



The Shepherd  
A Christmas ~ Easter Story

By

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# The Shepherd

Rafael woke from his nap and got ready to start the night's work. He went into the kitchen to get something to eat and his mother greeted him with hugs and kisses. "Get some food off the fire and start eating. You and your father have a long night ahead of you."

Rafael was eight years old and had just started working with his father on the family business, raising sheep. He finished eating, cleaned up and helped his mother pack food for the night of watching the flock on the hills nearby. He lived four miles outside of Jerusalem where the buildings, homes and farms stopped and gave way to the rolling hills of grass. Rafael's father owned one of the farms and kept the sheep pinned up there some of the time. Most of the time, they were out on the hillside getting fat. They had several men that worked for him watching the sheep day and night, night and day, day in and day out. Most of the sheep were sold one or two at a time to people who wanted to give offerings at the temple.

There was no shortage of customers for the sheep right then with people traveling to their places of birth to register for the Roman census that had been ordered. The Romans ruled the country with harsh cruelty to the local people who just wanted to live in peace. They imposed steep taxes on everything and the census was designed to help them do just that. No one escaped their domination without moving far, far away.

The men and Rafael got together for the one-mile trek to the sheep. They all carried their fair share. Rafael carried a smaller pack, but still it was heavy for him. They would be out all night with the animals and the other shepherds. The work was not strenuous, but it was tedious. At night, the shepherds would only have to walk the perimeter of the flock watching for threats from hungry predators. The dogs were the early warning system for any attack. They helped herd the animals and worked hard to keep them bunched and safe.

They got to the flock and relieved the men working there. The shift change came just as the sun set. They visited with the departing crew for a few minutes before they left. There was nothing to report that day and that was exactly what Rafael's father wanted to hear. The men started a fire and took up positions around the flock to start the long night ahead. Rafael unloaded the food and went with his father on an inspection walk of the entire flock. They looked at each and every one of the animals making sure they were doing well. All the animals were good that evening and that left them with the chore of keeping the watering troughs full from the well that was at the edge of their camp. That was Rafael's main responsibility and he did it well, bucket by bucket. The departing men had let the troughs get low and it irked Rafael that they were so lazy. He said nothing knowing that his father was well aware of what was going on. The men would be talked to the next day, but Rafael knew it would do little good and nothing would change.

The sun quickly ducked below the horizon and the stars came out with all their beauty. Rafael fetched wood for the fire and kept it going for the upcoming chilly night. The men came and went getting snacks and drink from the camp. They lingered by the fire exchanging conversation and catching up from the day's goings on around the town. These men were hired by his father and came and went often. Most were unreliable, tough and rude to Rafael. Even at his young age, he knew good and well these types of men were one of the reasons that shepherds were considered to be one of the lowest of the low in society. One or two of them were nice to Rafael, but mostly they either ignored him or treated him roughly when his father was not around.

The night closed in and the temperature dropped enough for the men to put on their heavier robes for the long work ahead. It was still pleasant out in the cool clear darkness. Rafael kept busy between the fire and the well water work. His father finished his chores and joined Rafael at the camp. He was sitting around the fire and visiting with the men as they came and went. Rafael's father was only one of the flock owners in the territory, but he had the ownership rights to the only well around this

side of the city. The other flock managers had to pay to draw water. They came and went with coins exchanging hands with every visit. Right that minute, Rafael and his father were the only two by the fire.

Rafael was the first to notice the flames on the nearby hill. He told his father to look and the flames turned white and grew taller. They both stood and walked toward them. They were only one hundred feet away when the light from the fire became too bright to look at. The brightness dimmed a bit as the light took the shape of a man. He was wearing white ropes that seemed to flicker just like the fire that quietly engulfed him roared to life all around his body.

Rafael's father clutched at Rafael and pushed the boy behind him for his own safety. They both fell to their knees and covered their eyes again.

The man spoke, "Do not be afraid for behold," With that statement, Rafael and his father uncovered their eyes and stood. "I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been borne for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Rafael understood little of what was said, but his father knew exactly what the man was saying and recognized that this was an angel of the Lord God Almighty. The angel finished speaking and another angel appeared next to him and then another and another. They had the same fiery glow about them as the first angel. In no more than a moment, the hill was crowded with hundreds of them.

