearing the coffin by the stout rope handles at each end. They gently, ever so gently, lifted Joseph's body from the bed and lowered it into his final resting place. I rose as if in protest, and my mother hurried to her feet and held me with both her arms around me. "It is time," she said softly. "It is time to go and do what must be done." I watched numbly as they placed the wooden cover on the coffin

and bound it with rope. Elizabeth and my mother led me out of the room and through the outer room to the street. I marveled at the throng that waited there silently. Yehwah and the two young men eased the coffin through the doorway and then were joined by another. They lifted the coffin to their shoulders and started down the lane. We followed, slow step after slow step. Behind us I heard the shuffle of many feet. There was absolute silence except for that. Total stillness. And then a single plaintive voice began a song of mourning, and one by one the throng joined in until it was a mighty chorus, a mighty sound of sorrow as we followed Joseph's body.

At the edge of town we came to a slight rise and started up the hill. My heart stood still. This was a place Joseph loved, a place to which we came often to sit and talk or to sit in silent contemplation of the beauty around us. As we reached the knoll I saw the grave, freshly dug and shallow, and flowers everywhere. Yehwah and his friends lowered the coffin slowly and gently into the grave and waited for those who followed to gather about. Then Yehwah spoke of his life with Joseph, this gentlest

and most loving of men, this father who had shared so much of himself with his family and with all men. He spoke of how sorely he would be missed. And when he was finished he stepped aside and one by one those who had loved Joseph spoke of this love and of Joseph's greatness. As I listened my grief lightened. What a legacy Joseph had left. How many memories of his goodness I had been left with. When the last speaker had finished, Yehwah reached down and picked up a single white rose and walked over and handed it to me. He took my arm and led me to the side of the grave. I knelt in the damp earth and placed the rose on the top of the plain box that held my beloved. I still could not believe that all of this was really happening. Yehwah took my arm and lifted me to my feet, and as he led me away down the path I could hear the first soft sounds of earth covering the grave, and I knew the finality of Joseph's death. I knew too that for me this was a place of beauty, that I would return here often. I would speak to Joseph and he would hear me. He would speak to me of his love all the days of my life. He would lend me his strength as he always had. He would never leave me alone.

Mary

Yehwah was such a comfort to me after Joseph died. The day of the funeral many returned with us to Joseph's and my house and spoke in small groups of Joseph and how he would be missed. Each one in turn spoke to me of his love for Joseph, his sorrow at his leaving us, and his wish to help in any way. They were very kind. One by one they left until only my mother and Yehwah remained with me. My mother and Yehwah bustled about, storing the food-stuffs and clearing the table, cleaning, not speaking, each silently somber.

I watched them as if from a great distance for a while and then got up to help. My mother firmly pushed me back into my chair and urged me to rest. She motioned to Yehwah to sit by me. He did and held my hand, his eyes anxiously searching my face. I felt nothing. I felt drained. But gradually the sight of Yehwah's dear face stirred in me the awareness that I had much to be grateful for. I pressed his hand. "It is all right, Yehwah. I will be all right." He smiled then and held my hand even more firmly.

"What can I do?" he asked. "What can I get for you?"

"Nothing now," I said.

My mother reminded me that I had not eaten since Joseph died, and urged me to try. I could not, but I promised that I would try later. She and Yehwah exchanged glances and he nodded. They are conspiring, I thought fondly, conspiring to take care of me now that Joseph has gone, and I felt a rush of love for these two, the dearest in all the world to me.

When the shadows of evening began to fall, my mother took her leave, promising to return the next day. She protested when Yehwah began to walk with her to her door as he usually did and insisted that he stay with me. She kissed me gently on the cheek before she left. "It will get better, Mary," is all she said. After she left, Yehwah came back to my side and we sat for a while in silence. Then he began to speak.

"The first thing I remember about Joseph," he said, "is riding on his shoulders. I remember the thrill of being at such a great height. I felt like the king of the world." And that started the memories, back to the very beginning of my marriage with Joseph

and through all the years between. I told Yehwah of my marriage and how it had come about. He had heard all of that before, but I told him now for the first time of Joseph's words to me that day, of his gentleness and generosity, of how he took away my fear and gradually replaced it with love. I told him again about his birth and the total love that Joseph felt for him from the very instant he first held him in his arms. We remembered together the years of exile and the homecoming, and the great good that Joseph did for all in those years. I had only to look around the room to be reminded of Joseph's caring, each piece of furniture lovingly crafted for his home, for his wife and child. No one had finer furniture. More ornate, perhaps, but no one had furniture of such simple perfection.

I glanced down beside my chair at the basket Joseph had made for me of finely woven strips of leather to hold my needlework. He labored long and lovingly over that gift and it had never left my side. We tried to remember one time when Joseph had been demanding and we could not. The only thing Joseph ever demanded of him, Yehwah said, was that when Joseph gave him money to buy something for himself,

he first use part of the money to buy something for his mother. I was amazed. Yehwah had never told me this before, but always over the years Yehwah had been thoughtful about little gifts -- a flower, a trinket, a piece of fruit -- and now I was learning that it was Joseph's doing, this generosity.

"Yehwah," I said, "and all these years I have been giving you the credit." We laughed for the first time since Joseph's death. "After a while," Yehwah said, "Joseph did not have to remind me, but I knew he would if I forgot."

And so the hours passed in happy reminiscence of Joseph's life with us. Most of our memories were shared memories, but some things I heard for the first time, and I told Yehwah some things he had not known. And all through these hours that we talked in the semi-darkness, the presence of Joseph grew and grew until at the end we both knew he was here, smiling gently, then nodding gravely as he listened to us speak of our love for him and of his love for us. He would always be with us, we knew. We had only to speak his name.

The Life of Mary in the Community

Jesus

After the funeral of Joseph, life took on new dimensions. I was pleased to find that I enjoyed my craft more than I had expected. I began to experience the pleasure in perfection that Joseph had known instinctively. I began to enjoy the necessary business dealings with my friends and neighbors who needed my work. I began to know the pleasure of being treated as a man able to do his part in the world. And I discovered that I was good at both these things. Therein lay much satisfaction. I still heard the voices and as I worked I almost always, certainly often, lost myself in interior dialogue. My hands worked on my craft. My mind was occupied with other things. I knew the continuing importance of this voice. It told me that indeed I was doing exactly what was expected of me at that moment, but that I should listen always for this voice and heed it, that I must at all times know love in my heart, as had my earthly father, for all I dealt with. It told me that I would be increasingly ex-

pected to speak to man of God and His works, that I would in the end be expected to share with the world that I was the only begotten son of God on earth and that I came to do my heavenly father's work. But not now. Now I was Jesus, son of Mary, a widow, and Joseph, now deceased. This was to be my life until I was told differently. I was to live the life of my countrymen, to know their pleasures and their problems, to seek out those in need and succor them and to do all in my power to convey the necessity of love given and received.

It was easy in the beginning. All who loved Joseph looked to me as his son and saw in me the qualities they loved in him. But I was not Joseph, and soon I began to know the impatience, the anger, the hostility that man was capable of when his needs were not met when and how he demanded. I had been sheltered against this aspect of human nature almost entirely. I had seen cruelty and anger. I had never experienced it. I knew man was capable of base emotions. I had been told of these. But I had never experienced their destructiveness. I began to know that it was not a simple and easy matter for men to love at all times. I began to realize the great power of Joseph,

of his total tolerance and acceptance of less than loving behavior and of his cleverness, for that is what I deemed it, in treating men in such a way that their anger cooled and their hostility turned to affection.

Joseph had always been incapable of anger, of short temper, of envy, of hostility, and it had come to pass that all who knew him knew this of him and so treated him differently than they did other men. I was grateful for this discovery, one I made very quickly, and it became my concern to transform base emotions into loving emotions by my words and actions each time I had the opportunity. It was not easy or quick, and I began to appreciate the full measure of Joseph's love for all men, the power of his gentle persuasion. Joseph had changed his small world, and he had been given to me as an example. It would in time come to me to change the greater world, and Joseph's example would live in my heart at all times.

Mary

The weeks after Joseph's death I do not re-

member exactly. My sense of loss was overwhelming. I could think of little else. My mother came often with Elizabeth, and they urged me to eat, to drink, to sleep, to walk out with them, to talk, to cry, to do anything but sit and stare. I loved them and I tried. I did all they asked and when they left I sat and stared.

My loneliness seemed to grow more intense each day. I needed Joseph so. One afternoon as I sat I was overcome by the absolute necessity of satisfying this need without delay. Almost blindly I made my way to Joseph's workshop, now Yehwah's. My Yehwah was startled when he saw me in the entrance way.

"I needed to come, Yehwah," I said brokenly, and as if in a dream I walked to where my son stood. His face mirrored his concern.

"It is all right, Yehwah," I said dully. "I just needed to be here for a little while."

I wandered about the shop, touching each tool that I knew Joseph had held in his hand, running my hand over each surface that I knew he had touched, walking the floor he had worn smooth with his steps. And then I touched and stroked each thing

once again. Slowly my anguish lessened, and I went to my son's side. He held me close to him. We did not speak. I bent and picked up a curl of wood and held it to my nose. The sweet scent brought back a flood of memories. Yehwah said he would walk home with me. On the way out I took Joseph's apron from the hook where it still hung, and folded it carefully. I told Yehwah that I would need a hook for my bedroom. He smiled in understanding and took me back to my home.

My beloved Yehwah was all to me in those weeks. He became a man overnight. He did become my strength as he had promised. My only pleasure was in caring for him in homely ways. No sooner had he left in the morning than I longed for mid-day when he would return for his daily meal. No sooner had he left after his mid-day meal than I yearned for nightfall and his return for the evening. He spoke with enthusiasm about how well Joseph's business was doing. Was it false enthusiasm? I could not tell. Perhaps there were miracles after all. Perhaps Yehwah would grow to love the craft he had learned from Joseph. Perhaps he would be content with his life and not dream of other things. Perhaps he would

cease to yearn for other worlds, other knowledge. And then as we sat together in the evening, I would look up from my sewing and see in his face an otherworldliness, a detachment from this room and from me. I would speak to him and he would not hear. I feared he was hearing the voices again. I feared what they were saying.

I went finally to Joseph's grave and stood over it for a long time, remembering. I recalled our quiet conversations, our dreams for Yehwah, our enjoyment in the simple pleasure of being here together. After that day I went often, and my greatest pleasure was in sitting on that little knoll and speaking to Joseph as if he were beside me. I told him all the bits of gossip that Yehwah brought home to me. I told him of my loneliness and my love. I told him of my need. I told him how well pleased Yehwah was in his work and how busy he was, and that he had already taken on an apprentice, how he was trying so hard to take Joseph's place. And then one day, I heard Joseph's voice as plainly as if he sat beside me. He spoke his love for me and for our son and said his love survived his death, that we had only to look into our hearts and he was

there. He said that always he was with us. That is all.

Mary

For a long time my mother was very patient with my mourning. She had known widowhood. She was well acquainted with its sorrow. She would look at me with narrowed eyes when she entered my house and found me sitting, endlessly sitting, and staring, endlessly staring. She would embrace me closely when I rose to greet her, then hold me off and look closely at my face, into my eyes. Then we would talk and she would gently urge me to realize that I could not go on like this indefinitely.

"Think of Yehwah," she would say. "This is not good for him." And I would nod and go on sitting and staring.

Then one day she lost patience. "Do you think that you are the only woman who has known this sorrow?" she demanded. "Do you think that you are doing yourself or anyone else good? Does this help Joseph? Do you think he would approve? And what of Yehwah? Do you ever think of what this

is doing to him? And what of God? Is He pleased with you, do you think?"

I turned away from her questions. I thought them cruel, and I couldn't speak. I walked into the other room and stood by the bed where Joseph had died. My mother came up behind me and put her arms around me, resting her head on my back. Then she turned me around as if I were a wooden thing and forced me to look at her.

"I am not trying to hurt you," she said, "but you have lost touch with all that should matter to you and you are losing yourself. Think, Mary, of the joy you knew meeting the needs of your husband. Think of the joy this loving caring brought to you. Joseph is gone, but there is much need of loving caring still. Yehwah needs you. I need you. Look around you and you will see other needs."

I shook my head slowly side to side. I heard, but I didn't believe. I didn't accept these harsh words. I thought them harsh.

"All right," said my mother, "we will speak later." She left me standing there and went into the other room. When I could, I followed her.

"All right," I said. "I will do as you say. I

will try it."

And so the next day after Yehwah left I forced myself to walk about. I forced myself to speak to those I encountered, to try to be pleasant, to pretend to be interested. I did not last long. But the second day it was easier, and the third. And before too long a time I began to look forward to these walks. I would tidy after Yehwah left and then leave. Each day I would walk the same path and I came to know each person's routine. I came to know the names of their children, to hear of their good fortune and their bad.

And then one day a young woman I spoke to often came to the doorway and asked me to come in. She said that her child, a little girl about seven, was so ill that she was frightened and she had no one to ask for help. When I saw the child I could tell she had cause for concern. The child was flushed with fever and in pain. She tossed from side to side, and her head moved constantly. She made no sound and she opened her eyes only when her mother touched her. I asked if she knew the old man who knew so much about sickness, and she said that she did. I told her that I would go to

him, that my son had once had a sickness like this and that the old man had given me medicine, a purgative I thought, that had eased his pain. When I got back, the child seemed worse even in such a short time. We gave the child the liquid the old man had sent and did as he said, giving clear cool water often and putting cold packs on her body and forehead. It took a long while for her to be soothed, but she finally slept. That was the first time I knew pleasure since Joseph's death, and it was a beginning. When I told Yehwah this story he smiled, and for a moment I saw Joseph in that smile.

Jesus

Before long Mary had created a routine for herself. She still spent much time sitting and staring, and everyone knew that she was thinking of Joseph, but she began to do other things. She heeded the advice of her mother and found things to busy her. She walked about the town a good deal, stopping to talk often with those she encountered and getting to know more of their lives. She was a good listener and

those who spoke to her gave her their confidence as though to an old trusted friend, though none of them had known her well in the past. She found quiet pleasure in these exchanges and looked forward to the pleasantries as well as to the confiding.

Gradually she began to realize that there was a real place for her in the fabric of the community, that there were things she could do that would help others and at the same time give her a sense of being needed. She missed being needed. Joseph had demanded little and she had given much. She was content to meet his needs and know little of the outer world. But now it was different. She took pleasure in providing for my needs, but it was not enough. We loved each other with a full love of mother for son and son for mother, but it was not the same and it was not enough. Gradually she began to finish her homely chores as quickly as possible so that she could be out and about our small community. It was not that she was meeting these people for the first time. She had known most of them all her life. But she was knowing them for the first time. She went into their houses and saw how they lived. She heard of their joys and their sor-

rows and shared in the pleasure and pain of each for the first time. She went often to her mother's house to help her. For the first time her mother, my grandmother, was beginning to feel the trials of old age, and it was sometimes difficult for her to do the simple necessary things. It gave my mother pleasure to return finally the gestures of love and caring that she had received from her mother all of her life.

She seemed to me to be everywhere at once, and I would hear stories of her kindnesses. It gave me joy to know of this. She spoke constantly of the pleasure she felt in being useful again, as though she had a new life, a life granted her at a time of greatest need, and soon she was in great demand. I became accustomed to the knock on the door before dawn, a knock which said that Mary was needed somewhere. A child was about to come. An aged parent had become suddenly ill. There was trouble in the house. Could she bring some linens to bind an injury?

Always my mother rose with joy to meet these requests. Always she met them well. There was a calmness in her that brought peace to a troubled household, that

brought comfort to a troubled mind, that brought solace to a mourning soul. All of this transformed my mother. She knew loneliness no more. She continued always to visit Joseph's grave, sometimes daily, and she said she told him of her new life, of her joy in being helpful to those who needed her help, and she said that she knew that he heard, that he approved. And when I observed her joy in serving others, I knew that we had both learned from Joseph.

