

**BOY OF
NAZARETH**

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BOY OF NAZARETH

BY MARIAN KEITH

Illustration -
Line drawing of woman in ancient
clothing carrying child. Assumed to
be representing Mary and Baby
Jesus.

ILLUSTRATED BY ARTHUR HARPER

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Boy of Nazareth is a revised edition of
Glad Days in Galilee (Abingdon, 1935).

Illustration -
Line drawing of coins or discs with
leather links holding them in a circle.

To the memory of D. C. M. and the happy days
we spent together in Galilee

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Illustration -
Man in ancient dress, drawing water
from well to fill water ewer.

BOY OF NAZARETH

Illustration - *In the village square*
Laughing schoolboys and shopping
women in village.



1. Holiday

THE SUNNY SQUARE in the center of the village rang with laughter and shouting. It was a great day for the schoolboys of Nazareth. Early that morning Rabbi Ezra, the village schoolmaster, had mounted his donkey and gone up over the hills to the wedding of his brother's son at Nain. And so all the boys who attended the synagogue school were having a holiday.

It was unusual to see such a crowd of the larger boys and girls playing in the streets in the morning. For there were no idle boys and girls in Nazareth.

When he was seven years of age every boy in the village started to morning school, and in the afternoon he was busy at home, where his father taught him his trade. Girls were kept at home both morning and afternoon, under their mothers' eyes. They helped carry jars of water from the village well and took their places at the little stone mills where the grain for the coarse bread was ground. They learned to spin and weave too, and to make pottage and cheese and barley cakes.

But today, work and lessons were forgotten. The hot dust of the square was trampled by many feet. Even the girls of ten and eleven were helping their brothers celebrate. There were Saul and Jacob, the shepherd's tall sons, with their good-natured, chubby sisters, Miriam and Adah. There was quiet, grave young Asa, grandson of old Asa who owned one of the richest vineyards on the hills above the town. With Asa was his little sister, Adina, with her long black curls. There were Joseph and John, the potter's sons, their long nimble fingers already showing something of their father's training, and their tall sister, Leah.

Because the schoolmaster had gone to a wedding, the boys and girls must have one too. Saul, the shepherd's oldest lad, being the biggest, had given himself the part of the chief character—the governor of the feast. This was a

part even more important than that of the bridegroom. Saul was sitting in state under the one olive tree of the square, shouting orders to his many servants. Young Asa, the bridegroom, came striding out from behind the well curb, gaily draped in his mother's head veil. He was followed by a procession of his friends, shouting and hammering on anything that would serve to make a great noise. From an arched gateway in the stone wall at the opposite side of the square Adina, leading a procession of girls, came dancing out to welcome the bridegroom.

"Behold, the bridegroom cometh! Go ye out to meet him!" shouted Saul, fairly swelling with importance.

The procession of girls, with their jingling bracelets and gay head coverings, had danced halfway across the square to meet the bridegroom when a sudden halt was called. Someone remembered that at a wedding there must be a bride, and they had entirely forgotten her! Who was going to be the bride?

At once the square was filled with noisy chatter. Leah, the potter's daughter, pushed boldly forward.

"You shall be the bride, Adina, and I will lead the maidens. I can dance better than you anyway."

"But *I* want to lead the maidens," wailed round-faced Miriam, the shepherd's daughter. "Leah, you and Adina always take the best parts."

Young Asa, who was a peaceable lad, tried to settle the dispute by ordering his sister to be the bride, but the bridal procession had become a shrill, scolding mob, and nobody heard him. The other boys added their voices to the uproar. A flock of doves, that had lighted on a tower near by, rose with a startled whirr, the sunlight flashing from their wings. Saul, finding that even the commands of the governor were unheeded, picked up a stone. But he did not throw it. Away up the narrow street there sounded a ringing call. The children turned to look, and all shouted a glad answer.

A boy was coming swiftly down the street—a handsome lad, dressed like all the other village boys in a striped blue smock and scarlet girdle. His head was covered with red-gold curls. His eyes were a shining blue. Laughing and leaping, he ran into the midst of the noisy, quarrelsome little group.

He was welcomed with shouts of delight. "Jesus, Jesus!" they all cried. "Come and play!"

"Come and make them play the game right!" cried Leah.

"How did you get away from the shop, Jesus?" cried young Asa, flinging

himself joyously upon his friend.

“Asa said you had work to do,” said Saul, dropping his stone.

“The usurer . . . from Capernaum . . . he came!” Jesus was almost breathless after his swift run. “My father wanted to talk to him, and he told me to run and play! Come! The wedding! The wedding! Is everybody ready?”

He clapped his hands, and the actors ran to their places. He gave swift orders. Adina must still lead the maidens. Miriam must be the bride, for Miriam was short and Joseph was her father, and a father must be bigger than a daughter. Leah would be the bride’s mother, because Leah was tall and could act so well. Oh, how fine they all looked! It would be the grandest wedding!

“But you, Jesus,” cried young Asa, when everyone had been given a part, “you have kept nothing for yourself.” Asa glanced jealously at the governor of the feast. “You are as tall as Saul, even if he is a year older.”

Jesus only laughed. A part for himself? He was not in the least concerned about that. When all were ready, he fell in at the end of the bridegroom’s procession, the humblest place of all. Taking a reed whistle from his girdle, he piped a gay little tune that set all the feet dancing across the square.

Mothers looked out from the low arched doorways of their homes and smiled at the gay scene. Deborah, the wife of the shepherd, was spinning under the shade of the grapevines at her door. She had been listening with an anxious frown to the loud wrangling voices of her children, but her face cleared as the sounds changed to laughter and singing. She stopped her wheel to listen. Then she saw the gay procession as the door of the courtyard swung aside to admit her pretty young sister-in-law, Zara. She had just been to the well in the center of the square and was carrying a tall jar of water on her head.

“Is Mary’s lad out there playing, Zara?” Deborah asked.

“Jesus? Yes, he just came,” Zara answered as she emptied her jar into the huge household vessel. The gurgling water and her tinkling bracelets made a dainty musical accompaniment. “The children were all quarreling when I went to the well,” she added, slipping the jar to her shoulder again. “But the carpenter’s lad came running down the hill, and now they are all as peaceful as a flock of doves.”

“It is strange,” Deborah said, turning to her wheel again. “When Jesus plays with them, they never quarrel. His mother is like that, too. Have you noticed, Zara, that when Mary comes to the well in the evening the unkind gossip dies away?”

But Zara had swung open the courtyard gate again and was off for another jar of water. Deborah sent her wheel spinning and joined in the joyous wedding hymn the children were singing.

They marched round and round the dusty square, clapping their hands in time to the singing, and the lilt of the whistle. When the procession was finished they all sat on the ground under the shade of the olive tree. This was the wedding feast, and the governor sat at the head with much pomp and ceremony. Prickly pears from the cactus hedge that surrounded the square were served, and Jesus was the waiter. He ran about, serving the governor with mock humility, making everyone laugh at his antics.

When the wedding was over, the children played funeral. A pet dove belonging to Reuben, the shepherd's youngest child, had been killed by a hawk that morning, and the little boy was still mourning his loss. They would give the pet a grand funeral, Jesus declared, and that would be some comfort to Reuben. Four boys bore the dove on a board high on their shoulders. The others followed in line, wailing and crying. Jesus came last, playing a melancholy dirge on his whistle. They crossed the sunny square solemnly and marched up the street toward the hills, where all bodies were laid away in caves in the rocks.

As the procession wound slowly up the street it passed a courtyard where a gate in the high stone wall stood open. Jesus, marching at the rear, paused to look in. This was his home, the little white house of Joseph the carpenter. Along one side of a paved courtyard ran two low, flat-roofed buildings. The one near the gate was the carpenter shop, the other was the dwelling house. There were grapevines growing up the courtyard wall, and before the door of the home grew a wide-branched mulberry tree. Two men were coming out of the low arched doorway of the shop. One was Simeon, the moneylender, dressed in rich, flowing robes and jeweled turban. The other was Joseph, the carpenter, wearing plain garments and leather apron.

Jesus stood by the gate a moment, then he ran after the procession. "Asa," he whispered to his friend, "I must go. The usurer is leaving and my father will need me."

"But the usurer is not yet gone, Jesus," Asa coaxed. "Come up to the hills with us. It is no fun without you. After the burial we will play robbers in our cave."

But already Jesus had turned and started back toward his home. He ran across the courtyard toward the door of the shop. Through the open doorway of the home he caught sight of his mother and waved his hand. She was seated

on the stone floor, turning the small mill that ground the meal for their bread. At the other side of the mill sat his little sister, Ruth. There were four younger brothers in the family. Three of them were in the procession going up the hill, but baby Simon was rolling around on the doorstep. He gave a squeal of delight at the sight of his big brother and held out his arms.

Jesus' mother, glancing up from beneath the soft blue veil that shaded her face, watched him lovingly until he disappeared in the gloom of the shop door.

Jesus seated himself on the stone floor among the sweet-smelling shavings and seized the leg of the table on which he had been working. He could see across the hot courtyard to where his father and Simeon were standing. The camel knelt; the richly robed usurer seated himself. The camel rose, uttering groans and protests in camel language, strode softly across the courtyard, and went swaying down the street.

Joseph came slowly back to the shop. He was a tall man with a kind, strong face. Although still quite young, constant work at his carpenter's bench had given a slight stoop to his broad shoulders.

Coming in from the glare of the white-walled courtyard, he did not at first notice Jesus, and his face was sad. Then he caught sight of the boy.

"Why, son," he cried. "I did not know you had come back from play."

"I came just this moment," Jesus answered. "Oh, Father, we had a wonderful time! We had a wedding, and Asa was the bridegroom and Saul was the governor of the feast. And then we had a funeral for little Reuben's pet dove, and Reuben was the chief mourner."

The man's anxious face brightened. "And what part did Jesus take, pray?" he asked, smiling.

"I? I don't remember. Oh, yes, I was the chief musician." He looked across at Joseph, his eyes dancing with laughter.

Joseph smiled. "Indeed, I have no doubt it was good music," he said. He seated himself upon the floor opposite the boy and took into his skilled brown hands a part of the camel saddle he was shaping.

The shop was low and dim, but it was cool and pleasant in contrast with the white glare of the courtyard. The arched doorway let in enough light and gave a view of the courtyard and of the great hills that rose beyond on every side, all golden in the sunshine.

Joseph's plane worked steadily and swiftly. Jesus noticed the anxious look on the man's face, and his gay chatter ceased. His fingers moved deftly over

the piece of wood as he whittled and smoothed it into shape. But his questioning eyes wandered often from his work to the grave face of the man opposite. Joseph was in trouble, and Jesus' loving heart was touched. This Simeon of Capernaum had been visiting them at regular periods ever since Jesus could remember, and his coming always seemed to cast a shadow over their little home.

Little Ruth came running across the courtyard with their midday meal, a light lunch which Joseph always ate in the shop. Her blue head veil floated behind, her anklets shone in the sun. She carried a pile of flat cakes, hot from the oven, with a dish of dried olives. She was a beautiful child, with dark eyes and regular features like her father's.

"I could not go out to play, Jesus," she pouted, as she gave him his cakes. "And Adina was there, and Leah!"

"It was too bad, sister," Jesus said, comfortingly, "I could not stay long either. But I will take you to Miriam's the next time I go, if Mother can spare you."

Ruth smiled at her brother. She gathered up the brass tray and water jar and ran back to the house.



2. Shadows

THE BRIEF MEAL was soon over, and Joseph and Jesus went to work again. The long, hot afternoon moved slowly, filled with ceaseless toil. When the great heat of summer came down upon the scorched valley, everyone in Nazareth took a noonday rest. But it was still late springtime, and those who had a large family to support and little to do it with kept hard at work from sunrise till sunset.

Jesus finished his table leg and started on another. He was tired and his legs were cramped, but he chatted cheerfully as he worked.

At last the shadows of the hills began to stretch across the valley. His mother's little grinding mill had been working again for an hour, but now its song stopped. Jesus, glancing out, saw his mother and sister go through the gate with water jars on their shoulders. He could see James, the oldest of the small brothers, taking care of baby Simon. Across the gateway of the courtyard other women and girls passed with their flowing veils and gleaming jars. The scraping and patter of sandaled feet sounded on the flagstones. Voices rose and died away.

Joseph's plane moved more slowly. He glanced down at the boy, stooping wearily over his work.

"You are growing tall, son," Joseph said, looking at the slim, brown legs stretched out on the stone floor.

Jesus looked up with a smile. "I should be tall!" he cried. "Do you remember that I will be eleven the next season of rains? In my twelfth year!"

"Indeed, well I remember. And a cold night it was on Bethlehem's hills nearly eleven years ago." Joseph was silent for a little, thinking of that time. "Yes," he continued, "you will enter your twelfth year. I had hoped to take you to the Passover in Jerusalem. But now—I know not."

The boy looked up, startled. “Shall we not be able to go to the Passover, Father?”

“We must do our best,” Joseph said, “for the law requires it. But I cannot see just yet how I can leave my work.”

“Is it because of the usurer?” Jesus asked.

Joseph nodded. “You are too young to understand—” he hesitated—“but I was in great need one time. Your mother was ill, and I borrowed money from Simeon. It has never been quite paid, and it grows with the years like the mustard on the hillside.” He sighed heavily.

Illustration - *In the carpenter shop*
Jesus and Joseph working together in the carpentry shop.

There was silence for a time. Jesus looked at Joseph in puzzled silence. His father and mother were always teaching their children that they must trust in Jehovah, that he was their heavenly Father and that those who trusted him would never come to want. Yet grownups seemed always full of fears and worries!

“But our Father will not let the usurer harm us, will he?” Jesus asked. “If he wants us to go to the Passover, he will see that we go.”

“Yes, child,” Joseph said, “we shall surely go if it be Jehovah’s holy will.” But the shadow did not clear from his face, and he drove his plane with more vigor, as if to wear down the mountain of debt that was standing in his way.

The mother and sister returned, the heavy water jars on their heads, the younger children with them. A cool breath came down over the hills, very grateful after the heat of the long day. The shadows of old Asa’s palm trees, which grew in the next courtyard, stretched across to the door of the shop. Joseph rose and laid aside his plane.

“Come, son,” he said. “The shadows lengthen, and your mother will be calling.”

Jesus sprang up with relief. Though he was strong and had never known a day’s illness in all his ten and a half years, the long hours of stooping over close work were hard on young, active muscles. He ran about, putting the tools into their places. “It surely is time to stop,” he cried gaily. “See, King Solomon is putting on his crown!”

Jesus had named each of the fourteen lofty hills that surrounded the Nazareth valley. He had given them the names of his favorite heroes: Gideon, Samson, Joshua, and others. The mighty western mountain, the highest of all, he had named for his ancestor, King David. King Solomon was the hill that guarded the eastern entrance to the valley. Always, when the sun sank into the Mediterranean, the top of King Solomon glowed like a golden crown. In the morning, when the sun arose above the rim of the desert away beyond the River Jordan, it was King David who wore a diadem.

Joseph generally responded to Jesus' gay chatter, but today he was too greatly worried. Simeon of Capernaum had been putting a heavier burden upon him each year, and this time it had become almost unbearable. Joseph had plenty of friends and relatives who would be willing to help a little, but many of them were even poorer than he was. Indeed he did not know which way to look for earthly help, and his little home was in grave danger. He shook the shavings from his robe and laid aside his leather apron slowly and thoughtfully.

Like every other house in Nazareth, the carpenter's was festooned with sparrows' nests, stuck along the edge of the flat roof. As Jesus carried in a bundle of staves that were lying beside the door, he noticed a baby sparrow on the ground. There was the nest from which the tiny thing had fallen, right above the lintel of the door. The parent birds circled about with cries of distress. Tenderly Jesus picked up the birdling, talking soothingly to the alarmed parent birds.

When Joseph came out of the shop, thinking sadly over his debt, he found Jesus scrambling up the stone wall to put the fledgling back into its nest. He slid down, his face glowing. "I was afraid Asa's dogs might get it," he explained. He helped place the heavy bar across the door. "Our Father cares for the sparrows, doesn't he?" he asked.

"Yes, child," Joseph replied absently. "He cares."

"But he cares more about us, doesn't he?"

"Yes, no doubt he does," Joseph answered.

"Oh, he must care ever and ever so much more about us," persisted Jesus. "He must think I'm worth dozens and dozens of sparrows. And you—" he looked up at the man, his eyes shining—"I am sure he must think you are worth hundreds and hundreds of sparrows."

Joseph looked down at the bright face, and the burden seemed to lift from his heart. His bent shoulders straightened. Surely he could not show less faith

than this child's! He looked up at the shining top of the mountain. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills," he murmured, and with his hand on Jesus' shoulder, he turned toward the house.

Mary came to the door to welcome them. Her eyes were like her eldest son's, blue and shining and very kind. She pushed back the curls from his warm forehead.

"You have been a great worker today, beloved," she said.

"And you too, Mother. I played awhile, but I saw you working hard all day. Are you tired?"

"Not with work," she whispered. "But . . . the usurer! I liked not his coming again."

"But he can do us no harm," the boy said. "Our Father knows about him." He caught up his baby brother from the floor, and danced about with him till the little fellow screamed with delight. Then he ran to help Ruth pour water from the water jars into the stone basin in the corner for the washing of hands. James, Judas, and little Joseph ran after him, clamoring for attention.

Father Joseph washed his hands first and seated himself on the ground under the wide branches of the mulberry tree. Mary's hand touched his shoulder lovingly. "Simeon was here again," she whispered.

"Yes," Joseph answered. "He was here again. But he has promised to wait until after the olives are harvested."

Mary looked at her husband in relief and surprise. She knew too well what misfortunes followed debt. Joseph did not seem as worried as she had feared.

"The Lord will provide a way of escape," he said. "We must trust him and not be afraid."

Mary's anxious face cleared. Her eyes brightened. "Come, daughter," she called happily to Ruth. "Come, and we will serve the food."