With one magnificent voice, they all said, "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased." Rafael and his father watched all this in amazement. The angels repeated this wonderful message over and over, as they began to disappear back into the flaming light. It faded with them until the first lone angel was left there smiling. His aura shimmered and faded with him until all was still again. The other shepherds came running into the camp and talked to each other about the vision.

They compared versions of what they saw and agreed that it was indeed a message related to the prophecy of the coming Messiah they had been taught about their whole lives. Rafael's father directed several of the men to return to tending the sheep who did not seem to even notice the wondrous vision. The men slipped away from the fire and into the surrounding darkness.

As they left, Rafael's father told them he and his son were going to go to Bethlehem and find the child as instructed by the angel. They picked up a few things and left.

The road they had taken to the fields was crowded with other shepherds going toward the tiny town that was the ancestral home of King David. They joined the foot traffic and talked with others about the vision as they walked. Most had seen it, while others were just going along with people that had. The trip was four miles and they were moving as fast as they could considering the crowded road. A few men on horses rode by and parted the people as they did.

Rafael understood most of what had happened, but was now more interested in trying not to be run over by the excited adults. His father held his hand most of the time, but let it free when he was describing the vision to some of the people who had not witnessed it close up as he had. Rafael knew the story of the coming of the king that would free his people from the tyranny and oppression they had experienced for years and years.

The boy and his family had been to this town many times before and knew most of the townspeople by name. They reached the outskirts of the little hamlet that was nothing more than a crossroad at a stream with ten or so buildings lining the streets. The manger the angel spoke of was off of a side street in a large stable where animals were being boarded for the night. It was behind a building that rented rooms to travelers. It was not hard to find with a steady line of people crowding along the street. Rafael and his father fell into the line made up of mostly shepherds and their wives. As they approached the stable itself, they could hear men and women giving praise to the Lord in loud and excited

voices. Rafael reached the side of the stable and saw an opening in the wallboards. He asked his father if he could sneak in that way and his father let him go.

He got down on his hands and knees and crawled through the hole. He came out in a dark pen on dirty straw directly under a large cow. The animal had just relieved itself and Rafael found himself covered in urine. He made a face and crawled out from under it as fast as possible. He stood as fast as he could and found his left foot planted firmly in a pile of steaming dung. He freed himself and shook off his sandal as best as he could.

He looked around and saw that he was standing behind and off to the side of a few adults gathered around a man and woman looking down at a feed trough that held a newborn baby. Men were passing by the child and kneeling and worshiping Him. The parents were somewhat taken aback by all of the attention. Some of the men had told the father about the angels and the message they brought to them.

Rafael approached the group and slid up behind the mother. She noticed him and waved for him to come closer. He did so just as his father reached the baby. The mother asked if he wanted to see the child. Rafael nodded and she picked the baby up and held it for him to see. Rafael didn't know what to say, but his father helped out by telling the mother how beautiful the infant was. The mother asked if Rafael had seen the angels too. He told her that he had and she told him that he was blessed to have received this special message from the Lord God Almighty himself. She asked if Rafael wanted to know a secret and he shook his head "yes". She whispered in his ear that she and her husband had seen angels before too. She described the visits to Rafael in detail. She told him the angel had given the child the name Jesus and Rafael told her that was a fine name. He would never forget her words and repeated the stories often as he grew older. But, what Rafael would remember the most was the face of the child. It was new and fresh as all newborns were, but there was something different about this one. The child's eyes had not opened yet, but Rafael "felt" the specialness the child radiated.

Later in life, he still could not explain the feeling, but it never left his mind when he remembered the night.

Rafael's father knew others were waiting and needed to move on. He let Rafael finish visiting with the mother while the father watched with nothing but a kind smile on his face. They left the stable and started the long walk back to the flocks.