Mary

It was our habit during those years to rise with the dawn. One morning in early summer we had just finished our morning meal and I was beginning to tidy when there was a sharp knock on the door. Yehwah opened it and found the baker's boy, more than a boy and not quite a man, barely able to speak with agitation. He said in a tumble of words when he could begin that we were needed in the baker's shop. I joined Yehwah and we followed the lad as he ran to the corner. Inside the shop he led us behind the counter and there lay the baker.

He was a large man, neither old nor young, who had always enjoyed robust good health for the many years we had known him, but now he lay on his back, senseless, his face purpled, his eyes closed, his limbs sprawled.

Yehwah had the boy help him drag the baker to a clearer spot on the floor. It was not easy, but they succeeded in doing so, and Yehwah was able to kneel on one side of him and I on the other. The boy hovered about anxious to help and not knowing what to do. Yehwah told him to go fetch a warm covering from our house as quickly as he could. Yehwah bent his head and put his ear to the baker's chest and listened intently. "Nothing," he said when he raised his head. He felt his extremities and they were cold to the touch. Yehwah directed me to massage his left arm and feet and ankles to see if I could bring back some warmth to them while he put all his strength into applying pressure to the area of the baker's chest where the heartbeat would normally be felt. He worked smoothly, rhythmically, and he had the intensity of expression I was beginning to recognize.

The lad returned with the bed coverings and I covered the baker's body as well as I could, leaving those necessary areas clear. I directed him to massage the baker's feet and lower legs and showed him the way while I continued to work on his arm and hand. There was nothing but silence among us. A few customers came to the door, saw us, and hastily withdrew.

Finally, after what seem to me the best part of an hour, Yehwah straightened up and sat back on his heels. "I don't think it is working," he said, and at that moment we saw the baker's eyelids begin to twitch, and a slight tremor passed over his features.

Without a word further, Yehwah returned to his labors and the boy and I renewed our efforts with added fervor. Then quickly consciousness returned to the baker. His eyes opened. He turned his head from side to side. When he could speak it was clear that he had no memory of his collapse and no understanding of what was happening. He did not recognize any of the three of us. But his breathing, while still shallow, grew more regular, and gradually the color in his face returned to normal. His hands and feet were still cold, but less than they had been.

As we were bending our efforts to keep him warm and make him more comfortable, his wife rushed into the room, eyes wide with fright, and seeing him lying on the floor, burst into tears. I rose and went to her and offered her assurances that her husband was no longer in danger, but that he should be moved to his bed and forced to rest until he was completely recovered. She was unbelieving at first and then reassured by Yehwah's quiet description of what had occurred. Yehwah left then and I said that I would remain until the baker was moved and accompany his wife back to their home and stay with her a while.

It was some time later that the baker was well enough to return to work, but he did so in the end, and I grew almost weary of his expressions of gratitude each time I entered his shop for many months afterwards. Yehwah smiled each time I told him of the baker's effusiveness. "You should be more patient, my mother," he said. "Gratitude is a gift akin to love. It enriches both the giver and the receiver. There is no such thing as too much of either."

Jesus

I knew above all else that I must care for my mother for as long as she needed me, but I knew with absolute certainty that it would come to pass that I could and would leave her, and with her blessing, to go out into the world and fulfill my destiny. But I knew equally that this would not come immediately. For now it was my destiny to take Joseph's place as best I could and to help my mother in any way she found necessary.

It was more than gratifying to see her find a new usefulness in her life in helping others in need of her care. Her skills grew rapidly as she tended to those stricken by illness or desolated by death. At times she ministered to those in joyful welcoming of a child. It was known far and wide that Mary my mother could be counted on in time of need. She found great joy in this work and cared not what the hour she was called or who was calling. Friend and stranger were alike to my mother. Her only requirement was they they needed her. Her experiences were rich and satisfying to us both. My mother spoke often of her new

understanding of human nature, of the complexity of man, of the diversity to be found in character and mind of those she met. She was struck by the capacity of some who had been given little, to feel great gratitude to God and to their fellow men and the failure of some who had been given much, to feel anything but dissatisfaction with their lots. Joseph had sheltered my mother from much of the harshness of life and he had sheltered me as well. My mother was easily shocked by some of what she saw in the course of her ministrations, and she would speak to me of these things in puzzlement and wonder.

There was a man, she said one day, who had come to her and asked her to minister to his wife. This was man of reputation and wealth, a man regarded as virtuous in the extreme. He said that his wife was not well and that Mary could be of great help to her, that she would see no one else. My mother promptly gathered up the tools and supplies that she customarily took with her and followed the man to his house. It was a great house, she told me, greater than any other around, with manservants and handmaidens and treasures greater than any she had ever seen. The man told a servant to

lead my mother to his wife's room. The servant left her at the door and indicated that she should enter, that she was expected.

The room was dark, and after my mother's eyes had become accustomed to the darkness she made her way to the window and pulled back the curtain enough to admit some light. In the bed she saw a figure of a woman that did not look like any other woman she had ever seen. The eyes were wild and darting, the hair was matted and ill kempt, the bones stood out in her face, and her fingers twitched perceptibly as she held tightly to the bed covers. My mother went and stood by the side of the bed and reached for one of those trembling hands. The woman drew back and turned her head away. My mother spoke softly and said her name.

At that, the woman turned back and grasped my mother's outstretched hand. "Help me," she said. "Help me. I am mad. Help me now." My mother sat on the edge of the bed, soothing this distraught woman and trying to understand the deluge of words that came from her lips. Much of it was spoken so rapidly as to be unintelligi-

ble, but gradually my mother began to understand. She had, the woman said, just lost a child in childbirth, not "just" she said, but weeks ago.

My mother sought to discover why this should so destroy her. "You are young enough to have other children," she said, though indeed the woman did not look young. Her age was hard to determine. The woman shook her head wearily. This was not the first child dead at birth, but the fourth. All perfect babies, three boys and one girl, all carried to term and all dead at birth. "I am cursed," she said, "cursed by the God who made me and who made these children and who killed these children. I want him now to kill me."

It was a long time before this woman was restored to health. Many months of visits from my mother. Many hours of shared anguish. Many hours of quiet contemplation. Many hours of loving prayer. Mary told her of her own sorrow at the death of Joseph and how she was tempted to withdraw from the world about her and nurse her grief and how she had done so for a while and how her life had changed when she discovered the joy of serving others.

"There are many children in need," she told her. "Perhaps God wants you to find these children and in finding them find yourself. I will help you however I can. Let us look together for these children." And find them they did, and in time the great house rang with the sound of children's laughter and my mother went there often. I could tell when she had been there. She glowed with pleasure and she bubbled over with stories of these children lost and then found, and of a woman fulfilled and happy, and of a man whose wife had been returned to him. And in none of this did my mother see a reflection of her goodness. Her modesty forbade it, but far and wide people knew the story and of Mary's part in it.

Beyond caring for the needs of my mother those years after the death of Joseph, I tried often to speak to those in need and to do for them whatever was within my power and capacity at that time. These were years of growing, physically and spiritually and emotionally. It was not difficult to find need. After a while I did not have to look. It came to me. People began to regard me with the same trust that they had felt for Joseph, and often as I worked at my craft I would be visited by someone who had a

story to tell, either of himself or of others that spoke of need.

The need was not always a physical or material need, though it was often. Sometimes it happened that the work of my mother met this need and she would cheerfully and willingly bend her efforts to help with all her skill and devotion. At other times I was called upon to help directly, and it gave me increasing pleasure to do so. There was a man among the first who came to me who had been deemed mad. He had led a life of seeming virtue for many years, had been respected and envied for his good fortune, and almost overnight had sunk into seeming idiocy. He began to mutter to himself, to be distracted, to neglect his family and his work, to distress all who knew him with his behavior. He did not come to me, but one of his friends did, one who had trusted Joseph entirely and had seen me work with my father Joseph since I was a boy. He did not ask me directly. We chatted of many things, of local happenings, of his family, of my mother, and gradually he came to speak of his friend in such turmoil. He grew agitated as he spoke and found it impossible to ask directly for help. Perhaps it implied too much

intimacy -- we were not close friends. When he paused, I asked more questions about this man in distress and he answered my questions freely and willingly. I said simply that I would like to talk with him, that perhaps I could help, that I had in the past learned a little medicine from the old man now dead. He offered to take me to him then, but I said that I had work that needed doing and that I would go with him in the early evening.

We went, those few hours later, to see his friend. He greeted us at his door, seemingly normal and well, but his face was drawn and his eyes circled with fatigue. He knew, he said, that his friend had gone to me for help. He had asked him to. He did not understand what was happening to him. His wife and children were alarmed by all that was happening, and there was nothing that he could do to help himself. Nothing.

There was no sign of his wife or children about. We sat and talked quietly and he described to me these attacks. His agitation grew as he spoke and he began to tremble and to display all the signs that had been described to me. His speech rambled. His eyes stared in his head. He heard nothing.

He trembled. His friend looked at me with concern. I laid my hand on the arm of the man so ill with a disease without a name and stilled it momentarily. For a second he seemed to end his torment. Then it began again. Gradually he quieted. He became aware of us once again. We sat there in the darkness, his hand in mine, and I spoke to him of his need to look into his soul to seek the source of his torment, to discover what he was hiding, albeit unknowingly, that was destroying him. He was too spent to object, too desperate to reject any suggestion, too anxious not to agree readily to any help offered.

I told him I would speak to him often, as often as he wished, and that we would work together to uncover the source of his sickness. He shook his head mutely, and I felt the pressure of his grasp increase. I rose. His friend said that he would stay with him and that he would speak to me on the morrow of meeting again. I turned again to the sick man and in his eyes read hope. I knew that he would be well, and indeed he was in not too long a time.

This was the first of many such healings, for that is what they came to be called, and

I knew the pleasure my mother had found in serving others. We spent many happy hours in the evenings sitting together speaking of our work.

I continued to spend most of my time at my craft, for indeed it provided the livelihood that we needed, but our needs were simple, and as time progressed I was able to spend more and more time ministering to the needs of others. There was no lack of need. As word of my ministry spread, people came from further and further away to seek my help. I could not turn away anyone whom I felt able to assist, and in time my mother often joined me in accommodating those who sought help. She brought with her skills I lacked and a sense of caring and competence that reassured even the most hopeless and fearful. There was great joy in what we did, and great satisfaction in seeing the sick healed, the bereft joyful, the homeless housed, the lost found. There were no single simple answers in our work. I learned much, as did my mother, of the nature of man and his mind and his body, of the importance of faith and trust and love, above all love, and of how closely all three of these gifts were related to healing and to restoring the soul and body of man

to a state of grace and well-being.

I cannot adequately describe the satisfaction that resulted in all this work. I felt as though I were being prepared for even greater efforts to help man to find peace of soul and wholeness of spirit. I knew without being told that God was with me, that this was His work, and that I was at last on the path I should take. I did not have all the answers I hungered to know. I did not have all the skills I needed. I did not have the absolute certainty I longed for in what I did. But I knew in my heart that I was doing as I was destined to do, that I had just begun down the path I was to take, but I knew it was the right path, the path chosen for me by God my Father. My mother knew too. I saw her stealing glances at me as I worked, and there was a serenity in her face I had not seen since Joseph died, and when I spoke to her of this she smiled with inner radiance and said only, "You know, Yehwah, don't you?"

Mary

Yehwah was so happy in those days when he first knew the joy and satisfaction of

healing. He had always had an inner radiance, but now it was so intense that I wondered that he did not light the darkness. Each day, it seemed, brought new challenges to both of us, but particularly to my son. Word of his talent spread quickly throughout our city and gradually even further than that. Yehwah worked long hours some days at his craft and then into the night helping those who needed his skills as a healer. For that is what he came to be known as, the healer of the mind more than of the body, but he ministered to both. He knew as did I, that there was often a connection between the two.

He rarely knew total failure. Sometimes he sought results he did not achieve, at least immediately, but always there was some change. He felt attuned, he said often. I was not sure exactly what this meant, but I knew he was doing as he was bidden, and he was gratified with his life.

We sometimes worked together. I had grown somewhat skillful at treating the ills of the body, and sometimes those of the spirit, but I did not have the power of my son for healing. There were times when I was sure that his powers were miraculous

in nature, though he felt that this was not so. At least at first he felt this. He said that the body and the mind had great capacity for self healing if the way was made clear, and that he did only that -- make clear the way. Although there was much truth in this, I never believed that it was the complete explanation of my son's power to heal.

Finally the time came when he began to realize that I was right. I think I was there to see his first miracle. I had just arrived home when Yehwah burst into the room. He was a fully grown man by this time many years after Joseph's death, but he kept the enthusiasm of a boy.

"Come quickly," he said. "I want you to see something. I need your help."

I followed him back to his shop. Inside, seated on a chair, was a young woman about thirty. She had her arm about the waist of a child who stood beside her. It was the child that immediately drew my attention. Her head lolled to one side and her tongue protruded slightly through her lips. Her eyes seemed unfocused and she did not in any way respond to our entry. Her arms hung slack by her sides, and when she stood her knees seemed to buckle

slightly and her feet were placed at odd angles to each other. She was a pretty child except for the vacancy of her expression. I thought her about ten, but very slight in her build, small for her age.

Yehwah introduced me to the mother who stood up and took her daughter's hand as she stood. When Yehwah spoke to the child and called her name she turned her gaze to him and said something so garbled as to be unintelligible. Yehwah asked her to walk towards him, and her mother nudged her gently to indicate that she should. When she walked her gait was unsteady, and her feet shuffled along without leaving the ground. When she got to Yehwah, he put his arms about her, and she stood quiet and unprotesting there as we spoke. Yehwah asked me if I had seen such a sickness in my work. I had not, I told him. I could be of no use. He took the child's head in his hands and raised her face to regard his.

"Then we must get other help," is all he said as he looked into the face of the little girl. He picked her up and carried her over to his work bench and had her lie back so that her head was at one end of the table. He motioned to us to come closer. He put

his hands on the child's shoulders and seemed to manipulate them, and his face took on an intensity of expression I had never seen before. As he worked, a tremor went through the body of the child, and then she lay still. Yehwah continued to work on her shoulders and neck for some time and the intensity of expression did not slacken.

When he was finished the child lay, still passive, and Yehwah showed her mother how he had been working on her neck and shoulders. He told her that he wanted to see this child again on the morrow, and her eyes filled with tears.

"I cannot," she said. "I have other children who need me. I must go home today."

I said that we would keep the child safely.

"I dare not," she said. "My husband does not know we came. He would be angry if he knew. I did not dare ask his permission. I was afraid he would refuse."

"Then," said Yehwah, "Let me show you what to do." And he instructed her and said that all the time she was doing as he instructed she must pray with great intensity and know in her heart that her child would be better. And indeed when the child

got down from the table and began to walk she did seem better already. Her head lolled, but not quite so much. She moved more freely. She paid some attention to what was being said. I could see in the mother's expression that she noticed these changes. There was the light of hope in her eyes.

It was some months later that they returned to express their thanks.

"I waited," said the mother, "to be sure it would last."

It was hard to believe that the child by her side was the same child. She clasped Yehwah's hand in hers in gratitude and told him how quickly her child had grown better -- weeks, she said, of steady slow progress, and now -- well, look at her.

When they had gone I said to my son, "You must be very pleased, Yehwah."

"My Father is pleased," was his only response.