The boys seated themselves in a circle with their father. When all were ready, Joseph turned toward the east, facing Jerusalem and the holy Temple. He raised his hands and the children followed his example. Their voices rose in prayer.

The supper was simple—a pot of lentils and meat, hot and savory. It was placed in the center of the circle and each was given a flat cake to dip into it. The mother and daughter served, as was the custom, eating their portion afterward. Through the doorway a breath of cool air blew softly from the

darkening hills.

Suddenly the father spoke sternly. Little Joseph had come to his meal with unclean hands. He was bidden to leave at once and wash them.

When he was seated again, Jesus whispered to Joseph. “Was it very bad for little Joseph to eat with his hands unwashed?” he asked.

“It was indeed,” Father Joseph said. “Every Jew is forbidden to eat with unwashed hands, as you know. So says the Law.”

The boy sat for a moment and thought deeply. Joseph knew from experience that another question was coming.

“I can understand that it is good to have the hands clean so that our food will not be soiled,” said Jesus at last. “But it wasn’t as if Joseph had been unkind or dishonest, was it?”

Little Joseph was sitting in disgrace, his small hands clean once more, his big brown eyes filled with tears. Father Joseph put a comforting hand upon the child’s head. “No, no,” he said, “Jesus is right. It is not well to forget to make the hands clean before eating, but it is not a sin like lying or unjust anger.”

Jesus and little Joseph each drew a sigh of relief. They finished their meal and the big brother, taking little Joseph between his knees, played a funny game with the tiny brown fingers.

Night was coming down swiftly—a cool, pleasant night. The mother and daughter sat in the doorway. Behind them glowed a brazier of coals like a warm, watching eye. Slowly a great golden moon came up over the Galilean hills, and the courtyard turned white.

This was storytelling time. It was also the hour when Joseph taught his family about their religion. He had a copy of the Scriptures and from it he daily brought forth a lesson for the children. Indeed many texts were engraved on the stone doorposts, and the children were taught to read them even before they went to the rabbi’s school. Tonight there was a psalm to be recited, and it happened to be one to bring comfort to those in anxiety.

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills. . . . My help cometh from the Lord who made heaven and earth.”

“And what shall the story be?” the father asked.

“Tell us about the ravens feeding Elijah,” begged Jesus.

Sitting out under the white moonlight, with the leaves of the mulberry tree making a lacy pattern over the ground and the sounds of the village growing

softer and fainter, the father told his children the lovely old story of God's care for his servant.

“And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning and bread and flesh in the evening.”

It was bedtime, and sleepy heads were nodding. Mary called softly from the doorway, and the little boys went to her. Jesus lifted the sleeping baby from the father's arms and carried him into the house. In the warmer days of summer the family slept in the open air upon the flat roof. But as yet the nights were cool and they slept indoors. The boys lay in a row on the raised part of the floor and were covered with their cloaks.

While the younger children were being put to bed, there was another member of the family, a very important one, to be fed and cared for. This was Timna, the little goat that helped provide milk and cheese and butter for the family, and besides was a great pet. Timna was brought in from the yard at night and bedded in a far corner of the house. Jesus loved the little goat, and Timna did not like to have anyone else tend her. He led her in with much petting and many endearing names, and she was soon asleep on her bundle of grass in her corner.

When everything was ready for the night, Joseph went out and stood in the middle of the moon-flooded courtyard, looking up at the silvered tops of the hills. He repeated the psalm of the evening, anchoring his sorely tried faith to it: “My help cometh from the Lord.”

If the olive harvest were plentiful, he and his family would escape the clutches of Simeon the usurer. If not—he dared not think of what might happen. But surely the Lord Jehovah would spare them. “ ‘He will not suffer thy foot to be moved,’ ” Joseph said aloud.

A warm hand was slipped into his. Jesus pressed close to him and softly added the next line of the psalm: “ ‘Behold, he that keepeth Joseph shall neither slumber nor sleep.’ ”

The man looked down in surprise. “It is ‘He that keepeth Israel,’ son,” he corrected.

“Yes, I know,” said the boy. “But is it not the same? Our Father means you, of course, doesn't he?”

With a sudden lift of faith Joseph again felt his burden grow light.

“Yes,” he replied, “surely Jehovah means me.”



3. Sunrise on the Mountain

IT WAS Sabbath afternoon. Mary was sitting against the wall of her home in the shade of the mulberry tree. It was only on the Sabbath that she had any rest from labor, for life in the household of the carpenter of Nazareth was a busy one.

The family had been to the synagogue that morning, as was the custom, and after their simple meal and the noonday rest Joseph had gone with old Asa and Nathan, the shepherd, for a stroll up the hills to the olive orchards. This was a year in which the olives were to bear, and the owners were anxious to see if the trees were in blossom.

Jesus was sitting on the doorstone, one arm reached inside to swing the cradle of baby Simon. The younger children were clustered about him, for he had just finished telling them the old tale of Samuel and how the Lord called him in the tabernacle. Jesus fixed his eyes upon the bold sweeping curves of the hill that he had named King David.

“Mother,” he said suddenly, “may I go up to the spur on King David tomorrow morning and see the sunrise? I could be back before Rabbi Ezra starts his lessons.”

Mary looked at him anxiously as he sat there, his eyes shining. He was good and obedient, but he was so fond of adventure! He was always climbing into dangerous places, always longing to be up and away over the hills, and every day his questions were getting harder to answer.

“Are Asa and Nathan’s lads going?” she asked.

“Oh, no, I have not told even Asa about it. I—I want to go alone this time, Mother, please.”

Mary looked at the bright, pleading face in dismay. “Alone! But there are

dangers there, son. Asa's father saw a panther behind the spur. And remember the madman on Mount Solomon. Joel and his shepherd lads heard him not long ago."

"Oh, but Mother, that was only poor Aziel from Japhia. Asa's uncle told us. Aziel is just frightened. Don't you think it was cruel of the people of Japhia to bind him with chains? No wonder he ran away so far. But Mother, I know no harm can come to me up there. My Father will take care of me. . . . I want to be alone with my Father just for a little while. . . . I think—" Jesus' voice sank to a whisper—"I think perhaps if I am up there alone when the sun comes up out of the desert my Father will speak to me. Perhaps he will call me the way he called Samuel."

Mary's hand caressed the sunny head. "I do not like your going alone to the hills, my son. You are so venturesome."

She looked at him with much love and concern. What lay ahead of him? Only that morning, as she walked to the synagogue with Rachel, the wife of old Asa, and other neighbor women, a chance word had set her wondering still more about Jesus. He and little James had been walking ahead with Joseph, and Mary had noticed happily that Jesus often looked back to see if she and Ruth and the little ones were coming. Old Rachel had noticed too, and smiled.

"The lad Jesus is wise far beyond his years, Mary," she said. "Who knows but the Lord may call him to be a prophet in Israel?"

Now, as Mary looked at the lad sitting there in the doorway and remembered the strange wonders that had attended his birth, she felt there was no place too high for him.

Now Jesus was saying with his usual persistence, "My Father must have a great deal of work for me to do some day. I think he would tell me about it if I could get away alone with him."

Mary understood. She had often felt that longing for solitude herself. She could see that in the crowded little home there was little chance for those great dreams that were stirring her child's heart.

"We shall ask your father," she said.

Illustration - *In the doorway*
Mary and young Jesus sitting in doorway. Jesus is rocking baby cradle.

Joseph was in no hurry to give his consent. “I will think about it,” he said.

At the end of the Sabbath day, while he and Mary sat on the roof in the grateful coolness and the children played below, they talked it over.

“I think we must let the boy have his way,” Joseph said at last. “I feel he can come to no harm. We will tell him that he must not go beyond the spur of Mount David.”

Jesus was to start on his journey very early, so he slept that night up on the roof lest he miss the first hint of dawn. It was cold up there, but he was warm under his rough cloak of camel’s hair. Beside him was his breakfast of bread and dates in a leather bag, and his sandals, and a stout staff. Just as the first sign of light came above the eastern hills he sprang up.

He laughed in happy excitement as he hurriedly tied on his sandals and tightened his girdle. He slung the leather bag across his shoulders, fastening the strap in front, and caught up his strong staff. He wanted to shout and spring down the stone steps. But he must not disturb the sleeping family below. He stepped softly over the rustling pine cones with which the roof was strewn, and stole down the stone steps of the outdoor stairs that led to the dark courtyard below. From the crack beneath the door shone a dim light—the small night light that every house kept burning. Jesus was stealing like a shadow past the door when it opened and a soft voice whispered his name.

He turned swiftly, “Oh, Mother,” he whispered, “did I waken you?”

“No, son, I was watching for you.” She smoothed his rumpled curls and straightened his girdle.

“Are your sandals tied tightly? And did you put the bread and dates in your bag?”

“Yes, Mother, I have everything,” he cried, all eagerness to be away.

“Go, then,” she said, smiling and sighing at the same time, “but oh, be careful on the heights, beloved. You are so daring, Jesus! The Lord keep your feet, my son.”

“Oh, he will, Mother,” he assured her blithely. “I will be as safe as if I were in the shop. My Father will be with me all the time.” He flung his arms around her neck and gave her a boyish hug.

Mary followed him to the gate with repeated warnings. “And don’t lose the little bag. You will need your breakfast. There is a spring just below the spur. And do be careful, child, for the rocks are slippery!”

She stood watching him as he ran up the dark street and out of sight. She wished he were not going alone, for well she knew that the rocks were steep and dangerous and that in the joy of the climb he would forget to be careful.

Jesus hurried with swift, noiseless steps through the narrow, silent streets. He was soon beyond the village and following the path that led up to the hills. This was the road along which Nathan, the shepherd, and his brother Joel had taken their flocks up to the pastures in the hills. Nathan had allowed his own sons and some of their friends to go with him and Joel, and Jesus and young Asa had followed the sheep far up to the green valleys. Later he and James and young Asa had gone up there in the wind and rain of the springtime to see the sowers casting the grain. So he knew the path well, even in the half-light of dawn. The young green blades of the growing grain were high about his feet. Jesus was careful not to step off the path, lest he crush them.

And now it was getting lighter; the stars had grown dim, and down in the village behind him a rooster crowed. Around him shadowy oleanders and other flowering shrubs began to take form. He could smell the mustard and the heavy sweet scent of the spikenard. Long dim rows of grapevines told him that he was passing through the vineyards. On every side there arose a murmur of birds. A thrush gave a little piping note and from the open field a lark arose, winging its way up and up into the heavens to meet the dawn.

Soon Jesus left the open fields and plunged into the darkness of the olive orchards. The trees were still in blossom and the petals fell about him like snow. As he ran up the shadowy aisles the lovely lines from the Song of Solomon came into his mind and he burst into song: “ ‘Lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come!’ ”

He checked his singing, for he discovered that he was disturbing the doves that nested in the branches. As he moved along silently there was a soft cooing and murmuring above.

Up and up he went. The heavy dew on the grass felt cool and pleasant to his feet. The light grew clearer and he could see the flowers. The open valleys were clothed with blue phlox, and the fields were dotted with clumps of wild rose. He could smell their perfume even when he could not see them.

He sped across the valley and began to climb the heights. Now he was among rocks, with thorns and shrubs growing in the crevices. He remembered that there were jackals up here in the dens and his eyes shone at the thought.

Up and up he scrambled. There was no singing now; he needed all his breath for climbing. Up here all was golden light. Nazareth, away down there,

lay in purple shadows, its tiny houses huddled close together. Away to the east the heavens were clear as crystal. He must make haste!

On he went, from height to height. A little stream trickled down through a deep crack in the rocks. This was his guide. He had only to follow it and it would lead him up to the spur of rock that jutted out like a great platform from the face of Mount David. Low bushes of wild figs grew here, but Jesus did not stop to see if there were any early fruit. He was grateful for the cool wind, for his forehead was damp with perspiration. A mountain grouse, disturbed by him, went whirring and scolding away.

He shifted the bag on his back and tightened his girdle. One more scramble to a higher ledge and he had pulled himself up by some bushes to the wide flat rock called the spur.

Jesus drew a great breath of delight and stepped to the edge, holding onto the shrubs. The whole world, it seemed, was spread out at his feet. Far to the south and west he could see the rolling blue plain of Esdraelon, with the great purple mountains guarding it: Gilboa, Tabor, Carmel. To the north the mighty Hermon lifted its shining crown of snow. Away to the east, beyond the Jordan, the heavens were all aglow. But the sun had not yet appeared. He was in time after all! Yonder to the south, far over the hills of Samaria, lay Jerusalem, the city of his dream.

Standing straight and tall, Jesus held out his hands toward the Holy City and chanted: “ ‘Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion, the city of our God.’ ”

Then his hands dropped and he stood breathless, for the sun, in a glory of gold and crimson, was marching up over the mountains of Moab and all the hills of Galilee and Samaria were kindling to its coming. Peak after peak caught the flame and glowed, rose and orange and crimson, till all the world seemed afire.

Tears came to Jesus' eyes. This great, beautiful world that lay at his feet was his Father's house and therefore his, and all men's. The Father wanted all men to live happily together. Someone must tell them! A strange feeling of power surged through his heart. He would tell them some day. He would work hard and learn, and some day, when he grew older, he would go out to tell all the people of the world about the Father's love.

“Speak to me, my Father!” he whispered.

He waited, breathless, for an answer.

A rustle in the bushes made him turn. There behind him stood a wild, half-

clad man staring at him with flaming eyes. It was Aziel, the madman. Once more he had escaped from his captors. All night he had been running and scrambling over the rocks, his wild shrieks terrifying the watching shepherds on the hillsides.

Jesus was astonished, but not in the least afraid. He had never yet known fear; and fear of a fellow human being, especially, was something he had never imagined. He looked straight into the maniac's blazing eyes with a gentle wonder.

The boy's courage saved him. His fearless, steady eyes held the madman's. As Aziel crouched back against the wall of rock, Jesus saw that his feet were bleeding and his eyes were full of misery.

"Oh, poor Aziel, is it you?" he said gently.

At the words of pity the fierce light died out of the madman's eyes. No one had spoken kindly to him for months. He stared in wonder.

"Who are you?" he asked hoarsely.

"My name is Jesus. I am the son of Joseph the carpenter, and I live with my mother and father in Nazareth. Look, you can see my home away down there under the palms."

Illustration - *On the mountaintop*
Aziel, the madman, and Jesus on top
of windy mountain.

But the man crouched farther into the shadow of the rock and began muttering to himself.

"Home," he whispered, "I have no home. I am driven as a wild boar before the hunter. I am stoned and hunted and starved. . . ." He was working himself up again into a fury. But at the mention of his hunger Jesus reached swiftly for the leather bag on his back. The climb up the mountain had sharpened his healthy boy's appetite, but he had no thought except that here was a poor sufferer who was hungry. He opened his bag and handed the whole pile of sweet barley cakes and dates to him.

"See!" he cried. "Here is food! It is good. . . . My mother baked the bread."

Jesus was astonished at the fierceness with which the man snatched the bread and crammed the food into his mouth. He ate like a famished animal.

Then Jesus slipped down from the rock to the spring beneath and filled his

little leather bottle with cold running water. He scrambled back to give Aziel a drink. But when he returned, the madman, his dimmed brain filled with some strange new fear of the one who had done him the kindness, was leaping along the rocky path that led to the woods. Jesus ran after him, calling, "Aziel, Aziel! wait! Come back and I will give you a drink and wash your poor sore feet!"

The man did not heed, but only ran the faster.

Jesus stood looking after him in deep pity until the flying figure disappeared into an oak grove.

Jesus did not climb back to the spur. The pageant of the dawn was over; the glory of the morning had turned into full daylight. The joy had departed from his heart too. Hungry and tired, he trudged along the stony path down the mountain. Why was poor Aziel mad? Why did not his family take him home and feed him? Was not the fact that he was mad a reason why he should be even more tenderly cared for?

The olive blossoms rained upon Jesus again as he ran down the white aisles. He noticed that the shadow of Mount Solomon had reached their edge. His mother had said she would look for him before the sun passed the olives on the hill slope. He hurried. A gully led down into a green valley at his right. He could hear the tinkle of bells and the bark of dogs. A long, running line of inky-black goats rushed up the slope. They leaped from rock to rock and seemed to bury themselves among the bushes. He could hear the sounds of the village now, and see groups of women with their water jars going to the well. His mother would be there, and Ruth with her small jar.

Down the last stony path, through fields and vineyards, and at last through the dusty streets he hurried, and into the courtyard.

The younger children ran to welcome him. Even Timna, tethered in her corner of the yard, stamped joyfully. Sister Ruth was sitting on the floor opposite her mother. Together they were turning the little stone mill to grind the meal for the day's bread.

"Ah, you are back, beloved!" Mary cried happily.

Jesus sat down on the stone doorstep in the shade. Baby Simon scrambled upon his knees and the other little boys sat close to him.

"Tell us what you saw, brother," Ruth cried.

"Did you climb all the way to the great spur?" asked James in wonder.

Jesus told them about the journey and the marvel of the sunrise. Then he faltered and his eyes grew sad.

“It was so beautiful, Mother,” he cried. “My Father was speaking out of the glory of the sunrise. And then the poor madman came, and the glory faded.”

“The madman!” Mary cried in terror.

“Yes. You know—Aziel. He ran away again. He was there. Just when I thought my Father would speak to me, I turned and saw Aziel. Oh, Mother, his eyes were so sad and his feet were bleeding! He was hungry, Mother, and I—” he hesitated and looked at her, a plea for forgiveness in his eyes, for well he knew there was little food in the house—“I gave him my breakfast. Aziel was so hungry that he snatched the food the way Nathan’s dogs do. When I went to fill my water bottle at the spring for him, he ran away.”

The grinding of the mill had stopped while Mary listened. Fear clutched her heart. Jesus had been in danger then, in danger of his life!

“Oh, brother!” cried Ruth, shivering. “Aziel, the madman! He is possessed of a devil—Zara’s mother says so. He might have killed you.”

