



Touched by the Savior

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As we journey with Jesus through this Holy Week, I offer this reflection, using some of the many people whose lives were touched or changed by the presence of the Savior. We hear from Joseph who was definitely unprepared for what Mary would reveal to him; we see a man named Simon of Cyrene who did not want to be involved; we stand with a Roman soldier who is unsure why he suddenly begins to care. I hope that these stories will in some way touch your hearts, showing you the difference that Jesus continues to make in our lives today.

Joseph of Nazareth

Nazareth was a quiet little town. I was born and raised there and loved the simplicity of my life. I remember as a small child helping my father Jacob in his carpenter shop, longing to learn the trade that gave my father such happiness. As a child, I loved spending time with my friends, running through the fields surrounding Nazareth. From my father, I learned to never take anything for granted, for all of life was a gift from the Almighty. From my father, I learned to love the sacred history of my people and our relationship with our God. From my father, I learned the lesson that, unknown to me then, would be the guiding principle in my life: to put my trust in the Almighty and in His plan for me and my life. My father always taught me the importance of being a just and righteous man, devoted to my faith and to my family. This is something that I always tried to be.

As a young man, apprenticed to my father and his trade, I was deeply in love with a young woman in our village named Mary. Her parents Joachim and Anne were very good friends with my mother and father. Our families would often spend time together, sharing stories of our heritage and praying together for guidance and direction. Mary and I not only shared a deep love for each other, but also a deep love for our faith and for the Almighty.

Mary and I were betrothed and planning to be married at a later date. It was in the early evening when Mary came to see me, saying that she needed to talk. She seemed nervous, unlike herself. We walked to a nearby garden and sat down. She told me of a messenger who had come to her, saying that she had been chosen. I must have looked very puzzled, because she said, "I know this is going to be difficult, Joseph. Just listen to me." She continued telling me that she would bear a son . . . he would be called Jesus . . . he would be the son of the Most High. I just sat there in shock . . . I honestly didn't know what to think or what to do. I don't even remember what I said to Mary at that moment except that I needed time to think.

That night, as I sat alone in my room, I knew what I had to do. I would divorce Mary quietly and let her go away from the village. It wasn't that I didn't believe Mary. I loved her so very much . . . I didn't understand . . . I didn't know what to do. I had a restless night. Suddenly, in a dream I

was told to believe all that Mary had told me. “Do not be afraid,” the angel had said. I woke up, knowing that my life would never be the same. I took Mary as my wife.

Together we made the long journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem where, in a small cave on a hillside outside of the town, our child was born. As I held my son, this tiny child, I knew that I was looking into the face of God. We talked about that journey and that night many times over the years, always bringing a smile.

The years went by far too quickly. When we were back in Nazareth, Jesus loved to spend time with me in my shop, much the same way that I had spent time with my father Jacob. I tried to teach him all that I had learned from my father. I prayed that I would always model for him what it meant to be a just and righteous man . . . a man who had learned to trust in the Almighty. As a young man, Jesus was learning my trade, skills that seemed to come very easy for him.

We were working in the shop one afternoon when suddenly my head began to ache so badly that I fell to the floor. Jesus called for Mary, and together they helped me to the house. Day after day I lay there, Mary and Jesus never leaving my side. We talked and laughed, sharing stories of our time together. I was telling Jesus the story about our trip to Bethlehem. I had told it to him countless times, but he never seemed to get tired of hearing it. As I was talking, I suddenly saw the angel that had appeared to me in Nazareth and in Bethlehem. He said, “It is time, Joseph. Your work is done here!” I looked into the face of Mary, my forever love; I looked into the face of Jesus, and I knew that I was looking into the face of God. All I could say was, “I love you!”

Mary of Nazareth

Growing up in a small town, my life was very simple and very ordinary. I was engaged to a wonderful man named Joseph, about to begin a new stage in my life, when the world I knew was turned upside down. “You are chosen,” the messenger said. “You are to be the mother of the Son of God.” With those words, my life was no longer simple and no longer ordinary. It was so very difficult trying to explain this to Joseph. It was difficult for me to fully comprehend what was happening; think of how difficult this was for Joseph. Eventually, with the help of God, he understood and knew what would be expected of him. It was outside that small town of Bethlehem, in a small hillside cave, that I first cradled that tiny child in my arms. I looked into his eyes, and I knew that I was looking into the face of God.