Mary

I was surprised one day when I stopped at

Yehwah's workshop unexpectedly to find two children sitting cross legged in one corner of the room whittling on pieces of soft wood, and a third standing by Yehwah's side watching him as he worked. No one looked up as I stood in the doorway, so engrossed were they in what they were doing. As I watched it took me back over the years, this scene, to the days when Yehwah spent so much time with Joseph, and to later when Yehwah was grown too old to play and other children came to watch Joseph work and learn the ways of wood. How quickly those years had passed. Finally Yehwah looked up from his work and saw me. "These are my friends, Mother," he said, and introduced each by name. Each of the children nodded solemnly at me as he was introduced and then Yehwah said to them, "It is leaving time now anyway. So put your work where it belongs and if you can come on the morrow I will be here." The children did as they were told, then thanked Yehwah, bowed again to me, and were gone. I reminded Yehwah of the hours he had spent so as a child. He smiled and said that it gave him great pleasure to remember those days.

I made it a habit after that day to stop on my way home to see the children. There were always three or four. The space did not allow more, and Yehwah said that they took turns in coming. Each one had a project he was working on -- and there were some girls, so I should say he or she -- and the greatest privilege was to watch and work with Yehwah in the finishing of his pieces.

Yehwah got into the habit of speaking to these children of the faraway places he had learned about, and after a while it got to be a treat just before they left to gather about Yehwah and listen to him as he spoke of those places and the people who lived there. Then he would encourage them each in turn to speak of their dreams and of their thoughts and each of them listened attentively to whoever was speaking.

There was a gentleness about these children that was a joy to behold and they gave great pleasure to Yehwah. I loved those times at the end of the day, listening first to Yehwah speak to them and then hearing their clear young voices speaking their thoughts and dreams. They were learning without knowing, I thought often, not sim-

ply the wonders of the world outside their small world, but the wonder of loving behavior and loving speech, the joy of sharing yourself with others.

I wondered often in the years that followed about those children, about how much they had learned in those sweet days and how that learning had helped them to shape their lives. I never knew, but I felt in my heart that they kept with them always something of my son.

Jesus

There was little I could do about my yearning to go abroad from this place until a later time, but I determined that while I was still obliged to remain with my mother to care for her and to ease the loneliness she still felt despite her full life, I would seek out those who had traveled far and wide and seek to learn from them the wisdom I lacked. There was not much time for this. My hours of work were long, and my duties to my mother, while not onerous, took much of what little time I had left, but more and more I was beginning to feel the absoluteness of my obligation to God

the Father of all as His son on earth. I could not yet speak of this to anyone. There were times when I burst with this awareness and wanted intensely to shout to the world that I had come from my father to teach man His way. But I knew I could not. Not now. But I could seek to learn of the further world from others.

There were merchants who came to Nazareth once or twice a year who traveled constantly to foreign lands and who brought riches from strange and exotic places to use in their trading. I determined to speak to these men when they next came. There was also living nearby a man of advanced years who had spent much of his life in travel. People said he was a little mad, that he thought he would find the source of the Nile, the great river that flowed through the land of Egypt. I wondered how he had managed to traverse such distances, and I determined to ask him to tell me what he had found. There was also a holy man who went from place to place preaching the word of God and who spoke to whoever would listen. He did not live in Nazareth, but he came often and lived on the kindness of believers. All these people could give me wisdom. All these people

could speak to me of the further world. I had only to ask.

In the meantime I heard often the voice that instructed me in the ways of God. I heard over and over again that the world suffered because man had forgotten his obligation, his absolute obligation, to live his life in love of all men and of God Himself. The voice told me to do all things in love, to speak all things in love. I spoke freely of this voice now with my mother. She listened and said little, but she said I had no choice in accepting whatever this voice said to me, in doing whatever this voice told me to do. I asked her if she ever heard this voice, and she hesitated. She said that she heard voices in her mind but that she was not sure of their source. She knew one of the voices was that of Joseph. It came when she thought of him. As for the rest, she did not know. She said that they brought messages of joy and comfort at all times, of hope and promise of all things. She said that in the quiet of the night she knew that these voices were heavenly voices, that they spoke to her heart and they spoke the truth. She told me finally that they spoke of the future, but she would not tell me what they said. It was

enough for me that my mother heard these voices and understood and accepted their source.

I told her about my plan to learn of the world from those who had seen much of it, and my mother smiled at me and encouraged me to do this. "It will be interesting for you, my son, to have such questions answered, but in the end you will learn the most from looking into your heart, from listening to the voice that speaks to you, from knowing that your life has special purpose. You have felt that for some time. Do what you must, Yehwah, to fulfill that purpose. You know you must."

The words were a joy to hear. My mother knew my heart. She had always known my heart. Now I was set free. But I knew that the time had not yet come. It would, but not yet, for now I would do as I thought wise. I would learn all I could of the ways of the world from those who had seen much of it. I would be patient and listen.

Above all in those days I chose to speak with a certain elder of the temple in Jerusalem who spent much time in Nazareth. There was not a temple in Nazareth, and occasionally some holy man

would come and hold an assemblage in someone's house and speak to those who gathered of God and of religion. I met this man at such a gathering. He was a man of great intensity, of great learning to be sure, but it was his intensity that first attracted me to him.

He was, first of all, intensely devoted to the word of God. He believed without any doubt in the God of the Jewish race. He believed that the holy scriptures left no doubt as to man's destiny, that man was sent to this earth for a brief span and that all he did during this brief life span was the measure of his existence. He believed that all of us in this life have a primary obligation to live lives of goodness, lives devoted to the praise of God, and that we should at all times be aware of the absolute necessity of prayer. He said that it was man's duty to accept whatever in life God chose to give him, that he should in no way ever rail against the wishes of God, and that God's judgment of what his life would be must prevail at all times. He said that the highest life was one of submission to the absolute will of God, and that man should at all times study to know the will of God. There was no room in his mind for doubt of this

firmly held set of beliefs. I asked him why he had chosen to study in the temple and become an elder. He said God had chosen that life for him. I asked him why he had never married. He said that God had chosen that he not marry. I asked him how he knew that God had chosen these things for him. He said that they happened and that therefore God had chosen them to happen. This was puzzling to me. I wanted to tell him about the voice I heard that I knew was the voice of God, but I knew if I did he would not be able to believe me at all. He would not be able to tolerate my belief or any concept that violated the tenets by which he had lived his life. I wanted to ask him how he could be so sure of his beliefs, but that would have been disrespectful. Instead, I asked him questions. I asked him how there could be evil in the world if all things were willed by God. He said that we must accept the fact of evil as part of God's plan because all of the world was the result of God's plan and evil must be regarded in the same way as good. If we could accept good as part of God's plan, why was it different or harder to accept evil? They were all one. They were all God's plan. I asked about the responsibility

of man. Did man bear responsibility for his deeds? Of course, said the elder, man is responsible for his deeds. He is doing as God wills him to do, but he is answerable for his actions in his own heart and answerable to God at all times.

"But, how, " I persisted, "can man be answerable for actions that you say are willed by God and man is only the instrument? How can man be held responsible for enacting God's will?" His patience would grow thin when I tried him like this, and he would generally respond that I should pray for greater understanding of the will of God, that I needed faith and acceptance above all, and that I was not learned enough to be asking such questions.

I knew I was not learned, and I knew that this man was, but I could not be satisfied with his acceptance of God's will as responsible for all the bad as well as all the good in this world. It was not enough. It was pleasurable for me to see the workings of this learned mind, but I could not accept all he said. I could not accept the concept that man's role in life was solely to submit to the will of a God for a brief life span and serve no other purpose. My heart

told me otherwise, and I knew as I had always known that I had to listen first to my heart.

Jesus

There were years in which I enjoyed a quiet fame. I was still Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph and Mary, the carpenter, and I enjoyed that role. It was important to me to be doing Joseph's work, and each piece of furniture I completed I regarded as a tribute to this gentle craftsman who had taught me all I knew of woodworking. I enjoyed the life I led. My mother never rested, it seemed to me, and never grew tired of her work. There were times I was sure that people sought her out simply for the miracle of her company. She had a way about her that was one of total charm. All who knew her and spoke to her left her company with a heightened sense of self. She had the capacity to bring out the very best in people and to help them to know the very best in themselves. Her words were golden, always other directed. She rarely thought of herself, and she was richer in contentment than she had ever been. She

took a great pleasure in my work at all times, and she rejoiced for me when I began to know the power of healing.

At first I had been hesitant. I knew that my heavenly Father had empowered me to do my work for Him on this earth, but I was not certain wherein these powers lay. I knew I had the gift of speech, of persuasiveness. I had always known of the ease with which words flowed from my tongue even as a very young child, but I did not know in how many other ways I had been gifted by God. Then, little by little, I became aware that there was special power in my hands, that they could at times transmit a kind of energy that had healing qualities. This was not always the case, nor did I look first to this power. Many of those I saw who suffered from illness of the body and mind, one or both, were more easily helped. I learned early the effect a troubled mind could have on the well being of the body, and I learned that the troubled mind was most often a lonely mind, greatly in need of love and caring. There were others too who had purely physical ills, and their needs could often be met simply. My mother had great skill in physical healing and often we worked together on such

cases.

My fame spread because of those illnesses and infirmities that did not lend themselves to easy solutions, to those cases deemed hopeless by all who had tried to help. More and more they came to me after all else had failed. And sometimes I could help. I would myself feel a kind of energy in my body, a heightening of awareness, an intensity of feeling, and I would know at that instant that my power was derived from my heavenly Father, that this gift came from Him, and that He was showing me one step along the way, the path I was to take. It was a humbling experience each time this happened, and a joyful experience as well, to see the infirm able, the diseased cured, the crazed sane, the dying restored.

Each time I told my mother of one of these experiences she smiled knowingly and knew my joy and satisfaction, and then, sometimes, a cloud would pass over her features and I knew that she was realizing that the day was drawing nearer when I would have to leave Nazareth to go abroad to do my Father's work. I knew that too, and I knew that I would be told when the time came and that I would not be able to

ignore this voice that had served me so well, this voice I loved as the voice of my Father.

Mary

I stood in the street outside the workshop looking in the doorway, and I saw across the room three young men, their backs turned to me, in earnest conversation with Yehwah. I could not see him, obscured as he was by their bodies, but I knew it had to be Yehwah. I could not hear their words from where I stood, but I sensed the intensity of the exchange. They gestured as they spoke and nodded their heads. Finally one of them turned his head slightly and saw me. He stepped to one side, and I could see Yehwah clearly then on the other side of the workbench. He stepped from behind it and came across the room to greet me as I stepped inside.

He took my arm and led me over to where the young men were still standing. He introduced me to each in turn, and I wondered that I had not met them before. They nodded politely and made their farewells to each of us before leaving.

"Who are they, my Yehwah?" I asked. "Why have I not seen them before?"

They are friends, he explained, newly met, whom he found interesting for their broad knowledge of the world outside Nazareth. They are merchants, he explained further, who travel from place to place buying and selling, newly arrived in this city.

"Where did you meet them?" I asked. I had never noticed strangers in our small community.

"I sought them out," Yehwah replied with a smile. "You know of my hunger to know of strange lands. In a way, they satisfy my hunger for this knowledge by sharing theirs with me. I want you to know them, a little at least."

And so they came and shared a meal with us, and I was reassured. They were pleasant and polite, and I listened with wonder to their tales of their travels. Each one seemed to have a tongue of gold and I could myself visualize the strange and colorful places they described. Yehwah was enraptured, interrupting to ask a question now and then, but totally captivated, as was I, by all that was said.

It was that evening that I knew that

Yehwah would not be much longer in deciding that he had to leave Nazareth, and I was comforted in the thought by all that these young men had to say. The world beyond our small community was not as threatening as I feared it might be. These strangers, newly friends, were not that different from the young men I had known since childhood. They spoke with enthusiasm of their lives of trading and travel.

When the evening was over and our guests ready to leave, I urged them to return often and spoke of my pleasure in their speech. Yehwah said he would walk with them a way, and when I was alone I thought of the days ahead, I hoped not too soon in coming, when I would sit in this room by myself and think of Yehwah in the places I had heard about that evening.

The Ministry of Jesus

Jesus

Very often I wondered how I would tell my mother when the time came for me to leave. I knew that she expected this. I knew that she had already accepted the fact that it was my destiny to speak to the world about what I believed man must do. I knew that her life was full and rich in her ministrations to others. I knew I would not have a word of protest. And yet it was difficult for me to find the words. The love that had always existed between my mother and me was a love that withstood all the tests of time, although our lives had been singularly free of strife, and which changed in nature over the years, but it was always a love that bound us to each other in such a way that we knew without being told what the other was thinking. There were times of wordless communication between us over the years that astonished others.

Now the time had come to tell my mother that this closeness was at an end, that physically we would be separated for a time neither of us could anticipate, and that the

close knit fabric of our life together would be sundered. It was bound to be difficult for my mother. It was difficult for me. All the years I had known the security of absolute love, first from both Joseph and my mother Mary, and then from her alone, had been golden years whose richness would never leave me. I knew full well that this love would live and flourish in both our hearts and that I would return as often as I could to Nazareth and to my mother, but I knew too that there would be an ache in both our hearts for a long time.

I decided to wait until just before I was ready to leave to tell my mother. So I made my plans. I secured a successor in the shop and arranged for him to see that my mother continued to be supported to some extent. She had little need, and I was not concerned about her physical well being. I knew she was secure there. I spoke with the merchants about traveling with them for a time until I learned more of the world outside. I spoke to my grandmother, now elderly and somewhat infirm, and asked for her blessing on this journey. I told my friends and neighbors. And lastly I told my mother.

It was as I expected. She raised no protest, but she was infinitely sad.

Mary

I did not sleep well the night before Yehwah left. When I tried to sleep I could not at first. I kept going over in my mind Yehwah's words to me as we walked the night before. I kept hearing them over and over in my mind, and when I did sleep my dreams were troubled. I woke frequently during the night and each time heard the words again. "I am leaving. It is time. I am leaving. I am leaving.... " endlessly in my brain. I took myself to task. I had no right to be so upset. I knew this was coming. I had had so much. But always I returned reluctantly to the sadness that had overwhelmed me the night before.

In the morning I woke with a start, and at first I did not remember. Then I did. Yehwah was up before me, and I found him sitting in the doorway looking out on my garden. When he heard me he stood and put an arm about my shoulders.

"I am going to miss this," he said, and his

embrace tightened. "I am going to miss you too, my mother."

"Oh. Yehwah." The words stuck in my throat. I turned away to hide the tears I felt coming and forced myself to smile. "A whole day, Yehwah. We have a whole day left."

"Almost," Yehwah agreed. "We leave at sundown."

He had already prepared the morning meal and fetched water from the well. As we ate, we spoke of the day ahead. First, he said, he wanted to see his grandmother. Then, he said, we would go to the the market and buy the supplies I would need for the next few days. He would prepare the mid day meal. Today was a day of rest for me, he decided, a day of being waited on, a special day. He was so anxious to please me. I forced myself to eat what he had so lovingly prepared, though I had no desire for food, and forced myself to be cheerful. I am not sure I succeeded.

My mother was pleased at our visit.

"I was not sure, Yehwah, that I would see you again before you left," she said. She made much of the flowers he had brought her from the garden. She asked him many

questions about where he was going first, about his traveling companions, about his feelings about this journey. I knew she was trying hard to cover up my silence. I still had difficulty speaking. Every time I tried I would choke with emotion. I kept remembering all the years and years of visiting my mother's house with my son. It was so hard to believe that this was the last visit for who knew how long. And again, I would get impatient with myself for such self pity. I knew Yehwah's cheerfulness was partly feigned and my mother's as well, and I determined that I must not be the one to lend gloom to the occasion. I tried again to join in their festive mood and this time I succeeded. My mother insisted that we share her mid day meal, and our protests were fruitless. After we ate we left for the market place and did our necessary shopping. Yehwah urged me to hurry with my purchasing, and when we got home insisted that I simply place all I had bought on the table.

"Walk with me," is all he said. We had not walked far before I knew where we were going.

We sat by Joseph's grave for a long time

and spoke of those happy days we had spent with him. I knew Joseph could hear us.