Jesus smiled sadly and shook his head. “No, sister, he would not harm me. Poor Aziel! He was hungry and in misery and needed someone to care for him.” Tears were in his eyes. “Mother,” he faltered, “if you had been there, you would have washed his wounds and put ointment on them.”

“You did well, son,” Mary said, drawing a great breath of relief. “Though at first I was alarmed at the thought that the madman might have hurt you. . . . But you are hungry, child. Come, Ruth, we will leave the grinding and get your brother some bread.”

When Jesus had eaten and had told the little brothers once again the story of his morning’s adventure, it was almost time for him and James to leave for school. But Jesus first ran out to the doorway of the shop for a word with Joseph.

The carpenter was seated on the ground in the dim, shady interior, making a plow handle.

“Ah, you have returned!” he cried. “Come and tell me about it.”

He looked curiously at the lad’s sober face. Joseph knew that it was always someone else’s trouble that brought a sad look to Jesus’ eyes.

“And did the Lord speak in the sunrise on Mount David?” he asked gently.

The bent head shook slowly, and the story came out. Just when the dawn was breaking, just when the whole earth and heaven were bathed in glory and he knew that the Father was about to speak, he had turned and seen the poor

ragged, bleeding madman!

The story of the mad wanderer who had snatched his breakfast as if he had been a wolf and then run away from him brought the tears again. “Poor Aziel! I am sure he would be quiet and good if someone were only kind to him, Father.”

Joseph was silent, thanking Jehovah from a troubled heart for his boy’s escape.

“I was so busy running after Aziel,” Jesus continued, “that I forgot about the sunrise, and when I came back to look, the sun had risen. I had promised Mother I would start down when the sun touched the olive groves, and so the Lord did not speak to me.”

There was silence in the little shop, except for the soft swish of the plane. Joseph did not answer at once. He was searching for wisdom.

“My son,” he said at last, putting down the plow handle upon which he had been working, “the Lord, Jehovah, has many ways of speaking to man. He called Samuel with his voice, but you remember he spoke to Moses out of a burning bush, and Gideon heard his message in the dew on the fleece. Who knows but that he was speaking to you through poor mad Aziel? It may be that he is calling you to minister to such as he; to help those who suffer and are in need.”

Jesus had risen. He looked at Joseph with shining eyes. “That was what he meant!” he cried. “I *know*! Something called me to run and care for Aziel. That was his word!” he whispered in awe.

“I think so, son,” Joseph said solemnly, turning to his work again, “do thou wait upon the Lord. ‘Wait patiently upon him, and he will bring it to pass.’ . . . Go now! It is schooltime. The rabbi will be waiting.”



4. School

JESUS ran all the way to the synagogue. This was by far the finest building in the village. It was here that the villagers met to worship on Sabbath. It also was used as a law court, where people went to have their disputes settled. And it was the village school, for in one of the smaller rooms at the back of the synagogue the boys of Nazareth were taught by Rabbi Ezra.

Next to the synagogue stood a fine white stone house, where Rabbi Matthias lived. He was the ruler of the synagogue and the most important man in the village. Rabbi Ezra, the schoolmaster, was next in importance to Rabbi Matthias. He lived in a house not quite so fine as Rabbi Matthias' house, on the other side of the synagogue. He too was held in high honor by everyone in Nazareth. His duties kept him in or near the synagogue. He was the one who announced all the meetings. Whenever there was to be a special gathering of the villagers, or when the Sabbath approached, Rabbi Ezra climbed the stone stairway that led to the wide flat roof of the synagogue and blew three great blasts from a trumpet. And everyone had to come at his call.

Rabbi Ezra was a strict schoolmaster. His favorite quotation from the Proverbs was "A rod for a fool's back." He seldom needed to raise the rod over his pupils, however; they were too much afraid of him to need it. He hated stupidity, and took an interest only in his clever boys. He should, then, have found Jesus a pupil after his own heart, for the carpenter's son was bright and intelligent far above the average. But Rabbi Ezra found Jesus a very troublesome pupil. Far more so, indeed, than Saul, the shepherd's eldest son, who could never even get the Hebrew ABC's into his head.

Jesus was always asking questions, many of which the rabbi could not answer. He had never had such a pupil, he declared, in all the twenty years he had taught the Nazareth school. Jesus questioned everything. His questions were eager and perfectly sincere; but they often annoyed the old schoolmaster

almost beyond endurance.

School went on as usual this morning. The older boys who had learned to read were seated in a circle by themselves. The younger lads, little James among them, were memorizing some passages from the Law. Jesus was with the older class, but he had finished his work and was thinking about Aziel and listening to the droning voices of the boys.

Rabbi Ezra turned to find the carpenter's son looking at him with troubled, anxious eyes. The old man's trip to his nephew's wedding had put him in a good humor.

Illustration - *At school*

Boys sitting on floor at school. Jesus asks the Rabbi a question.

“What is it, Jesus?” he asked. “You would ask a question, as usual?”

“Oh, yes, Rabbi, if you please,” said Jesus eagerly. “‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ That is what the boys are repeating. Is that Jehovah's command?”

“They are the words of the sacred Law, my son.”

“But did our Father really say them?”

The rabbi's bushy brows came together. The carpenter's son had a strange habit of referring to Jehovah, the Lord, as his Father; a habit of which Rabbi Ezra strongly disapproved.

The boy felt the rebuke and hastily corrected himself. “I—I mean, Rabbi, did the Lord Jehovah say it?”

“It is from the sayings of the fathers,” declared the schoolmaster, “and is therefore sacred. Those great and wise men who have taught our nation in the past could not err.”

The questioner was plainly not satisfied. “But, Rabbi,” he ventured, “is it right to seek to be revenged?”

“It is so written. ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,’” answered the rabbi firmly.

“Yes, but, Rabbi—” Jesus was so anxious that he forgot to be cautious—“would not Jehovah, the Lord, want us to forgive?”

Both classes had stopped work and were listening, wondering hopefully if

it were possible that the rabbi could be proven in the wrong.

The old man scowled. "It stands written. No more can be said," he declared in a loud voice. "To your task, O talkative one!"

Jesus picked up his roll hastily and bent his head over it. The little boys took up their droning task once more. But though the boy's tongue was silenced, his mind was unconvinced. He had a deep, sure feeling about the goodness of his Father in heaven that no rabbi could disturb. He would ask Father Joseph about it when he got home. Joseph never grew impatient over questions, nor shouted, "To thy task, O talkative one!"

"And what did the rabbi teach you today, son?" Joseph asked that afternoon as his saw flashed back and forth through a piece of sweet-smelling ash.

"He taught us the words of the Law," Jesus burst forth eagerly. "'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,' and 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy.'" The boy sat erect and looked straight into the man's eyes as though challenging him to say that this was wrong. "Rabbi Ezra said it was among the commands of the fathers," he continued in a dismayed voice, "and that we must obey."

Joseph stopped his saw. Here was a much more important piece of work than an ox yoke. Like Rabbi Ezra, he had always accepted unquestioningly any part of the Scriptures he could not understand. But under Jesus' keen questions Joseph had been forced to examine and change many of his old beliefs.

"Yes," Joseph said at last. "It is in the sayings of the fathers. But Moses did not give it. It was added afterward."

Jesus' face brightened. "Then my Father did not intend us to follow it?" he cried joyfully.

Joseph looked up a little startled, as he always was when the boy spoke the sacred name with such familiar ease. But, unlike Rabbi Ezra, he showed no annoyance.

"I think," he said at last, "there must be some good in this saying, or the fathers would not have set it down for our guidance. It is meant for justice between man and man. Jehovah, the Lord, requires an eye of the man who destroys the eye of another. But it is not meant for revenge, surely. The Lord does not wish us to hate anyone, even our enemies."

"You remember the psalm we had last evening? 'The Lord preserveth the stranger. He relieveth the fatherless and widow, but the way of the wicked he

turneth upside down.’ ”

“And what does our Father say we are to do to our enemies?” Jesus asked eagerly.

“ ‘If thou meet thy enemy’s ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again,’ ” Joseph quoted. “ ‘And if thou see the ass of him that hateth thee fallen under his burden, thou shalt surely help him.’ That is written in the Law.”

Jesus drew a great sigh of relief. Why, that was just what his mother had always taught them! Whenever James and Judas quarreled, their mother said, “You must forgive. ‘Let not the sun go down upon thy wrath.’ ”

And one day when Benjamin, the son of the governor, threw a stone into the courtyard and James picked it up to throw it back at him, Mary had stayed his hand. “Nay, son,” she had said. “Never seek revenge. Do no injury to Benjamin, though he did to you.”

Yes, that was it. Surely the Father in heaven could not be less kind and loving and just than his mother. Suddenly Jesus burst into singing like a thrush in the early morning. The shavings flew from under his fingers.

The Father had spoken twice today—once through poor mad Aziel, and now in the blessed words of the Scriptures!



5. Nazareth's Good Shepherd

JOEL, Nathan's younger brother and undershepherd for him, was a hero in the eyes of all the village boys. He was kind and strong and brave. When he was at home tending his flocks in the fold, he always had a troop of boys at his heels. When he led his flocks away up to the hills, after the short winter in the fold, the boys would follow him as far as they dared.

Joel was a marvelous storyteller, too, and Jesus loved to go over to Nathan's fold on a winter's evening to listen to his stories. Samson and David, Gideon, and the great heroes of the Maccabees lived again as the little audience, sitting around on the hay in the warm darkness, listened breathlessly. But best of all were the tales Joel told of his own adventures on the hills, when the sheep went astray in the storm and darkness, and wild beasts lurked in their mountain dens.

Joel was always bringing presents back from the hills. One day in midsummer he came home with a pair of furry little brown baby conies and left them with Nathan's boys. Jesus and young Asa were anxious to see the new pets. They planned to take a few minutes from the noonday rest to go to Nathan's home. Their fathers said they might go, but only for a short time, as it was not wise for them to be out long in the midday heat.

Young Asa took his rest in the courtyard under the shade of the vines, so that he would be ready when Jesus came. At the sound of a low whistle Asa sat up quickly. There in the blazing sunshine Jesus sat perched on the wall, laughing down at him. Asa jumped up, and the boys went scampering across the hot courtyard and out into the empty street.

In a shady corner of Nathan's courtyard they saw a group of boys sitting before a big wooden cage. They were laughing as they watched Saul, Nathan's oldest boy, reach into the cage with a sharp stick and prod the little prisoners.

The frightened animals darted from side to side, trying to escape and uttering piteous cries.

Suddenly all the boys jumped and turned quickly. Jesus had given a sharp cry and the next moment had leaped upon Saul and wrenched the stick from him. Saul crouched back as Jesus stood over him with the stick as though he would strike Saul with it. The other boys stared at Jesus in amazement. He was always so kind and patient! Even Asa stepped back to escape his flaming anger. For a moment Jesus held the stick over Saul, then suddenly broke it over his knee and flung it away.

“How could you hurt them, Saul?” he cried. “The poor little helpless things!” His voice shook with pity.

Saul hung his head. “They are our conies,” he muttered. “I can do what I like with them.”

“But they are not yours!” Jesus cried, his eyes still flashing. “And you can’t do what you like with them! They are God’s creatures. They do not belong to you!”

“The boy is right.” Saul’s younger uncle, Judah, sitting on the ground near by braiding a camel rope, spoke up. “And Joel will take the conies back if he hears that you are cruel to them.”

Saul managed to say he was sorry and peace was restored. Then, when the conies had gotten over their fright, they played together and tumbled over each other in such ridiculous baby fashion that the boys were soon laughing gaily together again.

Joel and his hired shepherds stayed far away on the mountains most of the summer, hunting green pastures for their sheep. But when the days grew cooler, Joel led his sheep home at the end of each week. There, in the sheepfold, he could look them over much more carefully than when they were running free in the pasture. Joel was a faithful shepherd, and Nathan’s sheep were the cleanest and fattest of all the Nazareth flocks.

One afternoon the boys of the little village had finished their work early and were waiting and watching for Joel’s return. Jesus and young Asa went to the gate of the courtyard. They were playing marbles in the street with Nathan’s boys when they heard welcome sounds. These were coming from a golden cloud of dust on the hillside—soft, far-off tinklings of little bells, the calling of lambs and the answer of their mothers.

Joel was coming! The boys stopped their game and ran up the street and away to the hills to meet him. The cloud of dust rolled nearer, the bleating of

the sheep grew louder, and out of the cloud strode Joel at the head of his flock, a smile on his kind brown face. Over his shoulder was a lamb that had hurt its leg among the rocks.

The boys ran alongside, shouting questions above the clamor of the lambs. Had he lost any sheep? Had he seen a panther? Were there many hyenas this year? They eagerly helped him put the sheep into the fold. They got in his way and in the way of the flock, too, but Joel praised them and declared he could not get on without them.

“Eh, eh, and it is the great shepherd you will be one day, if you do not stick to the carpenter’s bench,” he said to Jesus, as the boy’s quick eye noted a scar on a sheep’s ear.

Joel stood at the door of the fold, holding his rod across it so that only one sheep could enter at a time. In this way he was able to count them and to see if any needed special care. Curly had a limp and Whitey had a gash on his head, and both had to be anointed with healing oil.

Illustration - Joel counting sheep in the pen

When they had all been counted and were safely in the fold, Joel looked at the boys. “One missing!” he cried in dismay. “Did I count them right?” The boys’ count was the same. There should be one hundred in this flock and there were only ninety-nine. They must be counted again. Joel opened the door of the fold and called to the sheep. They came running out at the sound of his voice. Then he led them back into the fold again, under his rod, one by one, while he and the boys counted carefully. Ninety-seven, ninety-eight, ninety-nine. They were right; one was missing!

*Illustration - At the sheepfold
Joel recounts the sheep - one is missing*

“It’s Black Spot!” Jesus cried. “I don’t remember seeing Black Spot!”

“It is Black Spot, truly!” cried Joel. “Black Spot, the wanderer! He is always straying away, searching for something new.”

The boys looked up at Joel in dismay.

“I must go back at once,” he called over the wall to his brother Nathan.

Zara, Joel's pretty young wife, came running out from behind the vines, her bracelets jingling as she moved. "Oh, Joel, do not go," she begged. "It is late, and Nathan says there will be a storm!"

But Joel could not rest while one of his flock was wandering on the hillside. Black Spot might be eaten by a wild beast if he were left out there. Zara and Nathan's wife, Deborah, brought Joel some food. Scarcely waiting to eat it, he turned and strode away up the street and into the hills to find his sheep that was lost.

The darkness was falling as he disappeared, and the boys returned slowly to their homes.

"I think Joel must be greater even than King David," Jesus said, as he washed his tired, dusty feet before going to bed. "I think he must be like our Father, God."

Mary rubbed some oil on a great scratch on his knee and on little Joseph's sore finger. "And why do you think Joel is like the Lord, my son?" she asked.

"Because he is so kind and good to his sheep. Mahlon and Gad and the other hireling shepherds are not like Joel at all. He is kind even to Black Spot when he won't do as he is told. I have heard Joel tell Black Spot again and again to stay with the flock, and just today he was bad and ran away again. And now Joel is gone away up on the hills to find him." He looked at his mother dreamily. "Don't you think that our Father is like that, Mother, and that we are his sheep? He loves even the bad people who go astray like Black Spot, doesn't he, Mother?"

"Yes, dear one, I am sure he does. Come, we will say the shepherd psalm tonight with our evening prayers."

"'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.'" They chanted it together. Even baby Simon, in his hanging cradle beside the warm brazier of coals, added his baby notes. The younger children were asleep almost as soon as the last words, "in the house of the Lord forever," were spoken.

But Jesus did not fall asleep so quickly. He rolled about on the hard stone floor, which was covered only with a rough blanket. He was anxious about Joel, and in imagination could see him stumbling over the rocks on the dark hills, calling and calling to his straying sheep. There would be wild beasts lurking in the caves away up there. It was hard to sleep when Joel was in danger.

He woke, just before dawn, to hear voices in the street. Someone was passing and calling that he had found his sheep. Jesus jumped up. It was Joel!

He could hear Nathan's voice, too, and Judah's, shouting the good news. The neighbors were getting up to go out into the street and rejoice with them. Someone began to sing a song of rejoicing.

Joseph rose and slipped out, and Jesus softly followed. They joined the group about Joel and shouted their joy and relief. Black Spot stood close to Joel, his head hanging, as the shepherd told the tale of his rescue. He had slipped into a rocky hole and could not climb out and was bleating wildly. "Just telling all the foxes and hyenas where he was," Joel said. "And one was ready to spring on him. I was just in time." He put his hand gently on the foolish little sheep's head.

The boys were even more eager to see Joel the next week. They would help him count his sheep again, and everyone hoped there would be none missing this time. Jesus and young Asa and Nathan's boys went up the hills to meet him after their afternoon work was finished. But to their disappointment, when the music of the flocks rose from the hills, they found the sheep led by Nathan alone. There had been trouble in some parts with mountain lions, Nathan told them. The lions were very bold this year, and Joel and some of the hirelings were remaining with the rest of the flock for a few days longer.

It was a dull afternoon for the boys. Even the Sabbath was a disappointment because Joel's tall form was not among the men as they walked to the synagogue.

On the morning after the Sabbath Jesus went out as usual to help Joseph open the shop. It was a lovely morning, cool and clear. The days were still hot, but the nights were now quite cold and the mornings were delightful.

Jesus tugged at the heavy shutters that covered the door and at the same time listened to the pleasant morning sounds of the village—the crowing of cocks, the merry cackle of hens, the barking of dogs, the stamping of donkeys' feet, the clear, high voices of the women as they went to the well for water, and the pleasant greetings of neighbors shouted from housetop to housetop.

Suddenly there came a new sound—something strange and weird. Jesus dropped the shutter and stood listening. Joseph stopped as he crossed the courtyard, carrying a beam over his shoulder. Mary and Ruth had just swung open the courtyard gate on their way to the well, their jars balanced on their shoulders. They too stood still at the sound. It was a loud cry of grief.