In the following months, Rafael saw the father of Jesus a few times coming and going. The family remained in Bethlehem and the father worked as a carpenter on jobs near Rafael's home often. He saw the mother and child once in a great while and every time he did, the mother went out of her way to speak with him. This went on for two or three years until they moved away. Rafael was almost eleven when the whole city was talking about an astrological event. The population of Rafael's people practiced astrology alongside their strict Jewish practices.

Each of the twelve tribes had their own zodiac sign and stuck together as an extended family of sorts. A mysterious star had appeared in the east and was being talked about by everyone. There was much speculation as to what this new star in the sky meant to the people. The star moved ever so slightly every week until it was directly above Bethlehem. Rafael heard his father say that it was a sign verifying the royalty of the small child Jesus. Others dismissed it as just another meaningless event. Rafael recognized the different attitudes about the possible interpretations and found himself believing what his father did as most children will do.

Caravans of traders and merchants arrived often from the East and would pass right by the fields that Rafael's father owned and close to his home as well. These caravans were usually made up of a few camels and horses with hot sweaty men riding them. They often included pack animals and servants carrying packages of goods for trading. Rafael's father made him study the caravans. They were an integral part of his business.

One day, word of an extremely large one came to Rafael and his

family. They watched and waited for its arrival with the rest of the local people. When it finally passed by, it was more like a parade than a caravan. Persian soldiers led it off followed by many, many camels and horses carrying all the things royalty might bring along such as tents and other camp making items. There was wagon after wagon filled with beautiful rugs and fine cloth. The most impressive part of the stream were several men in colorful robes of the finest silks. They sat on camels covered with the same wondrous fabric. The caravan ended with even more soldiers. These were clearly important visitors from far, far away.

Rafael had never seen such an event as this. There was much speculation that somehow this visit was related to the star in the sky. The talk died away quickly and everything got back to normal.

A few days later, a very strange thing happened. It was the middle of the night and Rafael and his father were tending their flock. They were camped in their usual place by the well, when the soldiers and the foreign men quietly passed on the road headed back the way they came. They were there and gone in a few minutes and that was that.

An edict from the Jewish ruler came the next day. His soldiers entered Bethlehem and murdered the town's boys aged three and under. It rocked the city that such a barbarous act would be ordered by a king that was a Jew himself. The Romans did horrible acts like this every once in a while, but it was unheard of that a Jewish King would do such a thing. This king was known for his cruelty having murdered siblings and his own children to stay in power. Rafael was old enough to know that this was an act of desperation on the part of the King. He asked around, but no one knew what had happened to Jesus and his family.

Rafael grew into a fine man and took over the family business when his father could not do the work anymore. He married and started a family of his own. His sons helped with the sheep just as he had done when he was young. He became a devout man as his mother had taught him, obeying the Jewish ritual laws as best as he could. He tithed to the synagogue and attended services with his family. His parents passed



away as all people do. They were mourned and then celebrated for the fine legacy they had left behind.

Some years later, a movement was started by a strange man who lived in the wild outer lands. He traveled around the territory preaching to anyone that would listen. He was known as John, the Baptizer. Rafael had gone to listen to his message several times. The messages were a fairly depressing warning of the need for men to repent their sins and turn towards the light of the Lord. His sermons regularly included prophesy about a savior coming to save the world. He had been asked if he was the expected messiah of his people. He denied this adamantly saying that he was not fit to lace up the sandals of the exalted one who was coming any time now.

He dangerously included political commentary in his sermons as examples of what not to do. Specifically, he chastised the King for marrying his slain brother's wife. These declarations led to his ultimate execution by the King.

As part of his messianic message, he used baptism as a sacrament with his preaching. He regularly baptized people to let them demonstrate their commitment to turning over a new leaf in life for their sinful ways. He had said that the one who would come after him would not baptize with water, but with the Holy Spirit. Many people thought that John was a reincarnation of the prophet Elijah. Rafael went out to where John would preach by the River Jordon to hear him. Rafael and his whole family were baptized by John.

It was at these meetings that Rafael became friends with several of John's disciples. One of them was Andrew who, following John's direction, became one of Jesus' first disciples. John had preached that his ministry was coming to an end and the time of the one who was "the light of the world" was at hand.