"I take Joseph with me, you know," Yehwah said as we left.

"He has never been out of my heart."

Once again I could not speak. We walked home in silence, side by side, and already apart. The sun was beginning to lower when we got home, and Yehwah had time only to pick up his sack with his supplies and to say good-bye. He held me in close embrace as we stood by the door.

"I will be back," he whispered in my ear.

"Know that always."

Then he was gone. I could not bear to look after him.

Jesus

That day I wanted only to please my mother. It had been difficult for her the night before when I told her I was leaving at last to do my Father's bidding. She had said little, but she gave me her blessing freely and we shared a deep understanding

of the significance to both of us of my departure.

I wakened early that day and busied myself with all the last minute details of my departure. I was taking little with me, but I wanted to be sure that I had forgotten nothing. I walked about the room I had occupied for so many years, a room I would see with my eyes closed many times in the years to come. As I handled each object a flood of memories engulfed me. The toys that Joseph had fashioned for me. The books of my teacher that he had given me before his death. The dried flowers from my mother's garden. The bits and snatches of a life for me now over.

I went into the other room and stood in the doorway looking out at the garden, and then I put on the table the things needed for the morning meal. I sat for a while in my mother's chair that Joseph had fashioned for her so lovingly so long ago, and again the memories washed over me. I sat then in the doorway and remembered the happy times I had spent in this garden with my mother. I did not hear her stirring, so engrossed was I, until she stood next to me, a faint smile playing about her lips.

The day went by quickly. We visited my grandmother for a last goodbye and spent some time with the children I had befriended who found me as I was returning home with my mother. Most important, we walked to Joseph's grave and I held my mother's hand as both of us let our minds play over the years long past when we had been a family. The memories were sweet.

Finally it was time to go. My mother pressed upon me some additional supplies and insisted that I take them with me, dried meats and fruits, she said, nourishing and not at all heavy to carry. I laughed at her and pointed out that to the very last minute she proved herself the worrying mother I had known all these happy years. I knew how much I would miss this caring mother and how much she would miss me. I promised her messages whenever I could find a messenger and visits whenever I could manage. Then there were no words left. I held her in my arms and she rested her head on my shoulder, then pushed me away ever so gently. "Go," she whispered. "My love goes with you always." When I left I did not look back.

Mary

"He is gone. I cannot believe that he is gone, but he is." The words went round and round in my mind. I did not want to believe that he was gone, but I knew that I had to. I had known that this day was coming for a long time, perhaps from the beginning, though I could not admit it, even to myself, until it was forced on me. I looked around that empty house and everything reminded me of him. I walked from room to room and I saw him everywhere. I heard his voice. I longed for his touch. I was sick with longing.

I had not felt like that since the days after Joseph's death, such a long time ago. The years in between had been filled with the love and caring and presence of Yehwah, my beloved child. He would always be my child. He was a man. He had been a man for many years now. But he was still my child, my Yehwah, source of my joy.

I knew I was drowning in self pity. I knew I should instead be telling myself that few mothers have known the happiness I have known, that I have not lost my son, but that the time has come to share him with

the world. He has been mine only for much longer than I had a right to expect. But I missed him.

I sat on the edge of the bed he slept in since childhood, and I ran my hand over the covers as though I could feel his warmth in them. I picked up a toy he had saved all those years that his father Joseph made for him, and in my mind's eye I saw them together again, working together, talking together, loving each other without condition or limit. I picked up a piece of clothing he had left behind and held it to my face. I looked out the window and thought how often he had seen this exact same scene outside. I went and got flowers from the garden and put them in his room. I hoped he would somehow know that I had done this.

And, I told myself, I will hear news of him. He will come back to visit, too. He said he would. But when? Tomorrow would not be too soon. I knew the pain would ease, the loneliness would lessen. I will keep busy with my work, I told myself. I will see my mother often. She needs me. I will do everything I can to fill this aching void in my life, in my heart, and I will re-

joice, I told myself, that Yehwah has found it in his heart to go forth and do as he feels bade to do. I recalled our last evening -- was it only yesterday? -- when he spoke of his dreams of the future, a future so long in preparation. He spoke with certainty and fervor. There was no doubt in his soul as to the need the world has to hear his words, to accept his words, and to know the joy of living in love.

I thought, though, with all his faith, with all his hopes, with all his dreams, that he was in the end sorry to leave me. I comforted myself with that, and I hoped that at that moment he was safe from harm, happy in his decision, loved by all he encountered, and that still he thought often of me and these years we shared and the love we knew from the very beginning. I will go tomorrow to talk to Joseph, I decided. He will understand. We will look back together.

Mary

In the days that followed I could think of little else. Yehwah as an infant. Yehwah as a little boy. Yehwah as a youth on the edge

of manhood. Yehwah as a grown man. And in all of this I remembered first of all joy. I remembered that bleak night in Bethlehem when I was so young and so frightened and when I lost my fear at the first sight of this wondrous child. I remembered Joseph's smile as he beheld my pleasure. I remembered so well the swelling of love in my heart, a love which I thought then could not be greater, but which grew and grew with the child.

Those days of infancy taught me much of the joy of caring, and then as my son grew I learned the joy of sharing. Each first. The first smile, the first tooth, the first step, the first word. Each little triumph shared among the three of us, and triumph after triumph followed. A strong word, triumph, but that is what they were to me. The triumph of returning from exile, the years when Yehwah turned into a little boy before our very eyes. I remembered my pride as my mother saw him for the first time in such a long while, and the joy I knew when they spoke together so often and so seriously in the years that followed.

I remembered the blossoming of Yehwah's sweet mind, of the wonder of his words

and thoughts. It was a triumph to me too the day Yehwah first went as a man, though he was still a youth, to work with Joseph his father in his workshop, and the glow that lighted his face that evening at Joseph's words of praise. Those were years of beauty for all of us, too soon over when Joseph left.

My spirits lifted as I remembered Yehwah in those days of sorrow for both of us. Never did he fail to cheer me when I was sad, to sustain me when I was weak, to encourage me when I faltered. His inner peace became my inner peace, and when I learned the joy of helping others, my joy became Yehwah's joy. There was so much we shared in those years. Each day, it seemed, was vivid in my memory, and I knew that I would always be able to close my eyes and relive the love and joy of each one of those many days.

I was still lonely, but it was a sweet loneliness. I would never stop missing Yehwah's constant presence, but I knew that he was always there in my memory, always in my heart, and that one day he would again be in my arms.

Jesus

It was not long before I realized that my life as a teacher was full of surprises. The first surprise was the ease with which I spoke to the multitudes of people whom I had never seen before and the pleasure it gave me to see their faces light with recognition when they heard my words. It was as if the way had been prepared for me and their minds and hearts opened to hear my words. It came to be that when word of my arrival spread, people stopped whatever they were doing and came to find the place where I was speaking. There were not always great multitudes. There were times when I spoke to handfuls of people, but their reaction was the same. I was heartened by this openness, this receptiveness, and I increased my efforts.

I traveled much and it came to be that some certain individuals chose to go with me from place to place to listen closely to me each time I spoke. We met often and there was much interchange among us. I could see that they hungered as I had for so many years to know the truth of God's way. They sought from me knowledge of

what they should do, and I urged them to join me in changing man's ways and bringing him the joy he would know of a life lived in holiness and love.

Often I was asked to heal. There was little question that those who were brought to me were in need of powers beyond the ordinary, and often I could help them. There were times when I could see no change immediately, and in these cases I hoped that change would follow.

In all of this I found a joy beyond measure. Each day brought blessings beyond the modest expectations with which I began my ministry. I could not count the numbers I encountered each day. They were myriad, and each group gave to me as much as they took in love and understanding. I learned that men change little in different climes, that it matters not at all the worldly fortunes man enjoys or suffers, that the spirit survives earthly suffering and indeed at times seems to thrive on it. I found much beauty in men's souls, and I found that the lack of love was often easily remedied, that it had failed to develop out of ignorance of its importance to man's happiness. It was amazing to me at all times how the simplest

of my statements was regarded as profound truth, and I often chose to speak in parables to entertain and to enlighten and became known for these.

There was little in my life that was missing, nothing that I regretted. I knew at each moment of each day that I was doing the work that I was sent to this earthly existence to do, and my soul filled with joy with the start of each new day, and my joy grew as the day passed until night fell and brought an end to my labors.

I was rarely alone and rarely silent, and often the time for rest came welcomed and gave me a chance for quiet reflection. At those times my thoughts would turn to Nazareth and to my mother, and I would close my eyes and see her face and know the warmth of her love. I knew that I was in her heart and she in mine, and I longed to tell her of the joy that I had found in my teaching and of the great numbers which had opened their hearts to me, and I determined that I would return to Nazareth as soon and as often as I could and look into those eyes I knew so well and see pride. I longed to speak to her of what I had learned and of the depth of my satis-

faction with my new life. This, then, was my only regret, that my mother who had for so long been at my side was no longer there. But I had full faith that she was happy in her work and the sure knowledge that I would be with her in good time and that we would once more know the power of the love that bound us together.

Mary

For a while after Yehwah left I despaired of ever having word of him. I knew I was not being sensible, that I needed above all to be patient and to trust that Yehwah would send me word whenever he could, but I counted each day without news of Yehwah a day lost. I prayed, more than I had ever prayed before, that the God who had sent me my son and now claimed him as His own, would keep him safe from harm. I would have gone mad with anxiety had I not known the answer to my prayers in an inner conviction that nothing would happen to Yehwah as he followed the path he felt was his to take.

When I heard that there was a merchant caravan in the town a few months after

Yehwah left, I sought these merchants out and asked if they knew anything of my son. They had heard of him, they said, and the man I first spoke to asked the others if they knew more. No more, they said, than that his fame was spreading, that he had known some success in his teaching, but no one of them had actually encountered him in their travels. They would, they promised, seek to know more before they returned to Nazareth and speak to me then.

I had to be satisfied with this little assurance. My mother chided me for my lack of faith and for my lack of gratitude that my life was so full with my work. I was chastened by her words, uttered not in unkindness but in love, and asked for her prayers. She smiled at me.

"I never knew you to depend so much on prayer, Mary, as you do now." There was no question that she was right.

Finally they came, the three young men I had met with Yehwah, and they came with good news. When I opened the door and saw them standing there in the soft glow of an early evening I thought for one wild moment that I would see my son with them, that he was standing just aside, in the

shadows perhaps, but it was only for an instant. I greeted them each in turn and asked them to enter.

They were, they said, happy to bring me news of my son. They had seen him not too long before and his first request of them was to see me on their arrival in Nazareth. I held my breath. Yehwah asked them to speak to me of his love for me, they said, and to tell me that his heart spoke to him constantly of his mother. They said that he was well, that he was well pleased with his life. He told them to tell me that he was being well received wherever he went, treated with kindness and love, and that already he had attracted followers who were as devoted as he to the message of love. I asked them if he truly looked well, and they assured me that he did. I asked them if he was truly happy, and they assured me that he seemed so. They said that his only concern was for the well-being of his mother, and his grandmother as well, and that they would be happy to take to him any news we wished to send. They would be leaving in a few days, they said, and would return again to my house before their departure. They did, and I sent with them a tunic I had made

for Yehwah as a way to ease my loneliness and which had been stowed in his room for some time, and I begged them to tell my son that I longed for a visit, and that our love was always with him. I stood outside my door and watched them out of sight.

Then I sat in my chair in the semi-darkness and relived some of my days with Joseph and Yehwah. It was a game I played with myself, and it brought me comfort, but I kept seeing the face of my Yehwah as it must be today in a strange place surrounded by people strange to me, but newly friends to him. I so wanted him to be loved and happy. I could almost hear his voice reminding me that I need not worry, that he was all right.

Jesus

Early in my ministry there came to me a man much troubled by what he called demons. Much of the time he led an ordinary life, a life not marked in any way as unusual. He was of middle age. He had a family to which he was devoted. He worked hard when he was able. He had many friends. There was nothing in his life he

would choose to change, he told me, except for his sickness. Without warning he would be seized with paroxysms of what appeared to be rage. He would stiffen and seem to be unable to control his emotions. He would cry out and curse any who approached him. He would not recognize those dearest to him. He would quickly become senseless and fall prone to the ground and lie writhing in apparent agony until he was exhausted. Then sleep would follow and he would have no memory of the possession.

I spoke at length with this man. He said that his mind was free of care other than this, that he knew of no other person who suffered as he did, that he had heard of my healing powers, and that he sought my help. He said that he would do anything to be healed, that it troubled his wife and children that these demonic attacks seemed to be more frequent of late. I held his hands in mine as we spoke and I felt the tremors that passed through his body as he spoke of his illness. I could see the anxiety in his eyes as he looked into mine with hope and pleading.

I knew at once that in his healing I re-

quired the help of my Father, and I en-joined him to kneel with me as our bodies were joined hand in hand, and to join his heart with mine in begging God for help. He bowed his head in prayer and I felt the sincerity of his beseeching. As we prayed I felt the surge of healing power I had come to expect and I knew that this man was aware of it the moment I felt it. He raised his head and his eyes met and held mine, and his features were transformed with a holiness I knew well, a new awareness of the power of God's healing grace. We knelt thus, joined together, until I knew that the healing was complete. I released his hands and when I did he reached out and embraced me wordlessly.

By now the crowd which had witnessed this healing was murmuring its wonder, having stood in absolute silence through the time we were joined in prayerful supplication. I rose to my feet and lifted the newly cured believer to his. His eyes were filled with tears and they coursed unnoticed down his cheeks. He could not speak. He pressed me to him. Then he left.

By now the murmur of the crowd had risen to a babble. I heard exclamations of won-

der. I smiled to myself in the knowledge that many in this group who were nonbelievers would now think a bit more and perhaps come again to hear my words. My eyes turned heavenward and my silent thanks to my Father rose from my heart. I knew that He was with me at all times, never more than now.

Jesus

Before many months had passed I had the opportunity of returning to Nazareth. There were merchants whose path intersected with mine, and I was glad of the opportunity to take a respite from my labors. I had known some of this group and had earlier sent a message through them to my mother. They said that they welcomed my company, that they had heard of my successes and were anxious to speak with me.

It was a pleasant journey, and it was enlightening to me to discover that my words transcended class and culture. I had been speaking to simple folk, and now I found the same responsiveness to my words among these worldly wise merchants. Their questions were no more sophisticated than

those of the uneducated, nor were their demands to hear more of my words less vehement. I had expected to rest on the journey. I got no rest, and so although I enjoyed as always speaking of my convictions and seeking to persuade others, I was glad to end the journey and be once more in Nazareth, the only home I really remembered clearly, though I could vaguely recall the days of exile.

It was early evening when we came to the outskirts of town, and I quickly excused myself and made my way to the home I loved so well. I feared startling my mother, and so I knocked gently on the door. I could not hear anyone stirring inside and I was about to knock again when the door opened and in the soft glow of the evening I saw my mother once again, more beautiful to me than any other, standing in the doorway, a look of total disbelief on her features. Then she threw herself into my outstretched arms and clung to me, softly murmuring my name over and over. We stood thus for a long time, the warmth of our bodies mingling, our hearts beating as one, and then finally she stepped back and regarded me with a tear streaked face.

"I was afraid I was dreaming, Yehwah," she whispered. "I have dreamed this dream so often."

I took her in my arms again. "It is no dream, my mother. It is the realization of a dream." It was the end of a separation longer than I had envisioned and it was sweet.

We sat that evening with no thought of food or rest and talked endlessly. She told me about her work and her mother and about some of our acquaintances, but not before I had told her of the great joy I found in my new life and of the successes I had encountered in my teaching. Our roles were reversed. Now it was my mother who had all the questions. She would have liked an account of every day since I left, and I laughed at her for some of her concerns. She wanted to know the nature of my followers, what they said after hearing me speak, what I said to them. Endless questions. Endless joy in this exchange. Endless love rekindled into flame.