Joseph dropped his burden and ran to the gate, Jesus after him. The carpenter's house was on the slope of a hill, and down it came a group of men, crying and wailing. They were carrying a litter, high on their shoulders, with a motionless body lying stretched upon it. It was Joel, the bearers were crying.

He had been torn by a wild beast!

Everyone ran into the street, and as the little procession passed a great wailing cry was set up. The news spread like fire in the stubble after harvest, as it was shouted from housetop to housetop.

“Joel, Joel!” they wailed. “Joel, the son of Reuben, is wounded. Joel has been killed! Oh, woe, woe!”

As Obed, one of Nathan’s hireling shepherds, ran past, Joseph caught his cloak and cried to him to tell them what had happened.

The sheepfold had been attacked in the night by a panther, Obed said. The beast had leaped right over the hedge, the great thorn hedge that surrounded the fold, right into the midst of the flock. Joel and his hirelings were sitting outside, by the door. The men fled for their lives, but Joel dashed into the fold and gave battle to the beast. The men from a neighboring fold, hearing the uproar, ran to Joel’s aid. They found him badly wounded, lying beside the dead panther. They did their best to stanch his wounds, then wrapped him in their cloaks and carried him over the rough pathway down the mountainside. He was grievously hurt and none knew yet whether or not he would live.

The sorrowful procession arrived at the home of the shepherd. Young Zara ran out, screaming and tearing her hair, followed by Joel’s aged father, Reuben, and his weak, ailing mother, and all of Nathan’s family. The neighbor women joined their voices to those of the household, and the courtyard was filled with weeping and wailing.

Jesus was standing at the gate near Joseph, filled with sorrow and dismay. He felt a gentle hand on his head and, looking up, saw his mother. She had one arm around poor sobbing Zara and was trying to comfort her.

“I was searching for you, my son,” she said. “Run home to the little ones and care for the house till I return.”

Jesus ran swiftly up the street toward his home, though he longed to stay near Joel and learn what hopes there were of his recovery. He met little James and Judas hurrying toward him and found the household in disorder. Both Ruth and the baby were crying, and no one had had breakfast. There was no water in the house, and the fire of coals had died. Timna was stamping and complaining in her corner of the courtyard.

Jesus left Ruth to give baby Simon and the two little boys their breakfast while he and James took the heavy jars and went to the well for water. He fed the little goat and even managed to milk her, then helped Ruth with the children.

While he worked, the thought that Joel might be dying weighed heavily upon Jesus' spirits. Young Asa, coming home for his breakfast, stopped at the gate. His news was no better. His grandfather and grandmother were both with Joel. There were no doctors in Nazareth, but old Asa had great skill with herbs and his wife, Rachel, was always called to a home in case of serious illness. They had dressed Joel's wounds and given him a drug to stop his fever, but they both feared greatly for his life.

When young Asa had gone, Jesus slipped away to the shop. The stool he had been working on was lying there, but he did not pick it up. He could not see to work for blinding tears. Then he remembered that the Father knew all about Joel, and he would help.

Jesus knelt in the shavings and prayed. He prayed as he had never prayed before, for this was the first time that he had felt such great need. "O kind Father, spare Joel's life!" he prayed.

Suddenly Jesus raised his head, his face radiant. He jumped up and ran to the house, calling to Ruth. She stopped swinging the cradle and looked up in amazement at his happy face.

"Oh, brother, is Joel better?" she cried in wonder.

"Yes, yes!" cried Jesus. "He is not quite better, but he will get well. I am sure he will. *I know he will.*"

"Did you go to the shepherd's house?" little James asked.

"No," Jesus said, "but I prayed and prayed for Joel and I know my Father answered. Joel will soon be better!"

As he ran back to the shop, skipping and singing in his joy and relief, Joseph and Mary entered the gate. Their hearts were heavy, and they looked at Jesus' shining face in amazement. Knowing how much he loved Joel, it seemed impossible that he could be so happy.

"Why, son," Mary said, "have you forgotten the great sorrow in our neighbor's house?"

"Oh, no, Mother," Jesus cried, running to her, "but I know the sorrow will soon be turned into joy. I have prayed to my Father. Joel will not die. He will soon be better."

Joseph turned from the shop door, which he was about to enter. He and his wife both looked in wonder at Jesus. Mary put her hand gently upon his head. She did not wish to disturb his joyous confidence, but she did not believe Joel could recover.

“It must be as Jehovah wills, my child,” she said sadly. “Come, it is time you and James were away to school.”

She saw that their hands and faces were clean and their sandals and girdles neatly tied. All the time Jesus poured forth his joy and relief.

“Joel is still very sick, beloved,” Mary warned. “Little Asa’s grandmother Rachel fears still for his life.”

But Jesus was not to be disturbed. Taking his little brother by the hand, he ran away up the street, shouting to the other boys the glad news that Joel would not die, that he was going to get better.

Late in the afternoon Joseph left his work and went down the street once more to see if he could do anything for the shepherd’s sorrowing household. He took Jesus with him, thinking the boy’s bright face would bring some comfort to the anxious hearts. They carried a pile of newly baked cakes and a jar of fresh butter as a little gift to Joel’s aged parents and his young wife.

All the way down the street Jesus chattered gaily, and Joseph listened in some perplexity.

“Are you not glad Joel is getting better, Father Joseph?” Jesus asked. “He will soon be well, and then he will go back to his sheep. I am sure even Black Spot will be good when he sees what a good shepherd he has, won’t he?”

“Yes, yes, son,” Joseph said gravely. “We hope that Joel will recover. We hope so.”

When they came to the home of the shepherd they stood outside the gate, as was the custom, and Joseph called to announce their presence. The gate was opened by little Miriam, her eyes red and swollen with weeping. Old Reuben, Joel’s father, was sitting in the shade of the vines.

“Come in, come in, Joseph,” he called in his quavering voice. “You are welcome.”

“Peace be to this house,” Joseph said, as he entered.

Jesus followed, repeating the words shyly. This courtyard, where he had so often played with Nathan’s boys and listened to Joel’s tales, seemed a strange, awesome place now, with everyone weeping or sitting about with bowed heads.

Joseph and Jesus were no sooner seated on the ground beside the old man than he burst into sobs.

“Woe, woe is me! I am old and full of years, and waiting to be gathered to

my fathers, and I am left here, and my son is near the gates of death. Woe is me, for my son, Joel!”

Jesus slipped away into the house to give the bread and butter to Deborah, and then went over and sat in the corner of the courtyard where Nathan’s boys were sitting, frightened and silent. But the bright face of the boy visitor seemed to drive away the gloom.

Wasn’t it wonderful the way Joel had fought the panther? Jesus asked them. They would get him to tell them all about it when he was better. For he was going to get better. Oh, yes, he really was.

“My mother says that Uncle Joel is very near to death,” Saul said gloomily.

“Yes, but he won’t die,” Jesus answered confidently. “He will get well.”

Zara, sitting in a corner of the darkened house, weak with violent weeping, had been listening absently to the children’s talk. She raised her head suddenly and looked about her.

“I want to hear what Mary’s boy is saying,” she said, and Nathan’s wife went out and led Jesus in to her. He sat on the floor, in the circle of weeping women, just outside the darkened room where Joel lay, and Zara made him tell all about his prayer of the morning, and why he was so sure the heavenly Father would spare Joel’s life.

“Perhaps the lad is right,” Zara whispered to her mother, who had come to comfort her.

Her mother nodded. “Sometimes children know more about the will of the Lord than we do,” she said. “And Jesus is wise beyond his years.”

Just then old Rachel came out of the darkened room. Her eyes were shining.

“The Lord be praised, my daughter,” she said to Zara, “for he has spared your husband’s life. His fever is stayed. He will live!”



6. The Promise of the Olive Trees

AS THE LOVELY autumn days grew cooler Joel's strength returned quickly, and he was soon able to be with the sheep again. Much to the joy of all the boys, he did not go up to the hills for some weeks, and the story of his fight with the panther was told over and over again in the evenings when they sat around their favorite shepherd before the door of the sheepfold.

When the excitement over Joel's adventure had passed, another interest began to stir the village. It would soon be time for the "shaking of the trees," the men kept saying—time for the olive harvest to which everyone looked forward. Waiting for the olives to ripen was an anxious time, for many people depended upon them for their living during the winter.

To Joseph, the carpenter, the olive harvest meant more this year than to anyone else in Nazareth. If his trees bore plentifully, he could lift some of the burden of debt that weighed him down, and be free for a time from Simeon's terrible threats.

"We must go up the hill and look at our trees some day soon," he said to Jesus again and again, as they sat at their work in the shop. But there never seemed to come a day when he could leave his work. Then one cool, pleasant morning old Asa called from the roof of his house next door.

"Ho, Joseph!" he shouted. "My son Micah and I are going up to the olive groves this afternoon. Will you come along with us?"

"Just what I would like to do!" Joseph called back to his neighbor.

Jesus and young Asa heard, and spent their time on the way to and from school planning how to get permission to go along.

When they reached home young Asa coaxed his grandfather until old Asa said at last, "What a torment you are! Run then and see if Jesus may go. If he

goes, you may go too.”

After that everything was easy. Joseph said that both Jesus and little James might go, and the boys dashed off in high glee to get ready for the journey.

“Watch where you put your feet, son,” Mary warned Jesus, as she saw to the tying of his and James’s sandals. “Remember, you are too daring.”

Old Asa mounted his donkey. Micah and Joseph slung their leather bags over their shoulders. They were carrying a lunch to be eaten on the hill, and with staffs in their hands for the steep climb they set off, the three boys scampering far ahead.

From the narrow village street the path led up through a wide valley. It was yellow and bare, for the fields had long been stripped of their second crop of barley and the hot summer suns had burned up every blade of grass. Here and there clean threshing floors and idle wine presses lay by the wayside.

Suddenly a long black adder darted across the path. Young Asa jumped aside with a shout of warning. He caught up a stick and ran after it but, like the flip of a black whip, the snake disappeared swiftly into a hole.

“You are a wise old fellow, are you not, little brother?” Jesus called after it, kneeling and peering into the serpent’s den.

“He is a very bad old fellow!” cried James, stepping back cautiously.

“I wouldn’t call him my brother, would you, James?” cried young Asa. “Have a care, Jesus! He may jump out!”

Jesus laughed fearlessly. “He is too smart for that. He saw your stick, Asa.”

“There shouldn’t be such things as adders and vipers,” young Asa declared.

“Why?” asked Jesus.

“Well, what use are they?” cried little James.

Jesus thought awhile as they trudged on. “I don’t know,” he admitted. “But they must be of some use, or our Father would never have made them. Maybe the adder was made to teach us to be wise and careful. Mother always says I am not careful about watching where I step.”

“I don’t think we need anything so ugly and poisonous as an adder to teach us,” young Asa grumbled.

But Jesus held the happy idea that everything in the world was meant for good if people only knew how to use it. They talked the subject over as they trudged, more slowly now, up the flinty slopes. Jesus argued that perhaps if the

little adder had never been chased nor tramped on, he would not have gotten into that bad habit of poisonous biting.

“I don’t like serpents,” little James protested, watching the pathway ahead carefully. “Joel says they would kill all his sheep if he didn’t fill up their holes.”

“But if everybody and everything loved everybody else,” Jesus went on, “then nobody would hurt anybody else. Why, Rabbi Matthias, in the synagogue last Sabbath, read about such a time. He read from the Prophets that some day the lion would lie down with the lamb, and that a baby like little Simon would put its hand down an asp’s hole and not be hurt.”

“When you are a man, Jesus,” young Asa said gravely, “you will surely be a great rabbi.”

Jesus shook his head at the idea. Then a butterfly flitted above the path ahead, and the boys ran after it with cries of delight.

The bare fields and the stripped vineyards were beneath them now, and they marched over hard, stony pasture land. Not a blade of green grass nor a blossom could be seen where in the springtime a great garden had bloomed. Just beyond the open pastures the olive orchards were spread out like silvery embroidery. The trees that had been covered with white blossoms when Jesus passed under them on his journey to the sunrise, were now weighted down with heavy clusters of purple fruit.

The men of Nazareth had built a high tower in the center of the orchard. In this tower Amram, the watchman, was standing on guard. He shouted a harsh warning to them as they came up the path. Then, as old Asa’s donkey came around a rock that had hidden him, Amram recognized the rider and called a welcome instead. Handing his spear and arrows to his son, he came down the ladder to have a chat with the visitors.

Old Asa and Micah and Joseph moved up and down the long gray-green aisles, examining the heavy clusters of fruit and disturbing the doves from their nests. Nearly everyone in Nazareth owned trees in this grove, and it was sometimes a little difficult to find one’s own. But Jesus remembered exactly where Joseph’s were, away at one corner, near old Asa’s. Joseph was delighted to find the trees all heavy with fruit.

Illustration - *To the olive grove*
Children and men walk through the
path to the olive grove

Old Asa owed many more trees than Joseph, for he had much land and a large household to feed. He rode his donkey down between the long rows of trees. There was promise of a great harvest when the day should come for the “shaking of the trees.”

“Jehovah bless thee,” the old man said gratefully to the laden boughs as he passed them.

The dry bed of a mountain stream curved round one end of the orchard. Beside it stood the idle oil press, which would soon be so busy. It was a huge circular stone basin, with a heavy stone wheel that fitted into it for crushing the oil out of the fruit. The boys were greatly interested in it. John, the watchman’s son, saw them scrambling over it and shouted an invitation to come up and visit him. This was a wonderful treat. The boys climbed the ladder to the very top of the tower and gazed over the treetops to the valley and Nazareth far below. John, though he was older, was ready for play. He even joined them in pretending that the orchard was being raided by thieves, and helped them plan a great defense.

They ate their lunch of bread and dried figs in the warm sunshine at the edge of the orchard. Amram and his son joined them. The “shaking of the trees” could not be more than two weeks away, the watchman said. The boys were delighted. That would be the great day when everyone in Nazareth who owned a tree would climb the hills and shake the trees until every branch gave up its fruit.

The long shadows of the mountains were stretching across the valley when they turned homeward. Black clouds were piling up over the top of King Solomon’s crown. A gusty autumn wind came sweeping over the hills, sending little swirling eddies of dust about the boys as they raced down the slopes.

“The rains are not far off,” Micah said.

Old Asa drew his cloak closer about him, but the thought of a storm was fun to the children. They ran round and round in circles, following the whirling eddies till they were dizzy.

As they crossed a gully Jesus looked back up the narrow pass and gave a shout of laughter. The whole party turned to look. Down the little stream bed came a cloud of round, dancing objects—the eastern tumbleweed, a plant that everyone called the gul-gul. In early summer the gul-gul grew to a perfectly round ball about a foot in diameter. In the autumn its leaves became very dry and hard. Its slender stem snapped with the first rough wind and away it went, bounding over hill and plain, scattering seeds in all directions. And now here

was a mob of these little wanderers racing, chased by the wind down the gully, with much dust and racket and flying seeds. Old Asa's little donkey shied and refused to go on until they had passed. But the boys shouted with glee and joined the chase, jumping into the midst of the tossing balls.

The gul-guls seemed to be winning the wild race, when a contrary wind caught them and the army wheeled with military smartness and went dancing up the mountain again. The boys turned and followed, only to be met again by an opposing blast, and turned back.

As the laughing boys rushed past the men on another wild race down the slope, old Asa called after them the proverb which the sight of the foolish tumbleweed always brought to mind: " 'Oh, gul-gul, where dost thou put up for the night?' "

Jesus, remembering the answer, shouted back, " 'Where the wind puts up!' " And the ravine rang again with their laughter.

At a turn in the road that gave a near view of the village, Jesus' sharp eyes spied a figure on the housetop of his home. It was his mother, watching for the return of the travelers. He waved his scarf and ran forward. The shelter of the narrow walled streets was very pleasant, especially to the elders, after the winds on the hills.

The boys paused for a moment where the potter's sons were playing marbles at their gateway and told some of their adventures. But they did not stay long for, as usual, there was trouble in the potter's household. Zadoc himself was a peaceable man who worked all day at his wheel in the shop beside the house. But his wife was noisy and quarrelsome. Today she was scolding so loudly that even Leah looked cowed. Cracked wineskins hanging from the trellis in the courtyard, and the ground beneath, soaked with spilled wine, told the story. The servant had very carelessly poured the new wine, just made from the grapes, into old leather wine sacks that were hard and would not stretch. So when the new wine began to ferment the old wineskins cracked and the precious liquid was wasted. It was surely enough to disturb a more patient housewife than Huldah.

"May you be driven as the gul-gul before the wind!" she was screaming at the girl.

The boys slipped quietly away, but, remembering their glorious race with the gul-guls on the hills, they felt that perhaps that would not be such a very bad punishment after all!



7. Shaking the Trees

THE VISIT to the olive groves raised the hopes of the family in the home of the carpenter. Joseph had seen that there was plenty of fruit on their trees for their own supply of food and oil, and also enough to pay the heavy taxes on house and shop. All his savings could go to Simeon, and there was enough to put them beyond danger. They would be ready to meet the usurer when he came in the spring.

The look of care left Mary's face. She went about her household tasks singing the hymn that Jesus loved best. It was her very own psalm, one she had composed before his birth, and she sang it in times of great joy:

“My soul doth magnify the Lord,
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior!”

About the middle of November, John, the son of the watchman of the groves, came down to the village. From his housetop he shouted the news that the olive trees were ready for the shaking. His father would leave the grove the next evening, he said, and those who wanted to save their fruit must come early in the morning.

People came running up their outer stairs to hear the good news. It was shouted from housetop to housetop until it had reached the farthest edge of the village.

At once all Nazareth was astir. Everyone knew that if their olive trees were left unguarded for even one night, they would be stripped of their fruit by thieves. So everyone who owned an olive tree on the side of Mount David set to work getting out sacks and jars, ready for an early morning trip to the hills.

The little house under the mulberry tree was in a happy bustle. Aunt Abigail had promised to take care of baby Simon, but everyone else was going.