In a small country, it seemed to Rafael that almost everyone could legitimately claim they were related to everyone else. They all were cousins of some kind or related by marriage. The cousin relationships

might be distant, but they made the people family. It was common knowledge that John the Baptizer was Jesus's second cousin. What was not so well known was that two of Jesus's disciples, John and his brother James, were Jesus's first cousins. Adding to this closeness was the fact Andrew and his brother Peter were partners in a fishing business with James and John. So, besides being disciples of Christ, they had all grown up together as well.

When Rafael became friends with Andrew, he was accepted as friends with the other three men as well. Rafael could not ignore his sheep raising business, but he did take every opportunity to listen to John the preacher and be with his friends, the fishermen. They had many long discussions about whom exactly John was referring to when he talked about the messiah's coming. Rafael had described the events around Jesus's birth he had witnessed as a youth to his friends many times.

Jesus lived a good distance away from Rafael in and around the Sea of Galilee. He was often called a Nazarene, having been raised in Nazareth. Rafael had not seen Jesus since he was an infant and was only beginning to hear that he too had been preaching to the people just as John had been doing. Jesus was a carpenter by trade as was his father. He had heard a little bit of what Jesus was saying, but really was too busy to travel to hear him preach.

One day, Rafael slipped away from his workers and went to listen to John with Andrew. John was going on and on about the coming messiah and the need for repenting from the sin in your life when Jesus joined the crowd. Andrew introduced Jesus to Rafael and Rafael told him the story of being in Bethlehem when Jesus was born. They both enjoyed the visit, but the crowd kept shushing them so they could hear John.

All of a sudden, John saw Jesus and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! "This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.' I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water. I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. I did

not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’ I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God.”

Later that day, Jesus joined the people being baptized by John. There was a small disagreement between Jesus and John over the ceremony, but when Jesus insisted, John went ahead and baptized him. Rafael understood most of this with a little help from Peter after it was finished.

Rafael looked for Jesus after the baptism, but He had left. Rafael went back home and told his family all about what he had witnessed. He considered the whole event a miracle of the Lord and he gave praise to Him for letting him be a small part of it.

Sometime later, Rafael was at temple worshiping and Jesus preached. It was common practice during the service for lay people to say a few words. Jesus gave a different message than John’s. He seemed to infer He was the long sought after Messiah. Few understood the true meaning because the general population of Jews thought the Messiah was going to be an earthly king who would throw off the yoke of the oppressive Romans. The kingdom Jesus talked about was not earthly at all. It was a heavenly one that was yet to come. This message did not sit well with the Sanhedrin, the Jewish religious leaders. It was abundantly clear to Rafael the Priests did not welcome another itinerant preacher actually coming directly into their tightly controlled world.

Passover was just a few days away and Jesus was in the city. His popularity had grown significantly because of the miracles He was said to have performed in the surrounding towns. Peter had sent word to Rafael to please come and join him in the city for the day. He needed the help in dealing with the crowds that were following Jesus everywhere. On the first Sabbath day of the Holy Week, there were two Sabbath days that week, Jesus was going to attend morning service at the temple.

Rafael found both Peter and Andrew with Jesus and walked with

them to the temple. Jesus led the group and was the first to enter the courts. The courts often had a few merchants selling small animals for sacrifices and others changing larger denominations of money for smaller ones and paying a percentage to do so. This week, being a holy week, the court was crowded with small booths and tables the money changers and merchants had set up. They had even brought in large cattle and sheep along with the small birds for the worshipers to purchase at over inflated prices.

Jesus looked at the circus of people doing business and became angry. Rafael did not know what to do and stood aside as the teacher walked over to a curtain hanging over a window. He tore down the cords that held the cloth to the side and rolled it around his arm until it was the length He wanted. Jesus usually had a calm demeanor that hid his true physical strength. He was a carpenter by trade and a large man with powerful arms.