It was a visit filled with the joy of knowing once more the intimacy of my relationship with my mother. Once again we knew without words the other's thoughts. There was

a communion of soul between us that I had never found with any other person, and I rejoiced in the warmth of this loving exchange with the mother who had borne me and loved me totally ever since.

While I was there we did many of the things I had dreamed of doing while I was away. First we visited Joseph. His grave was freshly banked with flowers and I knew my mother had spent much loving care on them. Then we went to see my grandmother and she greeted me with the love I remembered so well and so fondly and insisted on hearing as many of my stories as there was time for. We saw many people, and my mother glowed with pride when she heard me speak to them. Before I left I visited the shop and was engulfed in memories of the many years I had known there, memories that reminded me sharply of how well prepared for my new life I had been by Joseph's constant example.

Then, finally, it was time to go. It was a bittersweet parting. Each of us longed to prolong being together again and each of us knew the need for me to leave. I promised my mother that I would return at the earliest time possible and joked that when she

heard a very light tapping on the door in the early evening a few months hence she should be prepared to find me standing there and not look so disbelieving. So we ended our visit as we had begun it, in love and joy, and in promises to each other of many things. As I walked toward the merchant caravan my heart sang with joy at both the past few days and the future that lay ahead. I was not disappointed in either.

Mary

When Yehwah came finally to see me, I had almost despaired of his ever coming. That very afternoon when I had spoken to my mother of my son I told her of my despair. I was infinitely sad that day with missing my Yehwah, and she had tried to cheer me, as she always did, and to bolster my faith. But I was still sad when I got home, and I thought back to the numbers of caravans that had come through Nazareth. I had gone each time to speak to the merchants, but no one had word from my son. Some had heard of him. That was all. I had prayed all this time, harder than I had ever prayed before, not selfishly that he would

come to see me, but that he was well, happy, and safe from harm. I knew in my heart that he was in God's protection, but still I worried.

I went to sit in my chair as night began to fall and to recall, as was my custom when I was sad, all the joy I had known as Yehwah's mother and Joseph's wife. Rarely did this fail to make me realize the selfishness and uselessness of my sadness. I was sitting there, dreaming and dozing, when I thought I heard a tapping on the door. It is your dream, I told myself, and paid no attention. Then something compelled me to go to the door, and when I opened it, there he was. I still thought it part of my dream until he took me into his arms and held me close. I tried to hold back the tears. My disbelief lingered, but I knew the firmness of Yehwah's embrace was no dream. I wanted never to move, and as I said his name over and over he stroked my hair with infinite gentleness. My Yehwah. My beloved Yehwah. The tears came. Tears of pure joy and relief.

When we sat talking that evening, hour after hour, it was as though Yehwah had never been away, but I could not rid myself

of the air of unreality that possessed me. I had so longed for this time that I still feared I was imagining it. Then I would reach out and hold that beloved hand and look on that beloved face and into the eyes I loved so well and know it was no dream.

Yehwah was so patient with me. The questions tumbled from my lips. Sometimes I did not let him finish the answer to one before beginning another. And all of his answers brought joy and reassurance. He had always had an inner radiance when he spoke and now it was as though he glowed. His features, always fine and beautiful to me, were expressive beyond words, luminous. There was a fire within my son and its brilliance shone through his every word, his every gesture. I was transfixed as I listened to him. I thought I had known my Yehwah perfectly, but there was a depth and richness to his words and to his bearing that was new to me. I knew how much I loved him. As I sat there that evening I began to know the measure of his greatness, his holiness, his kinship with his Father.

Finally, reluctantly, I knew he must rest, that there would be time to speak further

in the next few days. I did not ask Yehwah how long he would be with me. Perhaps I did not want to hear, though I knew that this was only a visit, that he knew when he had to leave. I knew that the caravans usually stayed two or three days. I hoped it was three.

We stood for a moment near the doorway of the bedroom that had been awaiting his return since the day he left, and said our good nights. He held me close again and I could feel the beating of his heart. I carry the memory of that moment to this day, and of all the other moments of that visit, all too short.

When it was time for Yehwah to leave, I knew he would be back with me again. I knew it would not be long. I had so many new memories to sustain me. It surprised me, though, how long the total joy of this visit stayed with me. Yehwah had left with me his love and his caring and part, I knew, of his heart, that heart that beat so steadily as he held me in a last embrace. I missed him, to be sure, but he was still with me in spirit, and I found myself able to visualize him as he went from place to place and to hear his words and the murmurs of ap-

proval from the crowds, and I saw him as he sat and spoke with those closest to him in the evening of what they must do the next day. And all of this brought a serenity to my life that I knew was not of my doing.

Jesus

There were times that I was sorely tempted to tell the world that I despaired of ever convincing man of the need to let his life be lived in love and to know that only in this way was he going to achieve happiness on earth and perfection in his next life. There were times when I felt that man had strayed so far from the path of righteousness that he would never be able to find his way through the thorns and brambles that his errors had constructed back to the way of God's will.

This is not to say that I often felt this discouraged. All men, it seemed, were willing to listen to my words. Some men listened and questioned and changed their ways if change was needed. Others listened and questioned and tried to understand the need to transform their lives and met repeated failure but persisted and in the end

achieved a degree of success. Others listened, questioned, and scoffed. They rejected the concept that the life of the spirit was more significant at all times than the life of the world, and that happiness could be achieved only by rejection of worldly standards of behavior and acceptance of the concept of love as a guiding force at each step in human existence. They could not rid themselves of greed and the glitter of power. They hungered for approbation from their fellow men above all things and sought to find this approbation in the amassing of wealth and the trappings of wealth. Such men discouraged me, and the longer I preached the more often I encountered them.

Generally they came to hear me out of curiosity. My fame preceded me wherever I went, and I grew accustomed to the size of the crowds that awaited me in each new place. My disciples grew in number and of their number a select few chose to stay with me at all times and to make smooth my way. Their devotion was gratifying, and there was little that marred my total happiness, but I was nagged by the realization that I was failing with this small group of stubborn men who most needed to heed

my words, and they were legion. Everywhere I went, it seemed, I encountered this stubborn minority whose ears were closed to my message, who regarded what I had to say as a threat to their hard won material security, their niche in a world of their making where material possessions and power bespoke authority and prestige.

There was occasionally one or two who were willing to recognize that the life I offered was superior in every way to one seeking happiness and spiritual satisfaction, and in each case when one of these men of power and wealth chose to abandon his material possessions and live a life of love and charity, there was much amazement among those who knew him and much faith in my powers was engendered and reinforced. Each time a rich man chose to follow me, I was gratified, and my sense of discouragement lessened, but my limited success with this group continued to plague me.

It was in one of the towns I had visited previously that one of my disciples encountered a man who had vociferously opposed my teachings. He had reviled me as a trouble maker, a radical reformer who rep-

resented a great danger to the stability that society enjoyed. I had spoken to him as persuasively as I knew how. I had met his bluster with softness and his aggression with love. I had asked him to keep my words in his heart and mind and to speak with me at a later time. I had asked him to speak to others who had changed their ways to live in the way of the Lord, and to plumb their hearts and listen closely to what these people had to say. I did not expect him to do this, and I took away from my encounter with him a saddened heart, for this was a man of power whose influence was great among the townspeople. Many listened to what he had to say about all things and acted accordingly.

It was many months later that I returned to the village where this man lived. I had been told by my disciples that he had asked that I return, that he desired to speak to me, and speak to me he did. He said that he had tried to ignore my words, to put them out of his head, and that he had tried to do this for many weeks and months, but that he had been unable to do so. He had finally done as I asked and spoken to others who had heeded my words and changed their lives accordingly and they told him of the

joy and peace that a life of love and caring had brought to them. This rich and powerful man had agonized, he said, about what he must do to achieve this peace of mind and soul. He had known all along, he said, that his life of wealth and power supplied many pleasures, but he had been aware that his happiness was narrowly defined, that it did not enrich the lives of those who were closest to him in the same way, that his wife and his children were as strangers to him, so intent was he in his pursuit first of wealth and power and then preserving this wealth and power once he had achieved it. He became aware, he said, that all of his life lacked the love I had spoken of as the mainspring of human joy and spiritual perfection, and he had reluctantly agreed to speak further to me of what he should do. We spoke often together that visit, and I probed the recesses of his mind. His confusion was great. He could not bring himself to give up the trappings of wealth and yet he knew that they did not bring him the peace of soul and the joy of love that he had come to desire.

I had no wish to tell this man in specific terms what he should do. I spoke to him with some urgency about his need to re-

solve the conflict he felt if he was to achieve satisfaction and love in this life and life eternal in the next. He made little progress while I was with him that visit, but I left knowing that he could no longer persuade himself of the essential nature of power and wealth to his happiness.

The next time I saw this man he came to me, having traveled a great distance to join our little group of believers who traveled together, and he was not the same man. His possessions were now few, he said. He had indeed given away much of his wealth and he spoke to me of the sense of freedom which he had so achieved. He spoke of the pleasure he felt each time one of those he befriended expressed his love and gratitude. He spoke of the change in the relationships with his family, of the alarm of his wife and children when he first began to divest himself of his great wealth. He told me of the dawning of awareness in their hearts when he repeated my words to them and expressed for the first time in many years the love he felt for them in his heart. He had offered them, he said, a choice in what part of his wealth they wished to keep for themselves and asked them to ponder their choices before they

spoke. In the end, he said, they agreed that a small portion of his total wealth was adequate to their needs, and they joined with him in the pleasure of meeting the needs of others out of his largesse.

My gratification in this case knew no bounds, and word of this rich man's conversion spread far and wide and brought others to a consideration of their need to follow his example. By no means did all heed his example, but many did and I found wherever I went after that less resistance to my words from those of might and money. Power and wealth held less allure thenceforth for many men as they learned the lessons of love and the joy of sharing.

Mary

I started out that afternoon to do some shopping. I was not half a dozen steps from my door when I changed my mind. There was nothing I really needed to buy that day, and I was already late leaving to see my mother. My morning had been busy, and each person I saw had seemed to take longer than usual, and I was perhaps an

hour later getting home. My mid-day meal was as simple as always and took little time, but still my mother would be expecting me and worry if I was late. She had taken to worrying lately, something she had never done earlier in life, and she joked that she had learned to worry from me and went on to say that I had better beware, that the habit of worrying would indeed become acute in my old age I had started so young.

I retraced my steps to my door, went in, and put my basket on the table, and then picked up the needlework I planned to work on that afternoon as I visited with my mother. I had got into the habit of stopping by her house once each day if I possibly could, most of the time staying only briefly, and spending a longer time one or two afternoons a week. This was one of those days. As I turned from my door in the opposite direction from before, heading for my mother's house, I began to think about how much she had failed in the last year, and at the very instant I had a feeling of great urgency. My mother needed me, I knew in that instant, and I quickened my pace until I was almost running.

When I got to her door it was ajar, and I

pushed it further open. What I saw brought my heart to my throat. Seated propped against the wall was my mother. Her neighbor knelt beside her and chafed one of her hands. The other lay limp in her lap. They both turned their eyes on me. "Mary," my mother murmured, "it is all right. I am all right." I knelt at her other side and looked questioningly at her neighbor as I held my mother's other hand. She explained that she had come to give my mother some baked goods and had found her lying on the floor, close to where she now sat. She said that she had knocked and when there was no answer, knowing that my mother was at home, she had entered and found her. My mother was conscious, she said, but dazed, and could not speak clearly.

Through all this talk my mother sat with closed eyes, her face pale, her breathing slow. I spoke to her and she opened her eyes. "All right," she said. "All right." I had brought my mother some tonic recently, when I felt she had looked tired, that I had found effective as a restorative, and I went in search of it. I held a small sip to her lips and then some water. We waited. I covered her lightly. Slowly some color began to return to her face.

When she felt ready, we supported her to her chair. She had barely sat when she said that she wanted to lie down. I knew then that my mother felt truly ill. My mother who would rather sit than lie down, rather stand than sit, rather walk than stand, rather run than walk. Her energy had always amazed everyone. And now she was weak and limp. She sank gratefully onto her bed and in minutes was asleep. Her neighbor, so kind and caring, left with assurances that she was available to help, to do anything at any time. I needed only to ask. She was very fond and admiring of my mother. I assured her that I appreciated her love and generosity and that I would speak to her before I left. "If I leave," I thought to myself. Now that I was alone I was filled with alarm. My mother was invulnerable. Never had she been ill. The infirmities of old age she shrugged off as inevitable nuisances and refused to let them slow her down. For the first time to my eyes she looked old.

As I sat by her bedside that afternoon, watching that still dear face, I was aware sharply for the first time of my mother's mortality. Not that I thought she was mortally ill. Not at all. But a sudden weakness

must have overtaken her and caused her to fall. I knew there could be many causes for this, particularly in a woman of her years. I was gratified for the simple skills in healing I had learned and thought that never had a person in need of my help been so important to me.

When she awakened, she was able to speak, although she did not remember falling or what she had been doing just before. I told her I would go home to gather a few things and stay with her until I was satisfied that she was well enough for me to leave her alone. She protested, but not with conviction, and soon she fell asleep again. I remembered the words of the old man when Joseph was ill. "Rest. Rest. The body will heal itself with rest." I wanted desperately to believe them. I had to believe them.

Mary

In the end, those years of Yehwah's ministry passed more quickly than I ever dared hope they would. I never stopped missing him. Not a day went by without my thoughts turning to him the instant I awakened in the morning and turning to him re-

peatedly during the day. His face was in my mind's eye and his love in my heart as I fell asleep every night. But his absence grew more tolerable. The passage of time became less painful. My loneliness was assuaged by my constant awareness of Yehwah's presence and love and by the many facets of my life. I was blessed with many things that required my time and devotion. Each morning was filled with service to those who needed me. Some of these mornings there would be a knock on the door in the early hours, an urgent summons. Usually this meant either the beginning or the ending of a life. In the end I counted each joyful.

The birth of a child was, of course, counted joyful by all, and it was my habit when the arrival was heralded in advance to be with the mother during her labor and to try to distract her with prayer and idle talk, alternately sometimes, from her pain. I often looked upon the spent faces of these young women and saw them as children having children, and then when I looked back at the birth of my son I knew that I too had been a child until that miraculous moment of birth. In those cases where skill was demanded, the birth being difficult, I

was gratified that I had been given the ability to help. There were few births I did not witness, and it was a great joy and satisfaction to me to watch these children as they grew, to minister to them in their illnesses, and to see the pride of their parents as they spoke of them to me.

The deaths were a different thing, but I did truly see in that moment of transition a miracle equal to that of birth. I gave what comfort I could to those who were near and dear to the dying, and to the dying I gave hope. I spoke to each one Yehwah's words of a life eternal, a life of love and joy that awaited each soul at the moment of death. I spoke of the endless love of the God that had given them life and was now taking it away and taking them into His kingdom to a more glorious life that awaited there. They all listened if they could. Most believed. Most died willingly, peacefully, and almost always at the moment of death I could see a fleeting radiance, a smile, almost of recognition I thought, and sometimes a name escaped these dying lips, the name I was told most often of a loved one who had gone before. This, then, was my life. Between the births

and the deaths, there was a myriad of other needs that it pleased me to meet, and as I went from place to place each day I was greeted along the way with love and reverence from old and young, all those I had come to know so well over the years. I smiled to myself at how pleased Yehwah would have been had he been at my side and heard and seen these expressions of love and gratitude. It was enough to think of Yehwah this way to cheer my day.

Thus were my mornings spent, and occasionally an afternoon or an evening, but generally my afternoons were free for my own pursuits and for my mother. She had never totally recovered from her collapse, although she was quickly on her feet afterwards, but never again did she have the confidence to go about as much as she had before, and I counted it important to visit her often and take her on short walks and visits to old friends.