The younger members of the family would be as useful as the grownups, especially in helping shake the olives down from the higher branches.

While it was still dark the next morning Jesus heard his mother moving about softly. He slipped noiselessly from his bed on the floor and fetched charcoal for the brazier, then ran to the well in the darkness for an extra jar of water. He helped his mother measure the meal for the cakes that were to be baked for their breakfast and for their lunch on the mountain. Even before the rest of the family was astir, the place was filled with the appetizing odor of baking bread.

Young Asa came over to help Jesus and his brothers pile together the jars and sacks for the olives.

“No school today!” young Asa shouted joyfully. “Rabbi Ezra is going too.”

They had almost finished their work when Jesus called that Aunt Abigail and Rebekah were coming to get the baby.

Aunt Abigail was not really an aunt, being only a cousin of Mary’s, but nearly every child in the village called her aunt. She loved children, and now that her youngest daughter, Rebekah, had grown up, she was always borrowing other people’s babies.

The visitors entered with the usual salutation, “Peace be to this house.” Rebekah, her bracelets tinkling, ran about helping Mary, so that they were soon ready for the road. Aunt Abigail rolled the baby in her long veil and swung him over her back, saying this was her little sack of olives. The baby laughed and chuckled.

It was scarcely daylight when the crowds began to pour through the streets and up toward the hills. The sharp *tap-tap* of donkeys’ feet mingled with the shouting of the drivers and the calling of the women to their children. Old Asa and his wife Rachel, mounted on their donkeys, came out of their gate.

“The Lord bless your day’s labor,” the old man called to all that passed. Micah and his wife were on donkeys too, with Adina running by her mother’s side. The potter’s family came past, Huldah crying shrilly to her children to make haste.

Joseph and Mary came out, carrying their jars and sacks. They closed the little house, and Joseph barred the courtyard gate. All the children, from Jesus to little Joseph, were dancing with excitement. Mary had little trouble with her family, for Ruth kept close to her and Jesus looked after the little boys and saw that they did not get into trouble.

It was a damp, chill morning, and the road up the mountain was rough and steep, but everyone's spirits were high. The night mists had not yet left the valley. Neighbor called to neighbor through the fog, and laughter and jokes were shouted from group to group. Before they had gone far, the sun lit up the head of King David and crowned him royally. The mists rolled away down the valley, and the day grew bright with sunshine.

Amram, the watchman, heard the crowds coming long before he could see them. When they reached the grove he had come down from his tower to meet them, glad to be relieved from his long nights of watching.

Soon the aisles of the orchard were alive, but there was much arguing before the work got under way. Each house-holder owned a definite number of trees. These belonged to the potter, those to the shepherd, this row to the blacksmith, that to the weaver. But often the men could not agree as to where one man's trees started and the other's left off. Sometimes the dispute grew so furious that old Asa or even Rabbi Matthias, the ruler of the synagogue, had to leave his own trees and come and settle matters.

Joseph's trees were a little apart, at the end of old Asa's long rows. Jesus led the way, carrying a great load of sacks on his head.

The fallen olives, scattered over the ground, were gathered first. When that task was finished, the young men and boys climbed up into the trees. Then it seemed as though winter's wildest storm were sweeping over the grove. The branches of the trees waved and shook and thrashed to and fro, as if tormented by a gale, and the purple fruit rained down upon the earth with a loud rattle and roar. The heavy dew of the night before rained down also, and those below were drenched as they gathered up the olives into the sacks and jars.

It was a gay, noisy scene. Bright turbans and sashes gleamed through the waving gray-green branches. Laughter and shouts rang from the treetops. Someone far up in a tree began singing a harvest song. Others took it up, and soon it was sounding from tree to tree.

In the corner where the carpenter and his family gathered their harvest Joseph shook the heavier branches. Jesus and young James climbed far up near the top and shook and thrashed the smaller branches while Mary and Ruth and the little boys gathered the fruit below.

Illustration - *In the olive grove*
Young Jesus and James climbed into the olive tree.

When the noonday sun had reached its height, the harvesters came out into the sunlight to eat their lunch and dry their drenched garments. Mary sat between old Rachel and Martha, young Asa's mother. Mary's face under her blue veil looked worn. Jesus, eating his bread and dried raisins on a sun-warmed stone with young Asa, looked across at his mother with loving anxiety.

"You are weary, Mother," he whispered, when the meal was over and the men were returning to their work. "Rest now. Ruth and Adina and I will gather for you, and James and little Asa will help Father shake the rest down."

Mary smiled at him. She knew how he loved to swing in the highest branches, and that it would be a great sacrifice for him to stay on the ground with the women and children.

"No, no, son," she said, "I am rested now, and your father needs you more than I do."

She sent him back to his work, for the olives must be harvested before nightfall and not even the women might rest long.

All the long afternoon the orchard waved and quivered, the fruit rattled upon the hard earth, and the singing and shouting echoed from the surrounding hills. Now and then, as the afternoon waned, a family would sweep clean the ground under their trees, place a row of filled sacks beside the mill, shoulder the remainder of their harvest, and stagger away down the mountain. It was the custom to come home from any harvest singing psalms, but only those who left the groves early felt able to sing after the day's heavy toil. Late in the afternoon dark clouds came sweeping up from the east, bringing a cold, driving rain. The children's hands were blue and stiff. The younger boys crept into the shelter of a little rocky cave, but Jesus remained high in a tree, buffeted, blinded, drenched by wind and rain. He was very tired, but still he kept on shaking and lashing the branches until almost the last of the fruit was dislodged.

No one took quite all the olives from the groves. They left some fruit for the gleaners. There were many poor folk in Nazareth who did not own trees. They were glad to go up to the orchards after the harvest to pick any stray fruit that might be left.

At last Joseph called to Jesus to come down. "You have done well, son," he called. "Leave the rest to the gleaners. There will be little enough."

The afternoon was gone by the time the last of the harvesters left the grove. Rows of bulging sacks were ranged beside the oil press. They would be put

through the mill as soon as the mountain stream rose high enough to run it. And there was every sign of rain. A half dozen of the strongest young men of the village, among them young Asa's eldest brother, Benjamin, and Joel's younger brother, Judah, stayed all night to guard the harvest. Already they had started a fire in front of a cave and were preparing their supper.

All the sacks that could be carried were slung over the backs of donkeys or men, or piled on the heads of the women, and the long procession wound its way down the mountainside. Micah lent Joseph one of his donkeys to help with his load, or he could never have taken it home. The younger children were worn out and staggering from weariness. Little Joseph and Judas were crying and hanging onto their mother's skirts, and Ruth could scarcely carry one of the empty jars. Mary was worn and drooping, and Joseph himself, who was not accustomed to such work, was aching in every muscle. Jesus, who had worked harder than any of the other children, was so tired that he could not keep from stumbling under his heavy load. But he shouldered it without complaint, and tried besides to give a steadying hand to little Joseph as they staggered down the rocky path.

In spite of their weariness their hearts were glad, for the harvest had been bountiful. Joseph's spirits rose as he thought of the row of well-filled sacks they had left beside the oil press. The olives they were carrying so painfully to their home meant light and fuel for the winter, and some food as well. The olives they had left on the hillside meant safety from the usurer. They would be able to take Jesus to the Passover in Jerusalem. Weary as he was, Joseph hummed the hymn of thanksgiving.

"The Lord hath dealt bountifully with his servants," old Asa was singing as his donkey picked its way carefully down the darkening slope. "He hath opened his hand and fed his children! 'Blessed be the name of the Lord.' "

" 'Blessed be the name of the Lord!' " echoed all who could sing. Jesus, trudging behind Joseph under his heavy load, whispered, " 'Blessed be the name of the Lord!' "

Violent gusts of wind came down upon them from the hills. Stormy black clouds waved like dark banners over the eastern wall of the valley.

"The rains are almost here!" Joseph cried, and he moved faster.

Little Ruth stumbled and began to cry. "Look, sister!" Jesus said. "Look! King Solomon has put off his crown and is wearing a black turban! And, see, we shall soon be home." He had been badly scratched by the olive branches, and the load on his back hurt sharply, but he managed to let Ruth hang upon his sleeve and helped to pull her along.

The weary but happy little group at last staggered in at the gate of their home.

“Better see to your roof, neighbor,” Micah called over the wall, as he put his donkeys under shelter. “The storm is rising.”

Joseph mounted the outer stairs in the tearing wind to see that all was secure. He came down quickly and had scarcely barred the door when the tempest swept over the valley, roaring down the mountainside like a wild animal let loose.

But all were housed, and the little home of the carpenter was well built and secure. Lying snugly under his warm cloak, Jesus listened to the storm. He whispered the psalm, “‘Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts.’” And long before the noise of the waterspouts had ceased he was sound asleep, worn out by his day of toil.

But Joseph and Mary and many more of the older folk did not sleep. Anxiety for the precious crop left on the mountainside kept them awake through the long night.

Up beside the olive grove there was no sleep for the young watchmen either. From the black canopy of clouds there poured down such floods of rain that every empty watercourse became a leaping torrent. Down the dry stream bed that circled the olive grove came a roaring river, sweeping all before it. The watchmen tried hard to rescue the precious sacks, but had to run for their lives to the high rocks above the torrent. The floods thundered onward. They overturned stone walls and tore up great trees by the root. Every threshing floor along the line of march was swept away as the floods leaped from terrace to terrace. A great river rushed through the olive grove, caught the garnered harvest of the Nazareth folk, and flung it far and wide down the gorge.

In the morning, when the sun arose over Mount Solomon, the worn and drenched watchmen left their refuge in a rocky cave. To their sorrow they found only the bare, washed olive press and the stripped trees left from the great ingathering of the day before.



8. An Adventure

THE DISASTER to the olive harvest brought distress to many families of Nazareth, but it fell most heavily upon the carpenter's household. Joseph had scarcely enough saved to pay his taxes. Now it was hopeless to think of meeting the usurer's claims in the spring or of attending the Passover.

It was very important for Mary and Joseph to go to this great meeting in Jerusalem this year and to take Jesus with them, for the Law required parents to present their sons in the Temple in their twelfth year.

This ceremony was a great occasion in a boy's life. It marked his passing from childhood to youth and being recognized as a "son of Israel." Saul, the shepherd's eldest boy, had gone through the ceremony the year before. His younger brother, Jacob, was to be presented by his parents this year. So was young Asa. Jesus also was looking forward to it eagerly.

Many nights Joseph lay awake, planning how he could do his duty by the boy and how he was to meet Simeon of Capernaum in the spring. He had scarcely been able to put him off on his last visit and he knew he could not do so again. Neither could he ask his good neighbors, old Asa and Micah, for help, because they too were suffering from their heavy losses through the flood.

In the midst of this anxiety Jesus was as bright and carefree as ever. The heavenly Father knew all about their needs. He knew they needed the olive oil for fuel and light in the coming winter. And he knew that there was not enough to pay the taxes and the usurer too, but he would look after it. Why, he had promised he would! And so Jesus sang and whistled at his work.

Mary, whose faith was held up by that of her son, still hoped that they might go to Jerusalem. All through the winter she busied herself preparing Jesus' clothing. For on this great occasion he would lay aside his child's

garments and put on the clothes of youth. The winter days were short and the supply of olive oil was cut down, so she had to work doubly hard during the daylight. The thread must be spun and the cloth woven. Day in and day out her shuttle flew, and as the web of blue cloth grew Mary wove into it many a prayer for the boy who was to wear it.

When spring had really come and all the hills of Galilee were covered with flowers, Mary put away her loom. She had finished her boy's new suit. But there was still no answer to the question as to how they were to get to Jerusalem for the Passover, or how they could pay the usurer when he came.

Joseph brooded heavily over the subject, especially in the mornings, when Jesus was at school and he was left alone with his thoughts at his bench. On one of his most anxious days, as he was praying earnestly for help, he thought suddenly of his well-to-do cousin, Enos, who owned rich vineyards away down on the plain of Esdraelon, to the south. Enos had a large family to support, to be sure, but he had many acres of fertile land, well watered, and his olive groves were famous for miles around. Surely Enos would not see a relative driven from his home! Joseph made up his mind to go at once across the hills to visit him.

It happened that Nahor, old Asa's youngest son, also was planning a trip over the southern hills. Old Asa owned some flocks which a couple of hireling shepherds were tending away up on the hills between Nazareth and the great plain. The sheep had been taken up from their winter fold only the week before, and old Asa was anxious to hear how they were faring.

Joseph was very glad of Nahor's company. It was pleasanter and much safer than to go alone, and Nahor knew the hills. Young Asa pleaded to go with his uncle, and Joseph decided to take Jesus also. The boys could stay all night with Nahor in the shepherd's hut, while Joseph made the rest of the journey alone. He would return to the hills the next day and pick up the boys.

Illustration - *Along the path*
Boys pointing to birds flying.

Jesus and young Asa could hardly sleep for joy the night before. They were up early. Martha, young Asa's mother, also rose early and prepared a great sack of food for the journey, so that Mary could be spared the work and expense.

With plenty of food tied in bags on their backs, and with stout staves in their hands, the four marched out of the village and up the hills. The two boys

tramped ahead, their staves coming down sharply on the stony path. Young Asa was happy to be away with Jesus alone without the other village boys who were always at Jesus' heels.

“When we grow up we shall always be together, shall we not?” he asked happily. “I shall be a vinedresser and you will have a carpenter shop next to me and we shall work together always.”

The boys ran ahead around a turn in the crooked street and paused at a house on the outskirts of a village. Two women were churning out in the courtyard under an olive tree. A bag, made from the skin of a goat, was suspended from a tripod. The churning consisted in punching and wringing the bag violently until the milk gave up its butter. The boys ran into the courtyard and, with the consent of the women, took over the churning. It was great fun. When the men caught up with them, the two boys were pounding and punching the churn with their fists, while the two women sat on the ground resting and laughing. But when the men passed the gate, the churners had to follow.

They were soon far ahead again. Jesus stopped once more. Here was the last house in the village, the home of a vinedresser whose wife Dorcas had lain ill of a painful disease all winter. She was sitting out by the side of the house in the morning sunshine, pale and weak, her face drawn with suffering. The courtyard was dirty and untidy, with no sign of beauty about it, but just over the wall on the hillside grew a wealth of lovely blossoms. The brightest were the tall lilies, flaunting scarlet banners, a sight to make anyone glad. Jesus gathered an armful, ran up the path, and handed them to the sick woman. Dorcas stretched out her shaking hands for the lovely blossoms.

“A blessing upon your golden head, son of Joseph,” she cried. “Blessed is the woman who bore you!”

Jesus wished he could stay and do more for her, but he had to run to catch the others.

When they reached the uplands they heard behind them the music of flocks. Up the hill came Nathan's brother, Judah, leading one of the smaller flocks of sheep to pasture. Judah strode ahead, calling constantly and shouting a warning to any sheep that seemed inclined to stray into a side path. The sheep came on quickly, pressing close to their shepherd. The scores of little tapping feet raised clouds of golden dust. The travelers stood aside for them to pass. Asa and Jesus perched themselves upon a rock above the path for a better view.

When the sheep had passed and turned up another valley, the travelers

went on. Day had fully come up here on the heights, and the air was fresh and delightful. Jesus climbed so rapidly that young Asa had a hard time to keep up with him.

“Your lad leaps like a hind,” cried Nahor. “Does he never tire, nor grow afraid?”

“I have never known him to show fear of anything,” Joseph said, not without pride.

“Nor any other fault,” Nahor admitted. “But he should be cautioned,” he complained. “He is much too venturesome.”

Just then, tempted by a narrow ledge of rock that ran parallel to the path, far above it, Jesus scrambled up and ran along in a perfect abandon of delight.

Young Asa, down on the path below, cried out a warning. Nahor lost his patience. “Come down, son of the storm!” he shouted. “You will surely break your foolish neck, fearless one!”

Joseph beckoned, and Jesus obediently came down. But as he trotted along the path his eyes often turned wistfully to the forbidden heights.

The early sunlight warmed the slopes up here, though the wind across the hills was still cold. Flowers carpeted the hillsides: crocuses and tulips and iris, and acres of the glorious scarlet lilies.

The sun was high by the time they got to the shepherd’s hut where the boys were to stay for the night. The herdsmen were sitting in the sun, eating their midday meal of dried olives. The sheep had just been let out from their winter quarters and were running about in the undergrowth, eating greedily.

The travelers sat down at the door of the hut and shared their meal with the shepherds. The boys ran to the spring and filled their skin bottle with cold water. As they stood beside the spring they could see through the trees the great plain of Esdraelon, lying away below them, dotted with white villages and sycamore groves. The sight made Jesus long to get a nearer view.

“May Asa and I go farther with you?” he asked Joseph, when the meal was finished. “We want to see the highway and the caravans.”

“We would come back early and sleep in the shepherd’s hut,” Asa added eagerly.

Joseph hesitated, wondering what Mary would think of the boys coming back up the mountain alone. He looked at Nahor for advice. Nahor thought the plan all foolishness, and said so. But he was rather glad to be rid of the boys,

for there was no telling what adventures Jesus would have before Joseph got back.

“Oh, let them go,” he said. “They’ll come to no more harm on the road than here.”

“You may come, then,” Joseph said. He stood up, adjusted his turban, and grasped his staff. “But you must come back to the camp early, and not linger by the way.”

It seemed too good to be true. The boys ran away ahead, their eyes on the great plain which lay spread out far below.

Jesus paused beside a great clump of azaleas. It was crammed with sparrows’ nests and swarming with the noisy, chattering little tenants.

“Sparrows make such a fuss and they are always so busy,” grumbled young Asa, waiting for his companion impatiently. “And what use are they?”

“But our Father loves them,” Jesus said, peering into the nests. “He takes care of them, you know. They are his very littlest children—almost,” he added, softly.

Young Asa was inclined to dispute this. How was it possible that the great Lord Jehovah should care about a bush full of such ragged little rascals as these?

“But our Father made them,” Jesus argued. “They are his children and he loves them, just as our fathers love us.”