He started flailing the rope whip at the merchants, the moneychangers and even the animals. He yelled, "Get these out of here! Stop turning My Father's house into a market!" All Rafael, Peter and Andrew could do was turn the animals loose and help the people up off the ground as they pushed them out of the courtyard. Jesus's tirade continued until the leaders of the temple came out and helped clear the court. When the court was cleared, Jesus threw down the rope whip and said, "Shame on these people who have defiled this holy place. Shame." He repeated these words again and again until it was quiet and the worshipers watching had moved either into the temple or off to the sides of the courts. Jesus and the three men entered the temple and worshiped. It was clear He was still angry, but He summoned up His usual peaceful side for the long service.

The summer came and Rafael had to work with his business often to handle the busy months the nice weather brought with it. There were many visitors to the territory and the city was becoming more populated with the Roman soldiers that were everywhere. They were some of his

best customers and he actually had a hard time keeping his stock up. This year he had to purchase many lambs looking forward to the following year. There was no indication the market for his sheep would get smaller, only increase.

The disciples of Jesus would often stop by Rafael's home to eat and stay while they were in town. He welcomed them and enjoyed the stories of the miraculous things Jesus was doing and more importantly the lives He was changing with his words. One late afternoon, Jesus was teaching outside of the city near where Rafael kept his flocks. He and his entire family went to hear him. Jesus's disciples were there with a decent sized crowd who had managed to slip away from their work.

Jesus went to the top of the hillside, sat down and taught. He talked about a difficult concept that said the people who you would least expect to be blessed were actually the ones who would receive the greatest blessings, the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, the peacemakers and those persecuted for being just *and doing what was good*. It seemed to Rafael it all came down to attitude and standing up for your beliefs. It was a matter of the heart and mind. The rich could give a lot to the church, but if your heart was not humble about it, it meant nothing. He talked about sin and the fact that if your thoughts, that were well known to God, were not pure, that too was a sin.

Rafael and his friends talked about the message and all agreed Jesus was "simply" taking the teachings from the Jewish canons and building on them. He was making them come alive with new ideas that would make the laws a question of the heart and not just hollow rules.

Later that year, Jesus was again preaching and teaching near and around Jerusalem. One day, after He had been busy for many days and the crowds were wearing on Him, He slipped away to try to find a place to pray by himself. He was upset that John the Baptizer had been executed by the King. He had taken a small boat, traveled a short distance and came ashore. But, the people had watched, word had spread and He was surrounded again.

The people were needy. They needed to hear His words and simply to be in His presence. He realized the difficulty they had overcome to find Him and had compassion on them. He walked among them and healed the ill as He preached. This went on for hours.

Rafael was with His usual companions that day and watched as they suggested to Jesus to end the meeting and let the people leave to go buy dinner. Much to His disciple's surprise, He challenged them to feed the people themselves. They did not understand since there were over five thousand men and their families. They checked around and found they only had five loaves of bread and two fish. This small amount could never feed the fifteen thousand people surrounding Jesus.

It was obvious that Jesus was pushing His disciples to think bigger than they had been. He told them to bring the food to him. Rafael had been the one to gather the few pieces of bread and fish. He had put them in a basket and brought them to Jesus when He asked. He set the basket before Jesus, Jesus looked at the food and prayed over it. He told Rafael and the others to take the basket and pass it around. As Rafael began the task, he saw the basket never emptied, no matter how much food was taken out. The men divided up the food into several more baskets and the same thing happened. The people ate their fill while Jesus taught and healed.

Rafael and the other men gathered up the baskets when everyone had had all they wanted and there was enough left over to fill twelve baskets. The people were very appreciative for the food. A few months later, Rafael learned that some of the people started hanging around Jesus, just because they thought they were going to get a free meal. He thought this was very sad considering Jesus's messages. Jesus the caterer... some people can't see the forest for the trees.

Rafael was home when Andrew stopped by. They visited and ate. Andrew told Rafael the story of Jesus healing the blind man and his subsequent talk with the Pharisees. Jesus simply told the truth about himself and said the just as the blind man could now see, He was the

Light of the World so the world could now *see* as well.

Andrew finished the story explaining Jesus had declared to his disciples they were now the “Light of the World” as well through spreading the message of new life by believing in Jesus as the Christ.