She never lacked company. My mother was beloved by all who knew her, young and old alike, and I often found her surrounded by children when I arrived. She taught them simple skills. She spoke to them of the days of her youth. She loved speaking

to them of Yehwah and of his words. She taught some of the older children the use of her oven and taught them to bake and to share what they made with all who were in need. Never was her life empty, but she was always glad to see me and to recount to me what she had done since last we met and to demand the same of me. I cherished this relationship with my mother. I cherished her beyond words and thanked the God who had given me to her as her child. When we parted each time it was with avowals of love for each other and for Yehwah. We both longed to see him, more each day.

And Yehwah did return as he promised, as often as he could, and each visit was pure joy, filled with talk, with loving remembrances, with dreams of what was to come. There seemed to be no limit to the joy -- there is no other word for it -- that Yehwah found in his ministry. He exulted in the faith he inspired in those to whom he spoke, in the power he had been given to persuade, exhort, and convert. There must have been difficulties in his life, as there are in all lives, but of these, if they existed, he spoke not at all. He spoke of the miracles that his faith wrought, of the true

valor and faithfulness of his followers, of the devotion of his disciples, of the inner peace he knew at the end of each day and of the fresh hope he felt at the beginning of each new day.

I could not ask God for more for my son. I watched his features, so dear, so fine, as they were transformed by the conviction with which he spoke, by the radiance of his faith and the intensity of his caring, and I was humbled by the knowledge that I had been privileged to bear this child, to nurture this child, to love this child, now grown to manhood, his divinity more clear with each word he spoke, each moment that passed. I prayed that this joy Yehwah knew would never cease, never be threatened. I counted it miraculous that he had never encountered hostility, that his words were so golden that they disarmed all who might have questioned. I hoped that Yehwah was not keeping anything from me, that he was not protecting me in any way. And then I discarded those useless worries that it was my nature to entertain. And each time when our reunions came to an end I sent Yehwah back with my blessing, and each time he took with him part of my heart and left with me part of his. My love

for my son could not have been greater.

Jesus

There is not much that needs to be said about my mother that I have not already said, but the story of her life after my departure from Nazareth is the story of a woman who found her joy and satisfaction in the service of others and her pleasure in the love that this service engendered both in her heart and in the hearts of all whose lives she touched.

I knew when I first left my mother to begin my ministry that she had a life of service to others that she managed to live in addition to her other duties. She was at all times attentive to my needs, and we spent much time together in loving talk and pleasure. It gave me some concern that when I was removed from her life she would find time hanging heavy on her hands. If this happened I never knew of it.

On my first visit to my home after I began my ministry I became aware of how quickly my mother had found needs to fill her empty hours. Each time I returned it

seemed that the list of those she felt responsible for giving her tender care grew longer, and each time I walked with her about Nazareth I was struck anew at the breadth of her acquaintance and the degree to which she was held in loving reverence by those we encountered. I told her in a jesting way that I was not as honored in my home as I was elsewhere when I walked with my mother. This distressed her until she realized that I spoke in humor, but there was more than an element of truth in what I said. My mother protested that her ministrations to the sick and needy in no way compared with my teaching and that she rested easy in the knowledge that the little she did was at all times the result of talents given to her for this purpose by God Himself, Father of us all. She said that at all times she was aware of the blessedness of her life, of the extent she had been gifted by God to do His work, but that it was the merest reflection of my ministry, that in no way could the two be confused.

I smiled as I listened to my mother's words of modest protest, and I realized anew the depth of the love she inspired in all whose lives she touched and of the pervasiveness

of her goodness. Never did she fully realize the extent of her worth to others. Never did she fully value her contributions. Never did she cease to speak with wonder of my gifts and with total modesty dismiss the importance of hers. But I was reminded anew each time I visited Nazareth of the extent to which my mother lived a life of love given and received, the life I told the world was pleasing to the utmost to man's Creator, the life of seeking for perfect love that nourished the soul and sped it on the road to spiritual perfection. My mother had always been perfect in my eyes, and now the world she knew realized this perfection. I counted my mother among my greatest blessings, perhaps the greatest gift my Father had given me to prepare me for the work He needed of me. And when I was away from my mother I knew with absolute certainty that she walked in love, that she was cherished by all, that she was incapable of error, and that in all ways she was the most pleasing of women in God's eyes. I knew, as time progressed, that this goodness would sustain her all the days of her life, that whatever trials and sorrows she might one day face that she would be at all times loving in

her behavior and her thoughts, and that at no time would she know despair or loneliness again. She was my mother, beloved in all ways to all people, destined for greatness from the beginning of her days in this earthly existence, destined to live eternally in love, destined to be revered at all times, in all places, in all ways.

First Hint of Trouble

Mary

I heard first through one of the merchant traders. Yehwah had made friends far and wide and in the end I received news often from these merchants as they passed through Nazareth. This time it was one of the young men I had met in Yehwah's workshop and who had first brought me news of my son so long ago. Now he came and spoke to me at length. He gave me all of Yehwah's messages and answered all my questions, but I had the feeling that he was holding something back, that there was more he wanted to say but that he hesitated.

For a while we spoke of other things, and when he rose to leave I took his hand in mine and asked if he was sure there was nothing else. He sat down again and spoke further. He said that he was concerned for Yehwah, that of late each time Yehwah spoke there seemed to be soldiers about. He said that there were whisperings that the Romans feared Yehwah, that they feared his ability to command an audience

and then persuade them of the truth of what he said. They had done nothing, he said, but stand on the edge of the crowd and listen. They had not spoken to Yehwah or to anyone else, and when the crowd dispersed, they disappeared. But lately, he had been told, wherever Yehwah went there were soldiers watching and listening.

I asked if he had spoken to Yehwah about this, and he said that he had not, that he was perhaps being foolish in mentioning it to me. Perhaps it was only further proof of my son's persuasiveness that even Roman soldiers would come to listen to his words. He promised that he would return and that in the meantime others would bring me news of my son.

After he left I sat and thought about his words. I could not get out of my mind the picture of Roman soldiers watching Yehwah, listening to his words. Were they sent to do this? Why? What did it mean? I tried to convince myself that their presence was not significant, but I did not succeed. I knew it was menacing, and I knew there was reason in the young merchant's speculation that the Romans were in fear of Yehwah's power to persuade. I knew in my

heart that Yehwah spoke no sedition, that his message was one of God's love and man's obligation to love, but I feared the Roman soldiers nonetheless. They were there for some reason other than curiosity. I did not sleep well that night. I had troubled dreams about the past, all concerned with the threat of the Roman soldiers. I relived all the times of past fear when I awakened, unable to return to sleep. I remembered my fear of the soldiers in Bethlehem when I clutched my newborn son to me and I remembered their coarse jokes. I remembered the chill of fear when the Roman soldiers had come to search our house just before we went into exile. Even when the Romans were pleasant, as the younger one had been then, they were frightening. It was my habit to cross the street when I saw a Roman soldier, to avoid passing close by. It was not unusual for them to make ribald remarks to women they encountered. I had heard of worse, but I had never seen it. Yehwah had always been warned to respond with respect and politeness if a Roman soldier ever spoke to him. All the children had. Nothing noteworthy had ever come of the Roman presence in Nazareth except for the years of

exile, but there was always an undercurrent of fear among the people, a fear that did not dare expression. So it was easy for the specter of soldiers watching Yehwah to ignite fear in my soul.

I did not know what to do. I rose from my bed before dawn, dressed for the street, and walked.. Without thinking consciously of it, I found myself heading for the merchant caravan. As I walked I knew suddenly what I must do. I must find Yehwah and see for myself.

It was light when I reached their camp and there was much stirring about the morning fires. I quickly found the young man who had visited me and asked if I might speak to him. He led me into his tent and motioned for me to sit on a cushion on the floor. I thanked him and said I would stand, that I would not be long. I asked him if he knew where Yehwah would be now or in the days to come. He said he did not, but that he might be able to discover this for me, that they were leaving that evening for Jerusalem and that he would try to get information there. There were always many travelers in Jerusalem and surely someone would know..

I knew he would be shocked by what I was about to ask and he was, at first, but then he agreed that I could travel to Jerusalem with them, that he would take me in his protection and see me safely into the hands of friends there. He warned me that I might not be able to get news of Yehwah's whereabouts immediately, but that he would help me as much as he could while he was there. They would leave just after sundown.

All the things I had to do in preparation flashed through my mind as he spoke, and I thanked him hurriedly and retraced my steps. I had first to see all those I had promised to see that morning and leave with them whatever supplies they needed for the next several days. I had then to buy foodstuffs for the journey and to prepare whatever I needed to take with me. I had no idea how long I would be gone. I hoped not long. I hoped that seeing Yehwah and talking with him would set my mind at ease. If I had not had such concern about the soldiers I would have been pleased at the prospect of hearing my son preach and of seeing the response of those who listened. Finally I had to see my mother and tell her of my journey. I knew I would have

to tell her the entire truth and although I disliked the thought of alarming her, I knew she would not be satisfied with anything less than the entire truth. I could never have deceived my mother even if I had tried. She had a way of knowing.

Jesus

There was nothing I could or wanted to do about the continuing ominous presence of the Romans. There were times when I spoke and looked for the presence of Roman soldiers in the crowd and found none, but these occasions grew more and more rare. Seldom were there none. More often there were a handful and occasionally large numbers. Their numbers were roughly proportionate, generally, to the size of the assembled multitude.

Much of the time they said nothing, simply listened in silence, expressionless, and moved away with the dissipating crowds at the close of my talk. Once in a while one or two would stand nearby listening, while pretending to be otherwise preoccupied, to the words that passed between me and those who stayed to speak privately. Once

in a great while, one of the soldiers would put his hand on the arm of one of the listeners and stroll along with him as he left, engaged in quiet conversation with him. My disciples, increasingly alarmed by the Roman presence, spoke always to these men later to determine the interest of the Romans in my words. There was little these men had to report. There was never any threat, any hostility, any hint of violence. Each time it seemed to be a matter of simple interest, simple inquiry, a wish to know more about this man who proclaimed himself spokesman for God, indeed son of God Himself.

We spoke often, my disciples and I, and often with others, of this presence, this constant surveillance, to determine the best path to follow, and although there were some who advocated confrontation, most agreed with me at all times that there was no need for action, that if there was any way to reassure the Romans that my teachings posed no direct threat to their power it was by their listening and hearing that my message was simple, that I advocated only love as a weapon of protest against any unfairness man found in his world. Never did one of the Romans seek to

Speak directly with me, and they seemed to know without a doubt which of the listeners were my close followers, and these they avoided speaking to as well.

There was little we could have done had we wanted to. Traveling as we did from place to place, changing our plans as seemed desirable at each moment, we did not have the means to communicate with those who might help us to determine the reason for the interest of the Romans in my words and in the response of those who listened to what I said of my holy Father and His plan for mankind in this earthly life. I knew in my heart, as I had always known, that I lived in my Father's protection, and that my only need was in absolute trust and faith in the rightness of all I said and did in His name, that no matter the outcome I followed the right path in all I said and did, and that no harm would come to those who put their faith and trust in me and through me in Him.

At each moment in time this was my response, my message to those who listened with open hearts to my words and felt the sureness of their truth and justness and lived their lives in accordance with God's

demand for love in word, thought, and deed. Each time I saw with fresh eyes the beauty in those faces uplifted to hear my words, I knew once again the intense joy given to me by my Father as I did His work, and there was no element of fear or apprehension in this joy, no hesitation in this overwhelming love I felt for all of God's creatures I was privileged to speak to and to teach the lessons of love. The wonder of my mission was always with me, rich and full in both promise and satisfaction each hour of my earthly existence. I could not wish for more. There was no room for doubt or fear or hesitation. Never.

Mary

It was not an unpleasant journey to Jerusalem. The merchants were all very kind, and I spent much time during the days and early evenings talking with the women. All women enjoy speaking of the wonders of their children, and these young mothers were no exception. I spoke to them of my son whom they had heard of but never heard or seen, and they were de-

lighted by my stories of Yehwah's childhood and boyhood and asked me to tell them what I knew of his teachings and of the miracles he had wrought.

I was restless and anxious to get to Jerusalem and discover Yehwah's whereabouts, and I found myself walking a good deal of the way, trying to visualize my son, trying to shake off the foreboding that had gripped me since I first heard of the soldiers watching him. At night I walked about the camp until I was exhausted, and then slept fitfully. I tried to be useful in small ways, but Yehwah's friends were in all ways kind and hospitable and assured me that they were pleased to have me as their guest, that I need do nothing in return.

We reached Jerusalem in early evening, and I was grateful for the plans Yehwah's friend had made for me to stay with friends of his until I had the time and the opportunity to seek out those I knew would welcome me into their homes. It had been a long time since I was in Jerusalem and much had changed. Aquinor, for that was what he was called, saw that I was comfortable and said that he would first thing in the morning seek knowledge of Yehwah's whereabouts

and come to speak to me when he had knowledge. I slept well that night, far better than I had anticipated, and woke the next morning refreshed and anxious. My hosts were kindness itself and insisted that I rest that day and recover from my journey. They had a pleasant garden and despite my impatience to be doing something about finding Yehwah, I enjoyed their home and their presence as I awaited news.

During the late afternoon I began to have misgivings when Aquinor had not returned, and I prayed that his inquiries had been successful. Almost as if in direct response to my prayer, he appeared in the doorway entrance to the garden where I was strolling. I hurried to him and he clasped my hands as he spoke. He said that he had heard from several people that Yehwah was near Jerusalem, but no one knew exactly where until one young man told him that he had been in his presence the day before and that he planned to spend a day or so in a little settlement outside the city. It was an easy journey, Aquinor said, and he would come for me at dawn the following morning to begin the journey. We would not be traveling alone, he said. Two or three of his group would join us to hear Yehwah's

words.

My heart suddenly sang with hope, and my sense of apprehension was lost in the joy I felt at seeing my son again, at hearing his healing words of love, of holding him in my embrace and never letting go. I was ready the next morning long before dawn. There was little conversation among the group as we journeyed. Each seemed lost in his own thoughts, perhaps in anticipation of the wonders to come.

When we reached the spot, there was already a small crowd assembled, standing, sitting, walking about, speaking softly. Aquinor found me a spot in the shade of a tree and bade me sit and rest. He charged a young friend with the responsibility of staying with me until he returned. I was tired from the trip and sat there in the soft heat, dozing despite myself until I became aware of a stir in the crowd. I looked up and there he was, at a distance, to be sure, but there he was, my Yehwah, my beloved child, radiant in his faith and love. I sat there mesmerized as I watched him move through the crowd, touching, smiling, clasping outstretched hands, moving slowly and steadily to a slight rise in the ground

where he stopped and stood quietly. The crowd quieted and watched him expectantly. Some stood. Most sat. All were reverently quiet.

When he began to speak I could not believe his voice. It had grown in richness and resonance, and though he seemed to be speaking quietly his words filled the small space and reached clearly to where I sat. He spoke of his heavenly Father and of the love that gave men faith and courage in the face of all adversity, and of the need each man had to know this love for all he encountered, friend and foe alike, and to act in love at all times, to be responsive in love to kindness and cruelty alike. He spoke stories of love. He told of the power of love in his ministry, and of how lives had been changed by the lessons of love he taught.

Almost at the end he saw me as his eyes swept over the crowd, and my heart leaped as his face became suffused with joy. He kept his eyes riveted on me as he finished speaking and looked away only when the crowd surged toward him at the end. He spoke quietly to each, slowly making his way toward me. I stood, my heart pounding as I watched him, and suddenly remem-

bered the reason for my trip. I had not seen a single soldier. I looked again to confirm this. Not one. I barely had time to feel relief when he was in front of me and I was in his arms, safe once again in the sureness of his love. I heard Aquinor's voice behind me and Yehwah held out his right hand in greeting, still clasping me tightly with his left arm. I stood there content to say nothing in Yehwah's embrace while he and Aquinor exchanged greetings and Aquinor explained how I had come to be there. I looked up at Yehwah just in time to see his face darken at the mention of the soldiers, and I knew then that there was reason in my coming.