“Well, he lets the hawks kill them,” young Asa said, “and the eagles kill the little lambs. See, there is one now!”

Away up in the dazzling blue a great bird soared, intent on prey in the valley far beneath. Jesus wrinkled his forehead and pushed back his curls as he always did when he was puzzled.

There was certainly something sadly wrong with this lovely world. He realized that more and more each day. There were the adder and the scorpion with their stings; that great eagle away up there, watching so cruelly for small birds; the mountain panther that had almost been the death of Joel; the men who drove poor, mad Aziel into the wilderness to die; and Simeon the usurer who caused Father Joseph so many sleepless nights. Jesus walked along silently for a while, his young mind wrestling with these problems, his deep eyes grave and shadowed.

As they came near the foot of the hills they saw the long gray ribbon of the

highway that ran across the plain of Esdraelon from the mighty cities of the coast to Damascus and Jerusalem and the far East. Here Joseph left the boys. They might stay for a couple of hours and watch the caravans pass, he said, but then they must go back to Nahor and the hut. And, he added, when a caravan was passing they were to keep out of sight among the mustard bushes above the road.

“They might be like the Midianites who carried Joseph away into Egypt,” Joseph said, looking warningly into the daring blue eyes of the boy who, he well knew, feared not all the robbers of the great desert. Then he went on down and across the plain alone, toward the village whose white walls gleamed through the sycamores.



9. The Golden Chain

THERE WAS a little rocky crag jutting out from the hillside where Joseph left the boys. It was covered with mustard and wild hyssop and flowering oleanders. From up here the boys were hidden yet had a good view of the road.

They seated themselves upon the rocks and eagerly looked over the valley, watching for a caravan. Away to the west towered Mount Carmel, and to the east the mighty peak of Mount Tabor lifted its lordly head. The wide, rolling plain between stretched far to the south, toward the place where Gideon and his men drove out the Midianites.

“When we are men, Jesus,” young Asa cried, “we will raise an army and drive out the Romans, as Gideon drove out the hosts of Midian!”

Jesus was silent, thinking.

“Would you not like to drive the Romans into the sea, Jesus?” Asa cried, “And be king of Israel and sit on David’s throne?”

Illustration -
Crowds of people and camels on the
plains.

Jesus answered slowly, “I think I should like to be a king. For then I would not let anyone fight or be unjust.”

“But would you not punish the Roman tyrants?” young Asa asked, amazed.

Jesus shook his head again. But before he could reply, a cloud of dust arose on the highway. A caravan was coming!

Illustration - *Along the highway*

Boys spying on the caravan from
behind the tree.

The boys scrambled farther up the rocks for a better view. From behind the cloud, as it approached, rose a confusion of sounds: shouts of men, bellowing of cattle, the muffled *pad-pad* of camels' feet.

At last the front of the procession appeared out of the swirling dust. First came a long line of unburdened camels, unbroken animals being taken to a western market. Next, droves of noisy cattle and sheep hurried past, their yelling herdsmen almost smothered in the dust of their pounding feet. Scores of swaying camels swung along, great bales piled high upon their humped backs, their long necks outthrust, their haughty lips curled as though in disdain of the noisy herds about their feet. Whiffs of strange perfume floated up to the two young watchers on the hillside.

The boys drew back into the shelter of the shrubbery, gazing breathless at the wonderful sight. Jesus' eyes shone. Who knew what wonders those high-piled bales held—sandalwood and spices and costly silks, gold and ivory and jewels from far, far lands!

A wild young camel, snow white, broke from the herd and went leaping up the hillside like a gigantic hare. A half-dozen men went after it, shouting and cursing. They were a rough, evil-looking band, and the two young watchers crept closer behind their screen of bushes.

The camel-riders too were strange-looking men, wearing barbaric jewels in their turbans and great rings in their ears. Some of them had dark, cruel faces; most of them, especially those who were most richly dressed, looked very sad, Jesus thought.

And now there came another procession, from the west. It was thundering along the highway, bound in the opposite direction. It came with a rattle of heavy wheels and a tramp of horses' hoofs. There were glittering chariots, armed horsemen, a long array of helmets and flashing spears. Some great Roman chief must be riding up to Jerusalem with his armed guard!

The clouds of dust rolled over the meeting processions, so that the boys did not see one of the heavy chariots turn out from the road and draw up under the very rock upon which they stood. It was a richly decorated chariot, drawn by six superb horses and followed by a dozen riders, all aglitter with armor. From the chariot there stepped a richly dressed young man. His every motion was stamped with the air of authority. As he stepped up the grassy slope a servant started to follow him.

“Await me here, Marcus,” the young lord said, waving the servant aside. “I go to escape the dust.”

He looked up the hill and, seeing the shady nook above the rock where the two boys were hidden, he strolled up the slope and into the grove.

The boys did not notice the stranger’s approach at first. But something made young Asa turn. Through an opening in the oleanders he caught a glimpse of the tall, gorgeously robed stranger coming straight toward them. Asa gave a warning gasp and dived beneath the green thicket like a rabbit chased by a fox.

Jesus did not move. He stood on the white shelf of limestone rock, as motionless as a statue on its pedestal. He was completely carried away by the wonders passing on the highway beneath. But when a sound broke the spell that held him, he turned. Then he saw the magnificent stranger, standing on the ledge of rock right beneath him and staring up at him.

Jesus was not in the least startled or alarmed. He looked down at the richly robed nobleman shyly but serenely. Then, remembering his father’s warning, he turned to slip quietly away.

The man raised his hand and spoke in a commanding voice in the Greek language.

Jesus hesitated. “I am a Hebrew, noble sir,” he said with gentle courtesy. “I know not your tongue.”

“Ah, a Hebrew lad!” the man cried in Jesus’ own language. “Come down. I would talk with you while I wait in the coolness here for the dust of these unclean herdsmen to clear away.”

Jesus slipped down from his perch and came near the stranger.

“Who are you?” the man asked, seating himself upon a stone ledge. “I thought at first you might be a son of the gods.”

Jesus smiled. “I am Jesus, son of Joseph, the carpenter of Nazareth,” he answered. “And this boy is my friend—” He turned to find that he was quite alone, and caught a fleeting glimpse of young Asa’s terrified face peering from the bushes above.

Jesus paused in embarrassment. “Why, he’s gone,” he said.

“Ah, ha!” laughed the stranger. “You will find, young son of Joseph the carpenter, and that before you are many years older, that it is ever thus with friends. When you turn to look for them, lo, they have forsaken you.”

He spoke bitterly, and Jesus' sensitive heart felt a sudden pity for the great man, though he seemed to possess everything the world could give.

"Indeed, young Asa was here but now, sir," he said. "He would not forsake me, I am sure. We are Nazareth lads, and seldom see strangers."

"But you do not seem afraid of strangers," the man remarked, still looking at Jesus wonderingly. "Come nearer."

Jesus obeyed and looked up with clear, trusting eyes into the dark, haughty face.

"Are you not afraid of me?" the man asked solemnly, putting a heavy jeweled hand on Jesus' shoulder.

"No, noble sir," said Jesus, smiling. "I do not fear you."

The man's hand dropped. "Sit here on this stone and talk to me," he said, still puzzled.

Jesus sat on the stone and faced the stranger. He clasped his hands around his knees and looked up, his blue eyes shining.

"So you have human friends," said the man. "I thought at first you were a woodland creature, a brother to the conies, maybe."

Jesus looked earnestly at the man. He saw a twinkle in his eye and broke into a delighted laugh.

"Indeed, I am, sir," he said. "Are not all the wild creatures our brothers?"

Again the wondering look came into the young Roman's dark eyes.

"Ah, and the jackal and the panther that would like to spring out at you—are they your brothers too?"

"But they are very gentle when they are tamed," Jesus ventured with a smile. "Rabbi Ezra—he is our teacher—he has a brother who has a tame panther, and it follows him about like a lamb."

"A young Orpheus, by the name of Jove," muttered the stranger. "So you really think all wild creatures might be tamed?"

"Yes, noble sir. Do you not think so too?"

"I do not. Even if it were true, what about all the men with the hearts of beasts? Do you think they can be tamed too?"

"Oh, yes, indeed!" cried the boy, eagerly. "That is what my mother always tells me. And my Uncle Zacharias, who is a priest in Jerusalem and is very

wise, says that my Father would tame all the hearts of men in a day if they would let him. And then everyone would be kind to everyone else, and no one would be unhappy any more.”

The man smiled. “What sort of man is this father of yours? Is he such a wonderful carpenter that he would take the human race as if it were a block of wood and make it over to his liking?”

Jesus smiled his apology. “Oh, I did not mean my father Joseph,” he explained. “I mean our heavenly Father, the Lord God who made us. . . . Your Father too, noble sir,” he added gently.

The stranger was silent. “Tell me more about this heavenly Father,” he said at last.

Jesus’ face shone with joy. He loved above all things to talk about his Father, God, and the day when he would rule the world and all would be love and happiness. He had not as many chances to talk about him as he would have liked, for he often found his elders a little puzzled by his talk. But this stranger was anxious to hear, and so interested that one could tell him anything. So Jesus sat down with the stranger and poured out his ideas.

This beautiful world was our Father’s house, and all people—yes, and all other living things—were his children. Romans, Hebrews, Greeks—everyone. Even the noisy little sparrows that scolded all day on the roof and the lilies growing in the brier clumps. The Father had made them all, and so he loved them all. And he cared most that men should love one another as he loved them. And when they did all love one another then it would be the Kingdom, and no one would be unkind or unhappy any more.

The stranger asked questions, and Jesus even told him something of his great ambition to go out into the great world and tell everyone of the heavenly Father and his Kingdom.

Illustration - *With the stranger*
Young Jesus talks to the stranger
while sitting on rocks.

The sun shone through the boughs of the sycamore, setting the jewels in the stranger’s headdress aflame and turning his silken robe to ruby red. It touched the golden head of the boy in his simple, coarse Galilean smock. The two made a strange contrast.

“My first idea of you was not far from the truth,” the man muttered. “The

ancient gods are not all dead.”

The dust of the caravan had died away far down the highway. Below, the chariot with its prancing horses and waiting servants stood ready to resume the journey. The stranger rose slowly from his rocky seat. He stood for a moment looking down at the boy, then laid a jeweled hand upon his shoulder.

“Your father, Joseph the carpenter, is a poor man,” he said. “But you should not spend your life at carpenter’s work. Come with me, and you will realize all your ambitions. Capernaum, where I have my headquarters, is an important city. You shall see Rome and Athens and Alexandria. I will send you to a great school, and you shall be a young prince like Moses. Does not that appeal to you?”

Jesus smiled radiantly, but he shook his head. “No, noble sir, I thank you. You are indeed good and kind. But I am the eldest son in my father’s house, and my next brother, James, is only a little lad. Father Joseph could not do without me in the shop, and I must help my mother with the grinding of the meal too. Oh, indeed, I could not leave them!”

The stranger frowned. “The son of the gods grinding corn!” he cried. “Ah, well, child, perhaps you have chosen wisely. The great world is a cruel place for such as you.”

He stood for a moment looking down at the boy’s serious face. “I wonder to what you will grow, when you find how far this world is from your dreams of the Kingdom?”

“Farewell, then, Jesus of Nazareth, son of the carpenter, since you will not come with me. I will remember your name and look to hear it again.”

He lifted a heavy chain of gold coins that hung about his neck, slipped it off, and flung it over Jesus’ head. It glittered strangely there against the coarse smock.

“Give that to your father Joseph,” he said with a laugh. “Tell him it is to help bring you to your Kingdom.” Then the stranger turned and strode down the slope toward his waiting chariot and horsemen.

Jesus ran along the height above the road, waving the shining chain, and calling farewell until the gleaming spears of the horsemen disappeared in a cloud of dust. The rider of the chariot waved his hand to the slender flying figure and smiled. But his face was grave and wondering as he rode on out of sight.

When Jesus returned to their rocky nook he met Asa, a small, trembling

figure, crawling out from under the bushes. Young Asa had been well nigh overcome at the sight of his friend sitting calmly talking with the grand stranger, while all those spearmen waited below. He fingered with awe the amazing gift the stranger had left.

“He said I was to give it to Father Joseph,” Jesus explained. “He would never wear it, I know. But perhaps it may help repay Simeon the usurer. Do you think so, Asa?”

The two boys could talk of nothing else but the wonderful stranger and his chariot and his horsemen as they went back up the hills again. Then the story had to be told all over again to Nahor when they reached the hut. Nahor declared that if it had not been for the gold chain he might think the boys had dreamed it all. He put away the treasure in a safe place till Joseph’s return.

It was almost noon of the next day when Joseph came plodding up the hills from the plain, his steps slow and heavy. His visit to Enos had been in vain. Last year locusts had destroyed his cousin’s vineyards. This year drought was ruining his crops. Enos would have to give the taxgatherer for the hated Roman conquerors everything he could save. So Joseph was returning empty-handed, struggling to hold to his faith in this last bitter disappointment.

When he reached a turn in the path that brought him into view of the shepherd’s hut on the height, a figure darted out from it like an arrow from a bow. Jesus came leaping down the slope with shouts of welcome. Joseph’s sad face broke into a smile. His heart felt lighter. It was not possible to doubt Jehovah’s goodness in the face of young Jesus’ radiant faith.

When the glad greeting was over the story of the caravans and of the stranger was told in a tumble of words, Joseph took the heavy chain of gold coins into his trembling hands. He stared at them in speechless wonder. Here was enough money to pay Simeon all his debt. He made Jesus tell the story again and again, and listened as if in a dream.

“It is the hand of the Lord,” Joseph whispered in awe. “Jehovah has stretched forth his arm to save!”

They knelt side by side on the rocks, their hands raised toward the east, where the Holy City lay far beyond the Samaritan hills. Together they chanted the psalm of thanksgiving:

“ ‘Bless the Lord, O my soul;
And all that is within me, bless his holy name.
Who redeemeth thy life from destruction;
Who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies;
Bless the Lord, O my soul!’ ”



10. The Great Journey

THE VILLAGE of Nazareth was as busy as a hive of bees. More than a hundred people were up with the dawn and preparing for their journey to the Passover at Jerusalem. All the grownups of old Asa's family, with young Asa added, were in the pilgrim party; Nathan, the shepherd, with most of his family, except Joel who remained home with the sheep; the potter and his household; Rabbi Matthias and all his. And of course Joseph the carpenter, with Mary and Jesus.

Everyone was glad it was a large party, for the road was long and dangerous, and a big company was safer than a smaller one.

Everywhere the black tents, made of goat's hair, were brought out, rolled up, and tied on the backs of donkeys or camels. Pots and jars for cooking food on the way, and the food itself for the early part of the journey, were added. Old Asa and his wife each had a camel to ride. A few others had donkeys. But most of the company, like the carpenter's family, tied their sandals securely and went on foot.

Jesus had been up since long before dawn. He ran about whistling and singing, giving everyone a helping hand. He helped Mary and Ruth put away the simple household goods where moths would not get at the clothing, nor rust at the brass jars. He helped Joseph pack away his tools and nail up the shutters of the shop. Last of all, with young Asa's help, he led Timna up to Aunt Abigail's house, where she and the younger children were to stay. This was no easy task, but it was great fun for the boys. Timna behaved very badly, even for a goat. She ran away and climbed walls. She tried to knock over anyone who came near her. Indeed she did everything she could to show that she did not want to leave home. The boys were weak with laughter and the struggle by the time they tied her up in Aunt Abigail's courtyard.

When Jesus returned home, he put on the new suit his mother had made for him. It was quite different from any clothes he had ever worn, for these were the tunic and girdle of youth. Never again would he wear his child's clothes. The new cloak made him look taller and older. He was very happy over his suit until he saw with wonder that there were tears in his mother's eyes.

Jesus was sorry to leave his little brothers and his sister Ruth. Even though they loved Aunt Abigail, and Rebekah and were looking forward to a happy visit in their comfortable home, the children grieved over the parting. Ruth put her arms tightly about Jesus' neck, and the little boys clung to him with tears. It needed all Aunt Abigail's coaxings to part them.

King David's shining crown was gone and the morning was well spent when at last the caravan moved slowly out of the village and climbed the hill to the north. They followed the road that led out to the great highway, the Via Maris that ran between the Mediterranean and the Jordan. All the way up the hills beyond the village Jesus stopped often and waved his new blue cloak to the little group on the roof of Aunt Abigail's house.

When at last they were out of sight, Jesus strode ahead where the men were. He was not the sort to be sad for long, and it was a morning to make anyone glad. The hills of Galilee were carpeted with blossoms. The little pools, still left in the stream beds, were filled with blue iris. Every thicket was aflame with scarlet lilies. Hedges were gay with golden broom, set thickly with pink roses. And the birds! Jesus counted a dozen different songs, from the lapwing with his loud scream to the lark singing far up in the blue heavens.

The caravan wound through the yellowing unfenced grain fields that covered the broad hilly country. Jesus was always ahead, running along the flowery pathway, the swiftest runner, the boldest climber. His bright eyes missed nothing.

His quick eye and swift foot served the company well on the third morning of their journey. They had spent the night in their tents on the slope of Mount Tabor and had set off early down a wild, lonely stretch of road.

Illustration - *In the ravine*
Jesus spots the robbers who plan to attack the caravan.

As they neared a narrow ravine with towering cliffs on either side, Jesus darted ahead alone. He hoped to have time to scramble up the sheer sides of a cliff before the caravan overtook him. Suddenly a sharp whistle above his head

brought him to a standstill. Looking up, he caught sight of a band of armed men, crouching behind the bushes at the top of the cliff. A fierce-looking sentinel, half hidden by a rock, was looking toward the pilgrim band that was just entering the pass. Noiselessly Jesus dropped behind a clump of oleanders. Then he whirled about and sped back like the wind.

The other boys, who had been looking for him, raced down the slope to meet him.

“Robbers!” Jesus gasped, breathless. “Up on the cliffs! Quick!”