The next year, Rafael celebrated Passover with his friends. There was trouble in the air. The synagogue priests were very, very agitated with this new movement led by this unschooled preacher and his followers. They would have dismissed Him away if not for the healings He was performing everywhere He went. They had tried to lay hands on Him several times, but Jesus had slipped away. They considered Him a threat to their positions of authority and were worried His followers would upset the tenuous relationship they had with the Romans.

Rafael continued to support Jesus and his disciples with money and food every chance he got. He was worried this whole thing was coming to a head. As the Passover approached, Jesus was determined to celebrate in the city not heeding the warnings of his close friends. He sent some of them into the city to prepare for his arrival. He seemed to know He was walking a sword’s edge, but was determined to share His message no matter what the consequences.

On the day Jesus entered the city, the crowd of His followers celebrated His arrival by greeting Him. They honored Him by laying palm branches on the street as He rode a young donkey in a little parade. They welcomed him as the Messiah, their new earthly king. Of course, this spontaneous celebration caught the attention of both the Pharisees and the Romans.

Jesus had a private Passover feast with His closest followers. After the meal, they traveled outside the city to a small garden to pray in private. Rafael was home with his family celebrating the holy time. One of his workers interrupted saying Jesus had been “arrested” by the Romans after the Jewish Priests had pushed them into it. Rafael dashed away into the city to try to help his friends. He went to the temple and found them hanging around the crowd that had gathered to watch the

“trial” that was being held. It was late when Rafael arrived and he was distressed to find they were actually physically assaulting Jesus. This was as serious as it got.

Rafael could not get into the proceeding and had to remain outside. He saw Peter hanging around by a fire. He said “Hi” with a somber wave and tried to listen to the goings on inside. He heard the Priests questioning people trying to trump up some charges against Jesus. The night wore on and on until they closed the doors and sent the people away. Peter had disappeared and Rafael went home by himself. He got a little sleep, but he was upset and that made sleep elusive.

The next morning, he went back into the city and discovered they had taken Jesus before Pilate, the Roman Governor. Jesus was standing before Pilate with the Priests accusing him of subversion, a very serious crime. Pilate questioned Jesus, but Jesus only gave one or two short answers. Pilate was ready to release Jesus having found him guilty of nothing. During the proceedings, Pilate discovered Jesus was actually under the jurisdiction of Herod because of where he lived.

Rafael learned later that Herod, who had executed John, only wanted to see Jesus do one of the miracles that he had been performing. He just wanted to be entertained. Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate. Pilate tried again to free Jesus, but the crowd kept demanding He be put to death. Rafael recognized many of the people and knew they were the common rabble from around the city. They had been paid by the Priests to be there.

Pilate finally gave in and ordered the execution. While the Roman soldiers were preparing, they beat Jesus and made horrible fun of him. Midafternoon, Rafael saw Jesus was being led by the soldiers to the usual place they crucified criminals. He, himself was afraid of reprisal and stayed well away from the gruesome parade.

The soldiers had brought two men with Jesus to be killed as well. They were nailed to crosses hung for the people to watch. The nailing of the hands and feet to the cross was the worst form of crucifixion. Often men were just tied to the cross and left to starve to death. Both methods



resulted in a horrible and painful death. Usually, the men would actually die of suffocation because they could not hold themselves up enough to catch their breath. Exhaustion would set in, they would sag and not be able to breath. Sometimes the cross had pegs between the legs of the prisoners that served only to prolong the suffering. Rafael had seen many of these crucifixions. The Romans would line the roads into the city with crosses as a message to the populace they dominated. Rafael could not think of a more horrible death.

Rafael tried to comfort Jesus's friends and family that watched the event. Late in the afternoon, some of Jesus's friends implored the Romans to end the suffering of Jesus because a Sabbath day started around sundown and after that, they could not deal with the body. Rafael was weeping silently, when the sky changed to night. When Jesus sagged and gave up His final breath, there was an earthquake of tremendous force that actually opened the graves in the cemetery. Even the Roman soldiers had to admit something miraculous was happening because of the death of this man Jesus.