Jesus is Apprehended

Jesus

There was never any doubt about the need to be careful about the Roman soldiers. They had for some time been an ominous presence each time I spoke to a gathering of followers. We had been unable to determine any reason for their presence each time I spoke. Despite our efforts, all inquiries failed. Now there were rumors and mutterings that the Romans had begun to threaten those who desired to hear my words, that those friendly to the Romans had let it be known that there was a danger in listening to this man, this self proclaimed messenger from God, who spoke seditiously and threatened the peace. It made no difference that none of this was true. It was of no concern to the Romans that they speak the truth, but it was apparently of concern that many gathered in the name of God to hear His word.

There were some who came to warn me of this with fear in their eyes and concern in their words. They advised discretion and suggested that I put an end to my teaching

until the fears of the Romans were allayed or forgotten. Others came to speak to me with indignation that the Romans should so interfere in matters that concerned civil law not at all, and proclaimed themselves willing and able to protest and resist this domination, this effort to interfere with their innermost feelings and seeking. There were others who were simply apologetic, who said that they could not risk harm to their families and that they wanted me to know that they longed to hear more of my words but were too frightened to chance the wrath of the authorities.

It was difficult to answer any of these people. To those who bade me surrender to the will of the Romans and remain forever silent, I said that I could never agree to such a silence, that I was subject to a higher authority that bade me speak His word, that at no time would I yield in this matter. To the others, I thanked them for their concern for my safety and reassured them as best I could. I said that at all times I spoke in honesty and that in my heart I knew I did no wrong, that I was compelled to continue to spread the word of God and to teach the lessons of love man needed so badly to learn. I cautioned against violence

of any sort. I comforted those who were filled with fear and offered them my understanding.

Little by little I realized that the threat that the presence of the Roman soldiers represented was real, that they feared my power over my believers. I could not understand this fear. My counsel to all who listened to my words was to love all men, including their oppressors, but perhaps they feared the simplicity of this message. Perhaps they felt it masked an effort to awaken the people to an awareness of their power to control their own destinies in all ways, not merely their spiritual destinies. I knew that it would be futile to seek to explain my message, to try to persuade the Romans that I meant them no harm, that I did not preach rebellion, but I was uncertain what I should do. I feared harm to my followers. I wanted to be able to reassure them, and I could not.

I spoke finally to my closest followers of my unwillingness to expose them to danger, and asked that they speak freely to me of their concerns and their wishes in this matter. To a man, they proclaimed their steadfast loyalty to me no matter what

choice I made in the face of this threat. If I chose to be silent, well then, they would be silent with me and patiently await the day when it would be possible to speak freely again. They would keep my words alive, they said, in every way possible. If I chose to defy the Roman presence and continue my ministry in the face of their opposition, they would support me fully in this choice. They had no fear, they said, for themselves. They had some fear, they said, for my safety. But they were agreed that the choice was mine alone and whatever that choice they would be at my side. As I looked into their eyes and saw the faith and trust that their gazes reflected, I counted myself among the most fortunate of men, and I spoke words of praise and thanks to my Heavenly Father that He should have sent me such men.

I thanked them for their devotion and their courage and said I would count myself blessed by their loyalty as I continued my ministry. I confessed that I did not know what lay ahead, that I could not foresee what the Romans would do, if anything, but that I would not be silenced at any cost. If they chose to stand with me in wordless protest and speak of the need for

love in a world gone badly astray I knew that they would be blessed. I embraced them one by one, and each murmured his love in my ear. Then I left to walk by myself and to think and to pray.

As I left the room where I had spoken with my disciples, I stopped briefly to embrace my mother, who had witnessed all that went on without participating. Earlier I had tried to reassure her, but I knew as well as she that I had no cause for optimism. I knew that I was an object of suspicion and that the Romans were likely to take some action against me. I still could not imagine why they felt I posed a danger. Had they been reasonable they would have realized that my influence was in no way negative to their cause but rather of benefit to them. My message was one of love and peace, not of disruption and hatred, but clearly they refused to take my message as that direct and simple. They were right in feeling that I was able to persuade, but that indeed was my entire ministry, persuasion in the name of my Father, but persuasion for good, for love, for patience, for fellowship, for charity. What threat were these qualities to our captors?

I could not answer my own questions, and so I went to walk by myself to think about what lay ahead. I was concerned for my mother. She was essentially alone in this great city, here out of concern for me. I determined that I would see first of all to her comfort and safety and try again to reassure her that I faced no great danger, and indeed I did not believe that my position was that perilous. If I could persuade my followers so readily I should be able to persuade the Romans.

As I walked, my thoughts returned to the discussion of what I must do earlier in the evening. There had been no question of the loyalty of my closest disciples, and I smiled as I remembered the vehemence of Judas in proclaiming his willingness to suffer any indignity in the cause of justice.

Judas tended to overstate at all times. There was no harm in him, I thought to myself, but he will be forever a boy, never quite a man, but his faith in all I said was touching to me, his reaction always so exaggerated and emotional. I could count on his loyalty, I knew, but there were times when his judgment was questionable. As for the rest, they were a disparate group, but united in a firm faith in all I said. They

felt the same urgency I did about the need for all to embrace the concept of love that my heavenly Father demanded of all His children. Each of them had found the inner peace that acceptance of the absolute necessity of total love brings, and each of them burned with the desire that all men know this inner peace. I could be content in the knowledge that if the Romans kept me in custody for any length of time these men, faithful all, would at all times continue to teach the lessons of love in my name. It would not matter how long. They would be faithful to our cause. This thought brought me great comfort. I had expected a measure of fear, but as I looked around the table at each of those dear faces I saw no fear. I saw concern. I saw puzzlement. I saw love. I saw no fear.

I quickened my steps as I approached the gate to the garden. It was my intention to find my mother and speak further with her. I wanted to take her back to Nazareth where she would be safe and surrounded by friends. There was a certain urgency in this if my fear that the Romans were going to act soon against me was well founded. No matter what happened, my mother would be better off there. It would not, I hoped,

be hard to persuade her.

Suddenly I felt a tap on my shoulder. I was sure that I was alone. I turned and looked into the face of a Roman soldier, an officer, a face I did not remember having seen before. He asked my name, and when I told him, gestured roughly to two men who stood in the shadows. They came forward and seized me, each holding one of my arms, and stood there waiting for a word from their superior. He peered into my face, his eyes close to mine in the darkness of the night. He said not a word, nor did I. I thought perhaps that this was an effort to frighten me into the silence they desired. After a few moments he stepped back and gestured to the soldiers. We moved to the gate, one holding firmly to each arm, and when we got to the narrow gate they released my arms and pushed me roughly forward. I stumbled and fell. They seized me once again and this time shackled my hands. Not a sound was made. The night was infinitely still.

As they led me away I wished that some of my followers had come with me to see this, to know to take care of my mother and keep her from harm. And then I saw Judas,

watching from the shadows. He looked away when our eyes met and disappeared into the darkness. I knew he would tell the others and that they would be fairly warned of the danger they were in. I knew they would care for my mother until I was free to do so, and so as my captors led me off I was less uneasy than I would have been had Judas not witnessed my captivity. As I walked my thoughts turned to my Father. I knew he would not desert me.

They took me directly to a large room after I was apprehended. There were not many people in the room at the beginning, but the officer in charge handled me roughly before turning me over to his subordinates. He asked me questions, and when I tried to answer, cuffed me and spoke of my sedition and rabble rousing. When I protested my innocence of any wrong doing he became more violent and demanded silence. The soldiers observing this snickered and spoke among themselves and they were not reprimanded for this unsoldierly behavior by their officer. Rather he seemed to encourage them by his continued physical and verbal abuse. Finally I kept silent and looked about me for support. There was none.

For a time I stood there, silent and staring, and the soldiers milled about, doing nothing but waiting, occasionally bursting into loud laughter. The officer had disappeared as suddenly as he had earlier appeared in the garden. I did not know what would happen next, but I knew that there was little hope of justice or mercy.

Before long there was a stirring among the group and a sudden silence. I looked toward the doorway and there was a man I had never seen before, accompanied by the officer who had abused me. They strode toward where I stood and spoke together in quiet tones as they regarded me. There was some dispute between them, clearly, but I could not hear enough to know its nature.

Finally, the civilian came closer to me and peered into my face. He asked my identity. I told him. He asked about my teachings. I told him. He asked me to tell him if I had proclaimed myself king of the Jews. I said I had not. He asked me if I professed to be the son of God. I said I did. He asked me by what right I said this blasphemous thing. I said by right of birth. He asked me if I would persist in this claim if I was com-

manded to be silent. I said I would do as my heavenly Father commanded me, that I listened to no man first. He asked me if I knew the power that the Romans had to punish me for my disobedience. I said I did. He asked me if I feared this power. I said I did not. I said that I knew the power of the authorities to regulate the worldly affairs of man and that I had no quarrel with that power. I said that they had no power to regulate the affairs of the soul and that my concern was only with the soul of man. He asked me if I realized that I risked death with continued defiance. I did not answer him. It had not occurred to me seriously that the Roman authorities would go that far. I had done nothing. I was not a threat to them. I failed to understand their alarm with my teachings.

As I stood there silent, he shook his head and walked back to the officer. They spoke briefly and then left the room together. The soldiers left to themselves resumed their good natured rousting among themselves, only occasionally glancing in my direction. As I stood there I prayed to my heavenly Father for guidance and for strength. As I stood there I thought of my mother and wished she were not in

Jerusalem, that she was home safe in Nazareth. I hoped that the Romans did not know of her presence, but I feared that they did.

Finally the officer returned and separated a half dozen soldiers from the larger body and directed them to take me in charge. They led me out of that room down a long hallway and into a smaller chamber. At first it was so much darker that I could not see clearly. Then as my eyes grew accustomed to the dim light I knew what was to come. I had heard of these rooms. Hanging from a spot high on one wall was an iron ring. The wall beneath it was splattered with stains as was the floor beneath. Two of the soldiers seized me by the arms and led me to this spot. They tied the leather shackles more tightly about my wrists and then tied them to the iron ring. They were not rough, but I felt my shoulders snap in pain as I was hoisted off the ground. Then they loosened it so that my feet barely touched the floor and the pain lessened. They moved away.

There was absolute silence in the room except for the sounds of occasional movement. I tried not to think of what was to

come. I tried to understand why this was happening. For the first time I knew almost with certainty what was to come. For the first time I knew despair. I did not fear the physical suffering no matter what it entailed. I feared the end of my ministry, the end of my teaching and preaching, the end of the lessons of love, but as I thought on this I knew I was wrong to despair, that there was in all of this a divine plan and that whatever that plan I was a willing participant. If it pleased my Father for me to die, well then, I would die willingly with love in my heart and on my lips. If it pleased my Father that the world should learn of the greatness of love in this way, well then, I would serve Him well in this way. My heart soared with joy at the realization of my true destiny and I barely felt the first blows. It angered them that I smiled and their violence increased, but at the end I still smiled. They were confounded, and I knew great comfort.

The Crucifixion

Mary

I thought my heart could break no further, but when I reached the spot they had chosen for the crucifixion and saw Yehwah standing there I knew I was wrong. He stood a short distance away from the cross which was lying flat on the ground, his hands lightly shackled, his head bowed, his shoulders slumped in exhaustion. His garments were torn and bloodied and stained. His hair was matted and dusty under the mocking crown they had fashioned, and specks of blood remained where there had once been rivulets. He stood alone, the soldiers at a distance, lounging and joking and occasionally gesturing to the crowd to stay back. There were not that many. I wanted desperately to go to my child, to hold him, to comfort him. I knew I could not, that it would cause him pain to see me roughly handled by the Romans. And then our eyes met and he smiled at me. Smiled. Smiled. I held out my arms beseechingly and he shook his head almost imperceptibly. I dropped my arms, but our eyes held, and

that unbelievable smile kept playing about his lips. His eyes mirrored his pain, but he smiled.

Then one of the soldiers noticing the smile walked to him and struck him full in the face and spat at him.. I could not hear what he said. I held my breath as Yehwah took a step or two backward but did not fall from the force of the blow.. The other soldiers looked on, amused by this casual cruelty. The crowd did not even murmur.

After a while, several minutes at most, one of the soldiers went up to Yehwah and ripped off his outer garments, threw them into the dust and trampled them. He removed the shackles and threw my son to the ground. The other soldiers took him by the shoulders and feet and laid him on the cross. I could not bear to look and I knew I must. They stretched his poor bruised limbs as they would have them. There was no sign of protest or resistance from Yehwah. I began dying inside.

From where I knelt I could see the blows being driven into Yehwah's left hand, that hand I had held to my heart so lovingly so often, and into his feet, roughly arranged one on top of the other above the wedge

driven into the foot of the cross. With each blow my heart shattered. I was beyond anger. I wanted to believe that this was not happening, that this was just a dream. Then the reality of it assailed me anew. This was the end of a different kind of dream.

When they had finished they called upon each other in crudely joking fashion to admire their handiwork, and they reviled my child as he lay there impaled. They spat. They kicked. One took Yehwah's head in his hands, careful to avoid the thorns, and turned it from side to side inviting all to admire the beauty now of this Jew.. He laughed at his cleverness. Yehwah's eyes were closed now, and I hoped that he had stopped feeling.

Then on a signal from the soldier in charge, the others raised the cross, grunting in protest at the weight of it, dropped it into the shallow hole which had been prepared and with their mallets drove a wedge in behind to hold it upright. They were rough, so very rough, and Yehwah's body was shaken with each blow into the wedge. I forced myself to watch, but I had not counted on the hideous wrenching sound as the weight of the sagging body of

my beloved child tore at his hands and arms. His body contorted once in a spasm of agony and then was still.

Their job done, the soldiers gathered their tools and left. One remained standing at a distance. I knelt a moment longer, my eyes riveted on that dear face, searching for a sign of life. Could it have happened this quickly? Then there was an almost imperceptible movement of Yehwah's head and I got up and went to my son. I put my arms around the cross and rested my head against it, my cheek on those poor mangled feet, the blood now trickling and beginning to congeal.

There was no one else in the world now.. My dying son and I. That was the world. That was my world. I moved back to watch his face, serene now, his eyes closed, his head bent to one side. I wanted desperately to believe that he was not suffering. I knew I deceived myself. The first tremor that shook his body shook mine. He opened his eyes, and again he smiled. I smiled back as my tears flowed.

Oh, Yehwah, my heart said, I want to die for you..

Oh, Yehwah, my tongue said, I am so

proud of you..

I know, Yehwah, my tongue said, that you had to do this.

Oh, Yehwah, my heart said, did it have to be this way?

Yehwah's words were surprisingly clear. "You know what they wanted."

"I know, Yehwah." They had wanted to silence him. That was his choice. Silence or death. There had been no choice for my son, no choice at all for the son of God come to speak His word.

After a while Yehwah spoke again. "Speak to me of my father Joseph. I need his strength now."

I was not sure I could speak. My tongue filled my mouth. Sounds roared in my ears. My eyes were unseeing through my tears. I forced myself. I spoke of all the days of beauty and love we had known with Joseph, of all he had taught Yehwah and me of goodness and love, and I watched my dying son's face light with pleasure at the remembrance.

The soldier left to guard had been watching me closely. He drew closer to listen and then, satisfied, moved off again. I watched

him warily.

"Love him, my mother." I could not believe the words at first. "Love them all, my mother."

I nodded mutely at Yehwah. I will try, Yehwah, my heart said. I do not know if I can. I will try.

"Yehwah," I asked after a long silence. "What would you have me do?"

"Remember," he said. "Remember my words. Remember my dream. Remember my destiny." He was spent with the effort, and his head sagged even further.