With a mother’s pride, I watched him grow. He grew into such an amazing young man. Joseph and I spent countless hours, as parents do, talking over what we should be teaching Jesus, what would be best to prepare him for the mission we knew he would one day begin. Jesus loved spending time with Joseph in the shop, and Joseph was never happier than when he was teaching Jesus about his trade or about life. When Joseph became ill, Jesus and I never left his side. The three of us talked endlessly about our lives together. Joseph told him stories about the trip to Bethlehem. “You would have been so proud of your mother, Jesus. It was such a long trip for us to take, especially in her condition. I tried resting as much as possible, but . . .” Joseph stopped there, and smiling, said how much he loved us. He closed his eyes, and I knew that he was gone. Losing Joseph was so difficult, but having Jesus by my side eased the pain. I loved having him with me; but I knew, deep within my heart, that he had other work to do . . . work that would take him away from our simple life in Nazareth.

It was soon time for Jesus to go. I knew, as he had told Joseph and I so long ago in the temple, that he had to be about his Father’s business. But it was so hard for me to say goodbye to him, my only son.

The years passed quickly. So many people would stop by and talk to me about Jesus, telling stories of what they had seen or heard or asking me to share stories from his childhood. Jesus was so good about keeping in touch with me, and there were many times when I would go with friends to see him. I was definitely a very proud mother. Some dear friends invited me to spend Passover with them in Jerusalem. When I accepted the invitation, I remember feeling uneasy, as if something was just not right. It was early morning when one of his young followers named John came to the house and told us that Jesus had been arrested. I didn't know what to think . . . I actually couldn't think. I was so wishing that Joseph were there with me. My son, what are they doing to you? That terrible day, I found myself on a hillside outside the city, watching my son, my child, die such a painful death. There, on a dark and stormy afternoon, I once again cradled my child in my arms. His body, bruised and pierced, torn and broken . . . I looked into his eyes, and I knew that I was looking into the face of God.

The story was not over . . . my life would never be the same and neither would the world. It was just beginning. We had seen the face of God.

Woman Caught in Adultery

I will never forget that morning in Jerusalem. The men had broken into the house and found me. They yelled "Adulterer! Woman of sin!" and pulled me into the street. As they pushed me through the crowd, I could feel the hatred around me . . . the words, the looks. When we finally stopped, they forced me against a wall and made me stand before the people. I looked at the angry crowd gathering around me, and suddenly my whole life flashed before me . . . the hurt, the pain, the emptiness, the loneliness. The crowd continued to yell, and I saw men picking up stones. I could no longer look . . . I could no longer stand. I fell to the ground, huddled against the wall, waiting for what I knew was soon to happen. Suddenly, all was quiet, but I could not look. I felt a hand gently touching my face and wiping away the tears. I opened my eyes, and I looked into the face of Jesus. And then he spoke to me: "Woman, where are they? Has no one judged you guilty?" I wanted to look around, but I couldn't look away from him. His eyes seemed to look into my soul. I simply said, "No one, sir." He took my hand and brought me to my feet. "I also don't judge you guilty. You may go now, but don't sin anymore." I opened my eyes, and I saw Jesus. I opened my heart, and I was never the same!

Simon of Cyrene

My name is Simon. I had traveled to Jerusalem from Cyrene with my two sons Alexander and Rufus to celebrate Passover. This was the boys' first trip to Jerusalem, and they were so very excited to be with their father . . . they had never experienced so many people and so much activity. As we were heading back to the small inn where we were staying, Rufus stopped and grabbed my arm. "Look, father. Can we go see what is happening there?" I saw large crowds of people lining the street, some crying and some yelling to the Roman soldiers who seemed to be pushing the crowds back. "No." I said. "We need to keep moving, son. We don't want to get involved in whatever is happening there." Alexander sided with his younger brother and begged me to just take a quick look. I finally gave in, and we walked toward the gathering crowd. My sons pulled me to the front; and before I knew it, I saw what all the crying and yelling was about. A man, beaten and bloody, had fallen beneath a large cross beam that was tied to his shoulders. I tried to shield my boys' eyes from this horrible scene, but they were intent on looking. Suddenly one of the Roman soldiers grabbed me and pulled me aside. "You, come here and help him," and he pushed me down beside the man. I looked over and saw the look of horror in my sons' eyes.