Shortly thereafter, the Roman soldiers overseeing the executions came to the body to break His legs with a club. Without the use of the legs, a man could not hold himself up at all and that hurried the process along. They saw that Jesus was already dead and did not need to break the legs. As was common practice, they stabbed a spear in Jesus's side to make the final definitive test. Seeing Jesus was indeed deceased, they took the body off the cross and let the family take it away to be buried.

The next time Rafael and his family went to synagogue, they saw the thick curtain that hung behind the Priest torn from top to bottom. He asked some of his friends about it and they told him it had happened exactly when Jesus had died. No one could give an earthly explanation for it being ripped or for the appearances of the dead saints who had been "haunting" the local people.

Rafael was very worried Jesus's ministry would die with Him. All the disciples were now in hiding. Rafael took a wee bit of solace in the fact that often a martyr would actually spur ideas along rather than kill

them. His sadness was deep and the “wee bit of solace” was far over shadowed by his grief.

Rafael finally found his friends and took comfort they were not being hunted. They were busy with arranging finishing Jesus’s burial. One of the Pharisees who had believed in the teachings of Jesus had donated his burial site for Jesus’s body. The second Sabbath had ended and the women were free to finish properly preparing Jesus’s body. Rafael had helped pay for the expensive spices that were required and gone home to his family to mourn.

The severe earthquake that occurred when Jesus died, had spawned many heavy aftershocks. It seemed to Rafael both heaven and earth were just as upset as he was. He knew without a doubt these things were signs from the Lord that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.

Rafael was in the fields with his flocks when Andrew and Peter came and found him. They told him to gather the necessary things and come with them. They exclaimed Jesus had raised himself from the dead and had been seen by many people. The witnesses had told them a message from Jesus to hurry to Galilee to meet Him. Rafael dropped what he was doing and left with them immediately.

They traveled for hours to the specific place they had been told to go. Rafael learned that Judas, one of the disciples had betrayed Jesus unto His death. He could not believe it. He could not fathom that anyone who had been so close to Jesus all these years of His ministry. Later he learned Judas had killed himself over the betrayal. Rafael knew Judas suffered the same misconception many people had of *believing* in the Christ, but not having *faith* in Him.

The men met up with the rest of the remaining disciples and hunkered down in a rented meeting room to wait. It did not take long before Jesus appeared to them. Even with the appearance of Christ right in front of them, some were unconvinced. Jesus was very patient with them and finally they came around to the truth of the resurrection. Jesus had a simple message for the men, “All authority has been given to Me in

heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Jesus preached this message over and over to anyone that would listen. He taught a new part of His story that He had to die and be reborn to pass on the gift of eternal life through Him. He further added that anyone who put their faith in Him and His teachings would not die a spiritual death but have everlasting life in heaven with the Father and Himself.

Of course, the disciples were thrilled He had returned. But, Jesus was now also telling them He had to leave again so the new blessing of the Holy Spirit could begin *His* work. This was a difficult concept for them to understand. It would not be until sometime later they would finally comprehend.

Rafael spent as much time as he could with his friends and Jesus in particular of course. Over a period of forty days, Jesus appeared to over five thousand men and women. One morning, after preaching to a small group of devoted followers including Rafael, he said thank you to everyone, blessed them and led them to a small mountain outside Jerusalem that was covered with a grove of olive trees. He reminded them of the coming blessing of the Holy Spirit that would give them the strength and power to be strong witnesses to all the people for the glory of the Lord.

Rafael watched as Jesus changed his appearance to exactly that of the angel he had seen as a small boy. With that change, Jesus rose into the air and disappeared.

The disciples carried on His ministry performing the same miracles Christ had done as a witness to the truth they preached.

Rafael remained friends with all the men and women who were close to Jesus supporting them any way he could. He provided a place for Jesus’s mother to live at the request of John who was called the Beloved Disciple. He counted himself truly blessed by the Lord to have seen the



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things he had and never stopped telling the story of his witness. At the end of his life, his dying prayer was that although others could not see what he had seen, they would *see* the story of Jesus Christ in their hearts and come to know His gift of eternal life through their repentance from sin and belief in Him.

The End

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