The boys turned and almost outran him in their headlong race for safety.

They rushed to the group of well-armed young men who always headed the caravan. A halt was called immediately, and orders given for all to move back up the slope. Another band of pilgrims, larger and stronger than the Nazareth party, was on the road only a mile behind. They decided to wait for these reinforcements. As they waited, they ate their noonday meal, keeping a sharp lookout ahead.

The boys were praised for their good scouting. “You shall be made our head sentinel, Jesus,” said Nahor, who was leader of the guard.

“Indeed, you shall stay by my side for the rest of the journey,” Joseph declared sternly when he realized what danger the boy had been in.

Judah, the young uncle of the shepherd’s boys, liked to tease them. “Saul is a great runner!” he cried. “You can leap like a hind, Saul, when danger is near!”

The men laughed, but Jacob came to his brother’s aid. “Anyone would run from robbers,” he declared.

“Everybody was afraid,” Saul added.

“Jesus was not afraid,” young Asa spoke up loyally. “He ran to warn everybody.”

The men looked at the boy as he sat perched upon a rock beside Joseph. The wind tossed his hair and his face glowed with excitement.

“How would you like to go down there and fight the robbers, son of the storm?” Nahor asked, laughing.

Jesus shook his head thoughtfully. “I should not like to fight them,” he said at last. “Perhaps they are hungry and wanted to get some of our food. Couldn’t we take them some?” he asked eagerly. “We have plenty.”

The men laughed heartily. “And then they would take all our clothes and

our money!” cried Micah.

“What would you do if they wanted that new warm cloak your mother made you?” Judah asked.

Jesus considered this for a while. His boyish face was grave.

“It is very cold up there on the rocks at night,” he said. “I think I could spare them my cloak.” He looked down at his new blue tunic. “I think I could give them my coat too,” he added earnestly. “I am never very cold!”

The men laughed, all but Joseph, who knew well that these were not the words of a thoughtless child.

When they were joined by the other caravan, the pilgrims moved safely down through the narrow pass.

Soon they left the hills of Galilee, and the highways grew broader and busier. Jesus’ eyes were full of wonder as he walked by Joseph’s side. Companies of Roman soldiers went clanking past in glittering arms. Wealthy men in rich robes rolled past in their chariots or were borne in litters on the shoulders of slaves. Rich merchant caravans met them, with long camel trains bearing great corded bales and chests from the far East for the wealthy cities of Rome and Corinth and Alexandria. And always bands of ragged thieves and miserable whining beggars dogged the footsteps of the pilgrims.

When they had crossed Galilee, the travelers turned southward and followed the Jordan River banks. At night they camped by the water’s edge, and their evening psalm mingled with the rushing sound of the swollen river. The Jordan valley was hot and the air seemed heavy to the folk from the hills of Galilee. The boys kept closer to the company here. The thick jungle that bordered the Jordan hid the dens of many wild beasts, and at night the men encircled the camp with a fire of thornbushes.

At last they reached the great city of Jericho, with its palm groves and its marble palaces. Here they turned their backs upon the Jordan and climbed the great sandy hills that lay between the river and Jerusalem.

It was late afternoon on a burning hot day when, weary but happy, they climbed the last steep hill and came out upon a height that gave them a view of the shining towers and bristling walls of the Holy City.

When Jesus, again far ahead of the party, caught his first glimpse of Jerusalem, he stood spellbound. Between the hills where the party halted and the hill upon which Jerusalem stood, was a deep gorge, where the little river Kedron flowed. As they looked across, the great city seemed to sit high upon

her throne, apart from the common places of earth. Jerusalem was a glorious sight—mighty walls, towers, and pinnacles, and the magnificent Temple, all white marble and gold, set against the glow of the western heavens.

Jesus caught hold of Joseph's robe. "See!" he cried. "Oh, see! Our Father's house!"

The whole pilgrim band burst into a chant as they came up the slope: " 'Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth!' Jerusalem! Jerusalem!" They marched, singing and shouting for joy, across to the Mount of Olives, where they were to pitch their tents.

Night came down swiftly and there was little enough time to prepare the camp. The slopes of Mount Olivet, which an hour earlier were quiet orchards of olive trees, were turned into a bustling, noisy town. Under every tree was the tent of a pilgrim family. Smoke rose from scores of little fires; men, women, and children, camels and donkeys filled the spaces between the trees. On every side were shouting and laughter and singing.

The evening meal was hurried. The prayers, with hands held up as always to the Holy City, now so near, were soon over, and the pilgrims slept on the slope of Olivet, opposite the goal of their journey, Jehovah's holy Temple.



11. The Father's House

EARLY the next morning the little party from Nazareth set out for the Holy City. Forming in procession, they moved down the slope, across the valley of the Kedron River, and up the steep hill to the city gate. As they marched they chanted a pilgrim psalm: “‘Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem!’ ”

Every road leading up to the city was thronged with groups of pilgrims, all on their way to the great gathering of the Passover. Mingled with them were long merchant trains of nodding camels, fastened together by jingling chains; little donkeys, with great loads on their backs; and women from the small upland farms of Judea, bearing fruit and vegetables and grain in huge bundles on their heads. People from far lands, with dark faces, strange barbaric dress and stranger speech; wealthy, bejeweled women, carried in luxurious litters on the shoulders of Nubian slaves; silk-clad merchants, looking down haughtily from their richly decked camels; rumbling, heavy-wheeled chariots; stern Roman soldiers in shining armor; ragged, screaming children; filthy beggars shouting for alms; goats and sheep, camels and donkeys—all jostled and crowded together in the city gateway. The bazaars, where costly rugs and silks and jewels dazzled the eye, were jammed with shouting, bargaining merchantmen.

The bewildered pilgrims from Nazareth struggled through the crowds, striving to keep together. Jesus and young Asa clutched each other's hands and kept as near to Joseph and Nathan as possible.

Jesus stumbled along silently, all the glory and wealth of the great city lost on him. He saw only the stern Roman soldiers thrusting people aside with their spears; the gaunt, starved children, holding out bony hands for food; the ragged women, with desperate eyes looking out from under their veils; the cripples picking up scraps of food from the filth of the street; the blind, the

halt, and the maimed, almost trampled upon by the pilgrims going up joyously to the worship of Jehovah in his Temple.

Jesus had been brought up in a poor home. He had learned the hard lesson of getting along with little food and clothing. But he had never known actual want, and in his quiet little mountain village he had never seen such sharp contrasts of poverty and wealth. He was amazed at the indifference to suffering in those who were here to worship Jehovah. In this Holy City, which was especially his Father's dwelling place, how could his children be hateful and cruel and selfish when the Father was all-kind and loving?

Mary noticed the excitement of Asa and the other children. She saw that Jesus' face was pale and that he was striving to keep back the tears. She understood her son better than anyone, and knew that his tender heart was being wrung.

"These are cruel sights, beloved," she whispered, putting her hand on his shoulder. "A great city is always a sad place. But see, we shall soon be at the Temple gate."

He looked up at her gratefully, and his bright smile flashed through his tears. Ah, yes, the Temple! Everything would be well there. Nobody could be sad or hungry in the Father's house.

The Temple area was not far from the eastern gate at which they had entered the city. Suddenly the sorrow left Jesus' face, for here, towering high above their heads, were the gleaming bronze and gold pillars of one of the Temple gates.

The throngs moved more quickly, but Jesus did not miss the sight of the beggars huddled at the gate. There was a little girl with pleading eyes who somehow reminded him of Ruth. With her was a little boy about the age of James, blind and crippled. Both were crying aloud for bread. There were many others almost as miserable, but the pilgrims pressing in to the worship of Jehovah took little heed of them.

Illustration - *In Jerusalem*
Crowds in the street on the way to
the temple area.

With the great crowds the party from Nazareth was swept through the gateway into a spacious pillared court—a great walled and paved area, where Gentiles as well as Jews were allowed. It was surrounded by many rows of magnificent marble pillars, and the walls were covered with beautifully carved

and ornamented woodwork. This great space was thronged with people who had come to the Passover from every known country in the world. Each devout Jew who was head of a household had to buy a lamb to be eaten at the Passover feast, so a large part of this court was given over to the sale of animals for the sacrifices. It was like a great market place. Drove of sheep and oxen and cages of doves were ranged down one side. The shouts of the herdsmen and the bawling and bleating of the cattle and sheep rose above the hubbub of the crowd. There were long rows of tables where the moneychangers sat bargaining and haggling, for every Israelite coming from another country had to get his money changed into Judean coins. The court was filled with a roaring, shouting, arguing crowd. There was every sign of business and pleasure, but none of the worship of Jehovah.

Jesus looked up at Joseph in bewilderment. Surely they had lost their way and were in the wrong place!

“Is this the Temple? Our Father’s house?” he asked, pulling anxiously at Joseph’s sleeve.

But Joseph was busy keeping his family and friends together and, as head of a household, buying a lamb for the Passover. It must be killed in the Temple by the priests and offered on the altar, then taken home to be eaten by the family, as the chief part of the Passover feast.

When all the men of the Nazareth party had bought their lambs, they joined the throngs that were streaming across the court and up toward the Temple. A broad staircase of twelve shining marble steps led up to glittering gold and bronze gates and into the Court of Israel.

Along one side of this upper court were pillared and cloistered alcoves, where the great rabbis sat and taught their followers. These Temple schools were famous all over the world. Here any son of Israel from any land was welcome to sit and listen to the great men explain the Law and the Prophets.

This second court of the Temple was even more beautiful than the one below. It had marble floors, walls of bronze and carved wood, and long spacious aisles marked off by lofty pillars of marble.

But there were greater glories farther on. From this court rose another flight of broad steps up to the Court of the Priests. Away up there stood the bright, brazen altar and all the rich furnishings used in connection with the sacrifice. Still higher, raised upon a lofty marble platform, towered the shining Temple itself, all white marble and gleaming gold, blinding in the morning sun.

Mary and the other women and the younger children remained in the Court of Israel, for no woman was allowed to climb to the Court of the Priests. There was a beautiful quiet space, railed off and called the Court of the Women, and here they seated themselves. Jesus left his mother quite content, for old Rachel and Martha and Deborah and many other Nazareth friends were with her.

Rabbi Matthias, the ruler of the Nazareth synagogue, led the men and older boys up the stairs. Jesus and young Asa and the other boys who had entered their twelfth year followed, keeping close to their fathers, who were to present them in the Temple for the first time as sons of Israel.

As they mounted the great staircase, silently and reverently, from its far height came a burst of music. Through the long, pillared aisles sounded the clash of cymbals and the ring of silver trumpets. A long procession of white-robed Levites, chanting a psalm, swept past and encircled the altar. And then the pilgrims stood in the upper court, just beneath the shining towers of the Temple, and the stately ceremony of the Passover commenced.

Jesus stood close to Joseph. His boy's heart was full of awe and wonder in this bewildering confusion of priests chanting, trumpets sounding, smoke rising from the great brazen altar. His heart was longing and searching for something. This was his Father's house, the place he had always longed to see. Here, surely, more than any place else on earth, one would see and hear some sign of the great loving heart of God. For here was the very place of his abiding. Beyond those gleaming doors, away beyond those sacred purple curtains that swung from the lofty golden ceiling, was the holy of holies, where Jehovah dwelt. That was the sacred place where no one except the high priest might set foot, and he only once a year.

And yet all the pomp and beauty seemed strange and unreal and unlike Jesus' idea of the Father. For, above the clang of the Temple music and the chanting of the priests, Jesus could hear the cry of the poor beggars and of the little girl who looked like Ruth, starving at the Temple gate.

When the services were over and they returned to the Court of the Women, Jesus walked as if in a dream. Mary saw that he was deeply moved, but wisely she asked no questions. Together they followed Joseph as he led the way down the stairs.

They ate their simple lunch, sitting by the curb of a well just outside the Temple wall, in the shade of a great sycamore. When Mary gave Jesus his share of the bread and dried grapes, he carefully put aside half of it. Young Asa, seeing what his friend was doing, added some of his bread, and together they made a packet of food for the little girl who looked like Ruth.

When they returned to the Temple there was an unusual commotion at the gate. A wealthy Pharisee was just entering to engage in the noonday prayer. His magnificent robe, embroidered in silk and gold, was held up from the dust of the street by a servant, while another walked before him with a trumpet and a heavy staff, clearing the way for the great man. The humble little party of Galileans stood aside for them to pass. Jesus was just placing the food in the eager, clutching hands of the little girl and her crippled brother, when the Pharisee's servant raised his staff and roughly pushed the children aside. The beggar child was so intent on the food that she did not notice. Only by a swift movement did Jesus prevent the blow from falling upon her helpless head.

The feeling of indignation that always surged up in the heart of Jesus at the sight of cruelty to any helpless creature was hot within him as he watched the magnificent Pharisee sweep in between the Temple gates, the sunlight flashing on the jewels of his flowing headdress. A little later the Galilean party came upon the great man again. He was standing, praying aloud, in one of the alcoves in front of a great marble pillar. But Jesus could not bear to listen to the prayers of a man who had ordered the poor and needy from his path. He grasped young Asa by the hand and hurried away.

There were many wonderful sights to be seen in the Temple courts. As the pilgrims wandered about, looking and listening, Mary noticed that Jesus had always that hungry, searching look in his eyes.

When the afternoon began to wane, Joseph gathered his little party together. They must return early to Mount Olivet, for the lamb must be cooked and prepared for the Passover feast.

It was very late when the great supper was over and the weary pilgrims lay down in their tents. Jesus and young Asa curled up together on the ground, covered by their warm cloaks.

One boy fell asleep at once, but the other tossed about for a long time. He was sadly disturbed by visions of the tragic contrast between the magnificence of Jehovah's dwelling place and the hunger and want at its beautiful gates.



12. Cousins

THE THREE important days of the Passover feast were gone. They had been crowded with great meetings at the Temple, and the pilgrims from Nazareth had missed nothing. Though the feast continued for several days longer, visitors from a distance did not always remain after the third day. Rabbi Matthias, head of the band from Nazareth, was considering an early return for them. And old Asa reminded the men that their vineyards and grain fields would be waiting.

On the fourth morning Joseph and his family left the party on Mount Olivet and went to make a long-promised visit to their relatives, Rabbi Zacharias and his wife, Elisabeth, and their only son, John. The saintly old priest was too feeble to attend the services in the Temple any more, and Elisabeth, his wife, was also old. The family lived in the village of Bethphage, just around the slope of Mount Olivet to the south.

The road around the mountain wound between vineyards and beneath fig and olive trees. It was thronged with bands of singing pilgrims going up to the Holy City. As the three climbed a breezy height, Mary took Jesus by the hand and pointed to the south.

“Look, son!” she whispered. “Yonder is Bethlehem!”

Jesus gazed across the hills to the little white-walled village that had been his birthplace.

“Yonder is the road that shepherds came up from the fields,” Joseph said, halting beside them. “And down this path the three kings rode from the East. They knew you were called of the Lord,” he added solemnly.

Mary was silent, recalling that wonderful time. Not even to Jesus had she told all the mystery and glory that had attended his birth. But he had heard many times the story of the crowded inn and of his cradle in a manger. And he

always said he was glad there was no room in the inn, so that he had slept with the baby lambs.

Joseph moved on. Just around the curve of the road ahead was Bethphage.

Rabbi Zacharias was not a man of wealth, but his home on the slope of the hill above the village looked very fine to the visitors from Nazareth. The house was large and pleasantly cool after the hot walk. It was built around three sides of a courtyard, and in the center of the yard were a fountain and some fragrant camphor trees.

Joseph and his family were met at the gate by a young man and woman—Hannah, Elisabeth’s niece, and her husband, Ammon. These two looked after the household and the vineyards. They welcomed the travelers. Hannah ordered a servant to bring cool water to bathe their hot, dusty feet. Ammon dropped some sweet-smelling ointment upon Joseph’s head.

They found Zacharias and Elisabeth sitting under the trees beside the fountain. Elisabeth greeted them joyfully. She kissed Mary on both cheeks, then turned her dim eyes eagerly upon Jesus, who was standing shyly behind Joseph. Mary led Jesus forward to the old priest, and Zacharias placed his hands in blessing upon the boy’s shining head.

“The child of promise!” he whispered. “It is indeed a blessed day that brings this lad to be with us and our son.”

At that moment a door at the far end of the courtyard opened and a boy entered. He was dark, with straight black hair and black eyes. His face was grave, in strong contrast to the sunny, smiling face of his cousin from Galilee.

After John had met the visitors the two boys stood apart, looking at each other shyly. Jesus was the first to speak.

“I have wanted for such a long time to see you, cousin,” he said. “My mother said you would surely come to Nazareth some day.”

A smile lit up the other boy’s grave face. “I have often wished to go to Nazareth, when the rabbi let me out of school,” he said in his stately, grown-up manner. “But my father is too feeble for such a long journey.”

He glanced lovingly at the old man seated under the camphor trees, talking with Joseph. The two mothers were at the other side of the fountain, chatting. The boys slipped away together. John led the way to the garden where rows of pomegranate and fig and olive trees grew, and luxuriant grapevines were trained against the high stone wall. Along the sunny side of the house ran a hedge of lilies, heavy with fragrance. In the small homes of Nazareth there

were no such gardens, and Jesus ran down the pathway in delight.

“Oh, John,” he cried. “Do you not want to live in this garden all the time? It is so beautiful!”

John shook his head gravely. “No, when Ammon does not need me to help in the vineyards, I like to go up on the hills, yonder. I do not care to be shut up in a garden.”

Jesus nodded. “Yes,” he said, “I like to go up to the hills, too, to be alone with my Father.”

“But my father does not go beyond the garden,” John said, not understanding him. “Come, I will show you where I want to live someday.”

He put his sandaled foot into a crevice in the stone wall and drew himself up to the top. He turned to help his cousin, but found that Jesus, with a light spring, was beside him. John looked at him with approval.

“You can surely climb,” he declared.