At that moment, I regretted letting them talk me into coming here. What was I doing here? I don't want to be involved in all this. I want no part of this. I then looked into the eyes of the man. I saw such pain and agony, but I also saw love. It was a look that I will never forget. I suddenly knew what I had to do. I helped him struggle to his feet, and together we carried the heavy burden. I didn't know that I had such strength; but strangely with him by my side, I felt that I could do anything. Together we plodded up a barren hill outside the city. When we reached the top of the hill, the soldiers pushed him to the ground and shoved me out of the way. My sons ran to me, and the three of us stood there together, holding onto each other. I hadn't wanted to be involved, but now I couldn't leave . . . I needed to be there with him. I had walked with Jesus, and that made all the difference in my life and in the lives of my sons.

John, the Apostle

My name is John. My older brother James and I were fishermen, working with our father Zebedee at the Sea of Galilee. We both knew that there had to be something more to life than fishing . . . we were always searching for truth and for meaning. Jesus passed by one day while we were helping our father in the boat. When he called us to follow him, we didn't hesitate . . . we immediately left everything behind to become his disciples.

The three years I spent with Jesus were truly the best years of my life. I was the youngest of the disciples, so there were times when the others definitely didn't appreciate me. I never felt that way with Jesus . . . he always made me feel welcome and accepted . . . I loved him as a brother. Both my brother James and I had pretty quick tempers. In fact, Jesus referred to us as the "Sons of Thunder!" which made the other disciples laugh.

With James and Peter, I experienced special moments with our Master. We watched as he raised a young girl to life; we accompanied him to a mountain top where he was transfigured before us, speaking with Moses and Elijah; we were asked to keep watch and pray in the Garden on that terrible night when he was betrayed.

That night and the day that followed are forever burned into my soul. I have never felt such emptiness and loneliness as I did during those long hours. I looked for the other disciples but could find no one. I knew that his mother was in town for the Passover, so I set out to find her. I will never forget standing on that hillside beneath the cross of my Master , , , my brother Jesus. I stood there with Mary and the other women, in disbelief at what was happening. I looked into his eyes . . . even in the pain and agony he was experiencing, I could still see love. He spoke to us, "Woman, behold your son" and "behold your mother." I put my arms around her and tried to cover her face with my cloak, attempting to protect her from the pain that was all around us.

When they finally took his lifeless body from the cross, she reached out her arms to receive her son, cradling and rocking him as she did so many years before in a small cave outside of Bethlehem. I looked at the face of my Master, and I knew that I was looking at the face of God. As they bore Jesus away, I put my arm around her and gently said, "Come, mother. I'll take you to him." Even in the darkness of that night, I knew that it was not over. It was not finished.

Roman Soldier

I have been assigned to many crucifixions since I first came here to Jerusalem, but something is very different about this one. Something is very different about this man, something I just can't describe. I have been a Roman soldier for quite some time. I initially served in Rome, but my

wild lifestyle got me into trouble. I was sent here, to Jerusalem. Any Roman soldier will tell you that being sent here is the worst punishment you can get. This is the place where the lowest of the low of soldiers is sent. So, here I am.

As I said, something is very different about this man. People jeered at him and mocked him. I heard him say, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!" Even I, a hardened soldier pledged to Rome, felt something like compassion for this man. I saw a woman who some say was his mother with some other women standing beneath the cross. Some of my friends had tried to push them away, but I stepped up and said to leave them alone. I'm not sure what made me do that . . . it's definitely not like me to care. There was also a young man with them who I think must have been one of his followers. Back at the praetorium, we had called him king and placed a crown of large thorns on his head. Now, in this place, it seems as though he wears the crown in kingly dignity. Suddenly the mob is hushed and silent. I'm told he is dead. I watch as my friend Longinus pierces his side for proof beyond all doubt that he has died.

Why do I feel this way? I've watched many men die before . . . what is so different about this one? The earth is trembling now . . . what is happening? It's growing dark, and I am strangely alone on this hillside. It's beginning to rain. I look over and see Longinus falling to his knees. He says, "Surely, this Jesus was the Son of God!" looking up at this man. I look at his face, and suddenly I know that I am looking into the face of God. This was no ordinary man!