There was no sun in the sky now.. Black clouds filled the horizon.

I did not know the exact moment of death. The silences had grown longer. The tremors had lessened in intensity. His skin had taken on a waxy transparency. The soldier on guard had dozed off and now awakened with a start. He walked over to where I stood looking on the still face of my son. He went up and jabbed Yehwah with the tip of his spear. There was no response. He grunted in satisfaction and then with a savage thrust drove the spear into the side of my child. I grabbed his sleeve

in protest and cried out, and he swung about and pushed me roughly aside with the spear, wet with the blood of my child. I wanted to provoke him. I wanted to die by the same spear. Then I remembered Yehwah's words and I dropped my arms and dropped to my knees and knelt there and tried to love this man.

The wait seemed endless. I was only vaguely aware of the loving words of comfort, of the gently reassuring touches, of the concern of those who waited with me, those who had shared Yehwah's life and shared the horror of his suffering and death. As I waited with them, I lived and relived the past few days, the inexorable road Yehwah had taken to this final moment. I closed my eyes and I saw his face the last few hours of his mortal life and I heard his words over and over again, "Love them, my mother. Love them all," and I knew he had died as he had lived, in total love of all men, and I knew once again the precious heritage that he had left with me, the absolute obligation to keep alive his dream, his perfect love. I thought to myself, "Now he is with both his fathers. Now he knows the full glory," and as the words passed through my mind I knew too that he

was still with me, with all of us, that he would never leave those with whom he had shared love, that he would never leave those who needed his love.

Finally they came and they gently lowered the cross and began removing the nails. I turned away. I could not watch any longer. I knew the suffering was over, but I could not watch. I heard my name called finally and I turned and walked to where my poor mangled Yehwah lay. I sat and they lifted him and put him in my arms. He was so light. I cradled his head against my shoulder and covered him with my cloak. I stroked that beloved face more serene and beautiful in death than I had imagined possible, and I spoke to him of my love, and I knew that he heard me, that our hearts would always be one. He sleeps, I murmured to myself, my Yehwah sleeps.

As I held my son in my arms, I heard the words again, "Love him, my mother. Love them all, my mother," and I looked up into the face of the Roman soldier who had so mutilated my child as he hung there dead. His eyes were stony. I smiled at him. My face almost broke with the effort, and I know that my heart did once again. I would

not let go of his eyes. They turned from stony to incredulous, and then he turned brusquely and walked away.. My smile turned into a sob and I held my child even more closely.

I surrendered his body reluctantly to those loving hands waiting to prepare him for the tomb, but I knew I surrendered only the body he had used so wisely and well these short years, the body I had borne and loved endlessly and now returned. I kept with me the love that had sustained us all those years and which would sustain me the rest of my earthly life. I kept with me the memory of each precious day of all the years of Yehwah's brief life and these memories would sustain me. I kept with me the sure knowledge of the divinity of my son, the certainty that he would never die, that his words would never die, that his dream would never die. I knew with absolute certainty that Yehwah's lesson of love would always be a beacon of hope in a troubled world and that generations to come would live and die in the light of his love, in the peace of understanding. My son had just begun to live.

He is arisen.

Mary

A little after the death of my son, I began to realize the utter futility of trying to protest what had happened and the utter impossibility of conveying even to those closest to me the peace I had known as I sat there with my dead child in my arms at the foot of the cross on which he had died.

I knew without any question that it was true what they said, that my Yehwah had indeed arisen from the dead and appeared to many, and to many he spoke of the need to keep alive his memory and his teachings and to perpetuate the principles by which he had lived and died. I did not in any way question these appearances. I knew that the tomb was empty when we went to see it. I knew that the rock had been rolled away to reveal the empty crypt, that blessed space where we had reverently and lovingly placed our Yehwah. I knew full well the weight of that stone. I had seen the effort it took to seal the tomb, and yet when we got there that morning it lay at some distance from the opening to the crypt.

My first reaction had been one of alarm. I feared that the Romans had not finished using my Yehwah as an example of what could happen to those who defied the orders of their masters, their oppressors. Then reason prevailed and I knew that the Romans were not likely to do anything of this sort, that they were happy to see an end to the threat they imagined Yehwah posed to them. No, it was clear that there was another explanation, and what more glorious explanation than that my Yehwah had indeed not died, had simply shed his human existence and now was among the glories of heaven, that he used his mortal appearance as a sign, as a reassurance to those who had believed in him that death is not an end but a beginning, that his words to them in life were now his words in life eternal.

I had seen Yehwah since he died. He came to me as I slept and awakened me with the gentleness of his presence. He looked as he had in death but translucent and brilliant with light. He bore the scars of the cruelty of the Romans and these too seemed sources of light. The intensity of his beauty filled the room and filled my heart. We exchanged no words, but there was no

need for words for me to know the intensity of the love we shared at that moment and the joy that I would know each time I recalled this miraculous instant. As I watched, arms outstretched, the vision faded, but the joy, the absolute ecstasy of that love, did not fade. I knew it would never fade, and that it would help me to wait patiently for that glorious day Yehwah would take me to him, in love absolute, in joy everlasting, in eternal union.

Epilogue

Easter Sunday, 1992 8:40AM

As I lay speaking to him this morning after I finished writing of Moses, Martin revealed to me the truth of this day. The Romans stole the body of Christ. They feared him even in death. It was planned from the very beginning. The same little man who questioned Him after His arrest, a policeman high in the court, ordered everything -- the beating, the crucifixion, the stealing of the body. He was afraid of a demonstration of protest against the death of Christ once word spread of His death, and reasoned that without a body there was no proof of death, that the power of Christ would be at an end. In stealing the body, he was the unwitting instrument of God the Father. Christ did indeed appear to many, as He did to me, His mother, and proved beyond a shadow of a doubt the truth of His teachings to all who saw Him and spoke to Him and to all who heard their words. It is truth.

Addendum

Saturday, 10/8/94 10:34AM [Dublin]

[I have been wanting to remember the period after Yehwah's death, particularly about my mother Ann. Last night, in the middle of the night, Martin granted me my wish, and I write now what I remembered then and remember still.]

I felt a great need to return to Yehwah's tomb. I don't know why my need was so insistent, but I went the next day with Mary and Margaret and John, who had stayed close to me since my son's death. I had found some lilies that I wanted to take with me, and I carried them in my arms protectively. We did not speak very much on the way, and I was lost in memories of the last few days when I heard Mary cry out. I don't remember her exact words, but there was terror in her voice. I raised my eyes and could not believe what I saw.. The tomb was unsealed, the stone rolled away. We stood still as John went toward the opening and looked inside. He turned and

said simply, "He is gone."

The lilies fell from my arms, and I covered my face with my hands and bowed in fear. Mary and Margaret dropped to their knees and touched the earth with their foreheads. They moaned. John hurried back and put his arm about me to steady me. I could not stop trembling.. Horrors passed through my head. "What have they done with him? Why?" I feared the wrath of the Romans. I feared that they had not finished with my son. Slowly I calmed. I needed, I told John, to see once again the spot where Yehwah had died. Perhaps we would learn something there.

When we reached the place, we found nothing. The cross was gone. The place where it had stood was filled in and smoothed over. There was no sign of what had happened here. In my mind's eye I saw once again the broken body of my Yehwah as he had hung there, and once again I feared the unknown. I longed to know.. We returned to Margaret's house and John left us to tell Yehwah's other followers the news. Before he left I told him that I wished to return to Nazareth, that I needed to be with my mother. He promised to

make arrangements as best he could.

I heard later that the news spread like wild-fire. "He is gone" became "He is arisen," and soon sorrow was transformed into joy. I smiled to think how pleased Yehwah must be.

When I returned to Nazareth it was with Aquinor and his group. John was insistent at first on accompanying me, but was finally persuaded that he was needed in more important ways. The journey was a sorrowful one for me. I dreaded telling my mother. My only solace was in recalling all the days of my Yehwah's life right to the very end, to his last words, and I spoke of my son to all who asked to know.

I asked Aquinor to leave me at my mother's door and to feel no further concern for me. He hesitated and then agreed upon the condition that I felt free to call upon him should I need anything he could help me with in the future. He held me gently to him and kissed me on the forehead before turning away. I watched him out of sight with a heart full of gratitude.

My mother must have been dozing when I opened the door. She did not turn her head or open her eyes until I touched her on the

arm. Her smile, so brilliant, faded when she saw my face, and tears formed in the corners of her eyes. She started to rise, but I pressed her gently back in to her chair and buried my face in her lap as I knelt at her feet. She brushed my hair with one hand as she grasped my hand in hers with the other. There was no word between us for a long time, but she knew..

Finally I spoke to her of all that had happened to our Yehwah as I toyed with the stew she insisted that I needed to eat. I told her everything, and her face mirrored her devastation, but as I described Yehwah's last hours I was astounded to see the same smile play around her lips as I had seen on Yehwah's features as he approached death, and when I described to her finding the empty tomb she nodded her head, still smiling. "He has done it, " she said. "He has done what he came to do."

6/15/95

When I was in a bookstore today I picked up a thick volume purporting to tell the real story of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, and I turned at random to a page

which described the Roman custom of cutting the crucified lightly with a lance to see if death had yet occurred. If the victim was dead, it was the custom to thrust the lance deeply into the body of the victim to indicate clearly that death had occurred. This is exactly as it is described in these pages. Obviously I was totally unaware until today of such a custom.

Thursday, 12/8/94 5:20AM

What sweet responsiveness I know always from my sweet scribe. At all times you yearn to write my words. At all times you stand ready to do whatever you think will please me. At all times, my beloved, you please me completely. Never for a moment doubt this perfection in yourself.

Now, my Marie, I wish to write of what we will do during this beautiful season of the year. You have long wanted to remember more of that blessed life you led so long ago by earthly standards, and it is my wish that you be gratified in this longing. You need, my love, to take time each day as often as you can to recall those days of love and devotion, and you need to be

aware of my presence in these efforts. Do not expect too much of yourself too quickly. You must be patient and persevering and success will follow. I will help you in all ways, my Marie. Now speak to me of what you want to know.

5:15PM

I see myself standing in the street outside my mother's door. I am loath to enter. It is the first time I will not find her there. I am filled with dread.

As I stand there my mother's neighbor for many years comes out of her doorway and comes to me. She puts her hand comfortingly upon my sleeve and turns her face away to hide her tears. I have no tears left, but I am comforted by hers. I cover her hand with mine and we stand there silently. When she can speak she asks me to go with her into her house and speak with her about my mother. I sense her need and nod in agreement. The tears continue to flow as she settles me into a chair and busies herself getting both of us something to drink. She hands me a cup of strong herb drink, bitter to the tongue, which has been sim-

mering over the fire.

For a while no words passed between us. Finally she began to speak and to recall all the pleasure she had known in my mother over so many years. She spoke of her children and of all the other children who had loved my mother as if they belonged to her. I remembered my mother's pleasure in being surrounded by children, and then with a stab of pain I remembered how she had loved Yehwah and how he had loved her from the very start of his life to the very end. She spoke of my mother's goodness and patience and generosity to all who needed her in any way, and as I heard these words of love and praise it seemed all over again to me that she could not be gone.

When I took my leave and finally entered my mother's house I half expected to find her as I always did lately, sitting patiently in her chair, a smile always when she caught sight of me, for my mother always so energetic and active, had grown frail over the past months and spent most of her days sitting and waiting. I know she did not fear death, but neither was she impatient for it. I think she knew how much I would miss her. Never was she demanding in any way.

She insisted that I continue with my work and come to her only when I was free of responsibility for others.

And so when I entered the door such a few short days ago I was not surprised to find her as I expected, patiently sitting, her hands clasped loosely in her lap, but she did not turn her head when I spoke, and at first I thought she was asleep. Her eyes were closed and her head fell slightly to one side. When I looked closely at her face I saw an expression I had never seen before. It was as if she were lit from within, as though she was seeing something beautiful and new in her experience. It was hard for me to accept the truth. I knew she was gone. I fought the idea. I stood looking at her for a long time, hoping against hope that her eyes would open and that she would be amused by my alarm.

I don't know how long it took me before I went to her and lifted her, light as a feather, and carried her over to her bed. I laid her gently down and arranged her hands and feet. I smoothed back her hair and stroked her cheek. Then I drew the bed covers about her as if to keep her warm, and stood and looked and looked

and looked. I knew I should summon help. I knew I needed to tell those who loved her of her death. I was not capable of either. I needed to be with my mother alone for a while longer. (5:45)

Sunday 12/11/94 3:10PM

When I try to remember I see a procession, a burial procession, moving along a dusty narrow road. I walk beside my mother and she holds my hand firmly in hers. I must be three or four. My mother is completely covered by a robe from her head to her feet. It seems to me I am wearing a short dress or robe, cinched at the waist, full below, that falls halfway down my legs below the knee.

I know that this is the funeral of my father. The name Zachary comes to my mind. My father was older than my mother, very old it seemed to me, and ill most of the time. I remember him best lying in bed, his face waxen, his body shrunken. He would call me to him often and I would climb onto the bed and lie in his arms, listening to the sound of his heart. He said very little, but my mother told me often that he loved me.

My mother has told me that my father has gone to God, back to where he came from, and that we must be glad for him, that we must never forget him, that if we spoke he would hear us.

There were not too many people in the procession, mostly women, no other children. When we reached the burial spot, my mother picked me up and held me to her closely as words were spoken, words I did not understand. At some of them she hugged me even more tightly to her. Finally, the man who spoke stopped and picked up a handful of earth and threw it onto the top of the wooden box where I knew my father lay. Then he handed some earth to my mother and she gave me some of it and we did the same. All the rest of the group did as well.

Then I remember everyone going back to our house. Many had brought sweets and cakes and my mother urged all to eat and drink and thanked them for being there. One by one they left and finally we were alone. My mother said that the tidying could wait, and she took me onto her lap and asked me if I understood that my father would not return to live with us. I said

that I did. Then she said again that only his human body was gone, that his soul lived on, and that he would always look over us from his heavenly home. There was much in what my mother said that I did not understand, but I nodded and snuggled more deeply into her embrace.

After a while she set me on my feet and took my hand in hers. Without saying any word further she walked with my hand in hers back to where my father lay buried. The dirt was now mounded over the grave and we stood for a few minutes without saying a word. Then my mother said that we would come here often, that my father needed our love still and that we needed his.

Tuesday, 12/20/94 10:20AM

As I grew, I grew closer and closer to my mother. She was all to me and I to her. We understood each other sometimes without speaking a word. I told her everything that was in my mind and heart, and she always listened, but I did not tell her when I stopped bleeding. It frightened me. I did not want to frighten my mother, but she

knew something was wrong.

Finally I knew I had to speak and so I did. To my surprise my mother was not frightened at all. A look of absolute joy was her response. She swept me into her arms and held me close. I could feel her heart pounding. I knew mine was pounding too. Finally she held me away from her and looked into my eyes. She said that it was time for her to share a secret with me. My mother said that long before I was born God spoke to her of a special child that would be born to her and that this child would herself have a special child. She told me that this special child was growing inside me now, that the time had come and that I should be grateful and happy that God had given this child to me.

It was not easy for me at that moment. There was so much I did not understand, and my mother, seeing my confusion and some fear mirrored in my eyes, repeated what she had said about being happy and grateful. She said that there was nothing but joy in this child that would be mine as I was hers to love and to teach and to protect. I told her that I was not sure I could do all these things. Who would take care of

us, of me? My mother shushed me and said that I need not worry, that she would always take care of me, but that someone else would too. She said that I didn't need to know any more now, but that it was important that I not be fearful, that I trust her and I trust God.

Despite the fear that lingered stubbornly, I promised her that I would try to trust and to feel the joy and thankfulness that she said I should. My mother promised me that she would speak often of this miracle, and she made me promise that I would never again be afraid to tell her what troubled me.