From this height they could see over the brow of Olivet to the great tumbled hills of the desert, and away beyond to the deep valley of the Jordan and the Dead Sea.

Illustration - *With John*
The young Jesus and his cousin John
sit and talk under palm trees.

“When I am a man,” John declared, his eyes glowing, “I am going to live away down there in the desert. There are many holy men living in the hills there, and I shall try to be good enough to be one of them.”

“Would you live all alone, John?” Jesus asked.

“All alone.”

Jesus sat on the wall, swinging his brown legs and looking far over the great hills, golden in the warm sunlight.

“I should like to live in the hills above Nazareth,” he said at last. “And I should like to be alone there sometimes with my Father—I mean the Lord God. But I could not live alone always. My mother and my father need me. So do little Ruth, my sister, and James and my other brothers. And young Asa, who lives near our place, is my good friend and would miss me. My mother calls us David and Jonathan,” he said with a laugh. “No, I do not think I could

leave them.”

John shook his head. “That is not the sort of life that we must live. My father says that you and I have been called to serve the Lord.”

“Yes, our Father!” cried Jesus happily. “But the holy men up there on the hill—how do they serve the Father when they are all alone? Do they come down and serve him in the Temple?”

“No. They do not like the Temple and the sacrifices. Many of the priests in the Temple are not good men,” John added seriously.

Jesus looked at his cousin in dismay. “The holy priests?” he whispered.

“Rabbi Levi lives away up on that peak, all alone in a cave. He used to live in the Temple and serve at the evening sacrifice. But he left it because he did not think it was the will of Jehovah that he should stay. Now he spends his time away up there, fasting and praying.”

“Is he a prophet like Amos?”

“No, I do not think he is a prophet, but he is a very holy man. He says that the Pharisees are all vipers, and that when the Messiah comes the fire of Jehovah will fall upon them and burn them all up!”

Jesus’ blue eyes grew grave. He loved to think of this great prince, the Messiah, who was to come and save his nation. But he could not think of him as bringing the fire of God’s wrath.

“I thought—Father Joseph told me—that the Messiah would be like the shepherd that Isaiah tells about. ‘He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with his arm.’ ” He said the words with such tenderness that John looked at him earnestly.

“Perhaps you will be a great prophet someday, Jesus,” he said softly.

“And you, too, John,” Jesus said. “You, too, are called. My mother told me about it. We might go together like Elijah and Elisha,” he said, his eyes shining.

John looked at his cousin in silence for some time.

“Then it is you who will be Elijah, the leader,” he said with conviction, “and I shall be Elisha. Come, and I will show you where one of the holy men lives. It is not far.”

The two boys spent a happy morning, wandering over the hills. They returned when Ammon called them for the midday meal. Then it seemed only a few minutes till the visitors must leave in order to be back at the camp before

it was dark.

The two boys found it hard to part. “Could not John come and stay all night with us on Olivet?” Jesus begged, and John echoed the plea. He would come home early the next morning, he promised.

When the matter was laid before old Zacharias, he nodded, well pleased. He was glad that his son should be in the company of Jesus a little longer. Elisabeth warned her son to return early, before the pilgrims left for the Temple. And when all were ready to leave, the old man raised his hands in blessing as they stood about him with bowed heads. Softly he repeated the priestly benediction:

“ ‘The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face shine upon thee.’ ”

His shaking hands descended until they rested lovingly on the head of the boy from Nazareth.

When Joseph and Mary and Jesus and John came within sight of the camp in the late afternoon, they spied young Asa sitting forlornly on a rock, gazing anxiously down the road.

“Look, David!” Joseph cried, laughing. “Yonder is your Jonathan, waiting for you.”

The two boys ran to meet each other as though they had been separated for weeks instead of hours. John soon made young Asa’s acquaintance and the three ran off together. By the time the evening meal was ready, John had become acquainted with all the boys of the Nazareth party. When night fell, young Asa would not hear of their being separated, and Jesus asked Joseph’s permission for them to sleep in Asa’s tent.

“We are going to get up very early to take John part of the way home,” Jesus explained.

“And we would disturb no one if we slept together in my father’s tent,” young Asa added.

Joseph was seated before his campfire with three of the other men of his party. They were discussing the possibility of starting for Nazareth the next morning. Jesus had spent the night in young Asa’s tent before, so Joseph gave his permission, and the three boys hurried away. They played on the hillside above the camp and did not know that old Asa had joined the party around the fire and urged an early start for home. Some of the younger men wanted to stay the full week of the Passover, but at last the older men had their way. And

when everything was arranged for the move in the morning, the three boys were lying in young Asa's tent, sound asleep.

The next morning Jesus was awake before the stars had faded. He poked his head out from under Asa's low tent, and his eyes turned toward the Holy City. There was no sign of the white and gold of the Temple, and the great city itself was but a dim outline, for the mists still lay heavy in the valley of the Kedron. But a strange, soft grayness was stealing over the dewy world, and away across the desert beyond Jordan the heavens had taken on a crystal clearness.

Jesus crawled out carefully from the tent, and softly made his way up the path to the hilltop. The groups of camels and donkeys belonging to the camp were stirring sleepily and looking about for their morning meal.

Jesus had gone only a little way when he heard the swift pad of feet behind him, and John and young Asa were at his heels.

"Ah!" cried John. "'Be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices!'"

Jesus turned to him in delight. He loved a quotation from the Song of Songs, and as he skipped along the pathway he chanted another: "'Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out!'"

The three were marching along to his singing when they were halted by a call from below. Asa's father, Micah, was entering the grove where the camels were tethered. "Come back, Asa, lad," he cried, "and help your grandfather. He is calling for you."

"But why is Grandfather Asa awake so early?" grumbled young Asa in amazement. "I want to go with John and Jesus."

Jesus was full of sympathy, but there was no help for it. Asa must go back to the camp.

"When I have gone past the vineyards with John," Jesus promised, "I will come back and help you."

The two boys went on up the hill, and young Asa trudged slowly back. As he passed Joseph's tent he was surprised to see Jesus' mother preparing breakfast in the dim morning twilight. Surely everyone was stirring early this morning!

“Jesus has gone up the hill with John,” he called as he passed. “And he is coming back to help me with some work for Grandfather. May he have breakfast at our fire?”

“David and Jonathan!” Mary cried, laughing. “Yes, yes, child; he may. You must surely have your last breakfast here together.”

“Last breakfast?” Young Asa wondered what she meant as he ran across the hill, dodging between donkeys and tents.

Meanwhile Jesus and John were having a wonderful walk together over the hill toward Bethphage. The deep blue stretches of the Jordan desert were slowly turning to amethyst and rose. Around on every hand the lark and the thrush were making music to the dawn. Across the Kedron the towers and battlements of the Holy City and the high white glory of the Temple were slowly rising out of the rosy mists.

The boys walked in the glory of the morning, their arms about each other’s shoulders, and talked of the great things they would do when they became men.

When at last they parted, turning again and again to wave farewell, the sun had come up out of the golden desert and the Temple was like a white flame. Jesus stood gazing toward it, entranced. Surely the Father was near! There was God’s loveliness and his purity and his glory. It was the first time the Temple had brought him a feeling of joy since that morning when he had first entered its noisy courts.

Then, suddenly remembering his promise to Asa and that his mother and father would need him to bring water from the spring and help with the morning meal, he ran back along the path toward the camp.



13. The Father's Home

AS JESUS came down the slope of Olivet he looked along the road that led to Jericho. There he saw a slow caravan moving out toward the desert.

“Pilgrims going home,” he murmured, “and tomorrow we may go too.”

Then he entered the familiar olive grove and stopped and stared in utter bewilderment. The tents were gone! The place was silent and empty. Only the heaps of refuse, the trampled grass, and the dead ashes of fires told that a camp had been here. He ran back up the hill again to look at the caravan now disappearing into the great depths of the desert valley.

Zillah, the wife of an Olivet vinedresser, was sitting at her door with her baby in her arms. At the sight of Jesus she gave a little cry. “What, lad!” she said. “Are you not the Nazareth carpenter’s son? I told your mother you were with the others. I thought I saw you. Where have you been?”

Her husband came from around the hedge, his pruning hook in his hand.

“What is this?” he asked. “A Nazareth boy left behind?”

They were both much more distressed than the boy himself. Jesus did not like to think of his mother’s being worried when she found him missing, but he could not see any reason for being so disturbed.

“I can see how it happened,” he said. “My father and mother thought I was still with Asa, and Asa thought I was with them. But it will be all right. Perhaps I can catch them. I can run fast.”

“You shall do nothing of the sort, lad,” declared Jonas, the vinedresser. “You would fall among thieves on that evil road. Stay here with us, and your father will no doubt return for you.”

They gave him some bread and dried figs for his breakfast, and Jonas went

back to his work. Then Jesus, his eyes shining with the spirit of adventure, asked Zillah if it would be all right if he went over into the city. He wanted, oh, so much, to visit the Temple again.

“When my father and mother come for me,” he explained, “they will be sure to go to the Temple.”

The kindly woman looked at him with worried eyes. What could she do with a boy so independent as this? He seemed the sort of lad who would not get into much mischief. She was burdened with her children and her household cares, so she let him go.

Jesus ran down the slope of Olivet, across the Kedron Valley, up the steep road into the city gate, and on through the crowded narrow streets. The smoke of the morning sacrifice was rising high over the Temple, lighted up by the sun. The sound of music—priests chanting and silver trumpets calling—came down from the highest courts.

He climbed steadily to the upper court and walked through its lofty, cool arcades. At each alcove where the rabbis held discussion, he paused, the most eager listener. If the argument were over trivial matters, he would wander away and stand looking about, searching, searching for that sign of his Father which he had hoped to find in his Temple.

At last, tired out, he sat down on one of the great carved seats and gazed around. Surely God the Father was like that glorious shining cloud poised away up there above the altar, hovering over his children in love and beauty! But down here, right in the Temple, nothing seemed like him. Here was the clamor of business. Here were misery and sin and poverty. It was all a great puzzle.

The next morning Jesus was so helpful to both the vinedresser and his wife that Zillah declared she would keep him if his parents did not return for him. Jesus laughed, for he knew well they would come back. She let him go when the work was done, and he went back to the Temple again. And yet again on the third morning.

His cousin John had told him that a great and good rabbi named Hillel was teaching in the Temple. John had said that Rabbi Hillel was kind and liked to answer questions. So Jesus wandered about, searching for him.

He found the great man at last, sitting in a circle of listeners. He was a tall, handsome old man with a long white beard and keen, kind eyes. He was the greatest teacher in Israel, and was at present the head of the council that ruled Jerusalem under Rome. As Jesus paused before the group, Rabbi Hillel was

speaking of the Messiah, the Deliverer, whom every Jew expected would soon come to free Israel from the Roman rulers. This was a subject near to Jesus' heart, and he slipped into a corner to listen.

A richly robed Pharisee noticed the bright-eyed boy in the coarse Galilean tunic, and with a jeweled hand motioned him aside. The boy drew back, but Rabbi Hillel saw, and putting out his hand drew him right into the circle. The wisest teachers always made youths doubly welcome to their classes, and there was something so unusual in the appearance of this boy that the kindly old man was interested.

"When Messiah comes," a harsh voice was saying, "his first act will be to sweep the enemies of Israel into the sea!"

Jesus looked across at the speaker. To his surprise it was the Pharisee he had seen enter the Temple with such pomp and who had recited such long prayers on the first day of the Passover.

"Messiah will trample our enemies and oppressors beneath his feet," cried the richly robed man who sat next to Jesus, and the jewels in his turban flashed like fire. "Blood and fire and desolation for them, as he crushes them beneath the wheels of his chariot!"

Rabbi Hillel, looking kindly at the Galilean boy, noticed his glance of dismay. "What is it, my son?" he asked gently. "You would ask a question?"

"Oh, yes, Rabbi," Jesus broke out eagerly. "I thought that the Messiah would be—kind and good like our Father, God, even to the wicked enemies of Israel. I—I always thought he would be like Joel, our shepherd. Joel cares most for the sheep that go astray."

The Pharisee of the long prayers scoffed. "Sheep! Are you a son of Israel, and yet so ignorant? The enemies of Israel do not belong to the fold of the Kingdom! Outside are dogs and wolves!"

Jesus caught the magic word, "Kingdom." He must hear what Rabbi Hillel had to say about that. Surely such a great and learned man could answer all his questions. But the other men had broken into a hot argument as to who might be received into the fold of Israel. Hillel kept his eyes on the eager face of the youth before him.

"You would ask another question?" he asked, smiling, when the dispute had ended.

"Oh, Rabbi!" the boy burst forth in his eagerness, "will you tell me what is meant by the Kingdom of God?"

“Israel, the chosen people of God; they are God’s Kingdom,” interposed the harsh voice again.

Illustration - *In the Temple*
Jesus talks to the Rabbis in the temple.

Rabbi Hillel put his hand on the boy’s shoulder. “Israel is the door to the sheepfold, and through him all may one day enter. Jehovah’s Kingdom is wide enough for all.”

The boy’s face lit up. Here was one who knew his Father’s heart.

“Oh, yes, Rabbi!” he whispered. “And when will it be? Will it be soon?”

“A day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day,” he replied. “His ways are not our ways.” He rose, for it was almost noon.

“Come again, my son,” he said, his hand still on Jesus’ shoulder. “What is your name, and whose son are you?”

“My name is Jesus, and my father is Joseph, the carpenter of Nazareth.”

There was a stir and the sound of excited voices on the outskirts of the group. Jesus turned and gave a glad cry. There stood Mary and Joseph! He ran into their arms.

“Where have you been, child?” cried Joseph, with a great breath of relief.

“Son,” sobbed his mother, holding him close, “why have you treated us so? Your father and I have sought you sorrowing.”

The boy looked in wonder at his mother’s tears.

“But, Mother,” he cried. “Why did you sorrow? Did you not know that I would be here, quite safe? You knew I must be in my Father’s house!”

Mary did not answer. This was one of her son’s strange sayings which she could not quite understand. She told him how they had thought he was with Asa and so had not missed him until nightfall of the day they had started for Nazareth. Then she led him away, holding him close between her and Joseph, as if she could never again let him go.

The great men had turned back to their disputing, but Rabbi Hillel was silent as he slowly paced the pillared court. The head of the council of Jerusalem was still looking, with wonder in his eyes, after the figure of the boy from Galilee.

One hot sunny afternoon, when Mount David was sending long cool shadows across the valley of Nazareth, the pilgrims reached home.

Jesus and young Asa were ahead, as usual. At a turn in the path the valley opened, and there lay their home! The boys turned and shouted to the company the great news that Nazareth was there, as though they had feared that it might have been spirited away in their long absence. Then, followed by all the other boys of the band, they raced off down the hill, helter-skelter, at a breakneck pace. The whole village turned out to welcome them home. Men in field and vineyard dropped their mattocks and pruning hooks; women left their water jars at the well; old folks called a welcome from the housetops.

The streets began to fill with the relatives of the pilgrims: old Asa's household, from the head servant to the youngest grandchild; the potter's family, every one of them rejoicing to see even Huldah, the scold, back safely; Rabbi Ezra, shouting that his pupils must be at the school early the next morning; all the shepherd's family, headed by Joel, who was carrying, not a lamb, but his own baby, born while part of the family was in Jerusalem. Then Jesus gave a joyous shout that was echoed by a glad cry from his mother as four little figures raced down the hill from Aunt Abigail's white house. Far behind, Aunt Abigail struggled along with baby Simon in her arms! It was a great home-coming. The hills about Nazareth fairly rang with the joy of it.

It was better to come home than to visit the greatest cities in the whole wide world, Jesus declared as they sat together under the mulberry tree and ate their evening meal. And Joseph and Mary agreed.

Much later than their usual bedtime the little boys and Ruth stretched themselves on the cool housetop for their night's rest. Mary bent lovingly over each little head, her heart full of thanksgiving that they had been given back to her. She sat down beside them, still holding baby Simon in her arms. She could scarcely bear to lay him down. Joseph was still down at the gate, talking to a group of neighbors; there was so much to tell about their journey. Jesus had gone with young Asa to bring Timna home and, judging by the sounds from the street, the unreasonable little goat was quite as unwilling to come back as she had been to go away. Mary smiled as she listened to the boys' shouts of laughter over Timna's antics.

At last the little goat was led into the courtyard and tethered in her corner. Jesus stroked and petted her into good humor. Then he came running up the outer stair and sank down at his mother's feet, still breathless and laughing from his struggle.

It was cool and peaceful up on the roof. A great moon rose above the hills and touched all the little white houses with silver. Old Asa's palms laid a lovely pattern on the floor at their feet. Voices rose from the streets and floated across from other roofs where dim figures moved in the moonlight.

Jesus leaned his head against his mother's knee and gave a great sigh of content.

"Nazareth is a lovely place, Mother," he said, "and our home is beautiful, is it not?"

Mary smiled and touched his hair lovingly. It was good to hear him speak so of the humble little village and the poor little home, after all the grand places he had seen.

"It is because it is our home, beloved," she said, "and because love is here."

"Yes, and our Father is here, too," Jesus whispered. "Just as much as in the Holy City."

"Or in the Temple?" Mary asked wonderingly.

"Oh, yes," Jesus answered in perfect confidence. "I always thought he would be more there, in his own Temple, but he is here just as much." He gave a happy sigh. "Our Father is everywhere."

"Would you like to stay in Nazareth always then?" Mary asked wistfully.

"I should like to stay in Nazareth always," Jesus answered, "but—my Father may call me to go away."

He looked out over the dim valley, all silvery moonlight except for the deep blue shadows of the hills. Then his gaze rose to the softer blue above, where the moon shone like a jewel in King Solomon's crown. The great mountain seemed to look over the tops of lesser hills to the far stretches of the great world, that world thronged with people, the Father's unhappy, wayward children, hungry and poor, sick and sorrowing, all alike looking for a Deliverer. A great urge to go out and help the suffering throngs stirred Jesus' heart.

"And when my Father calls me I must go, Mother, must I not?" he said dreamily. "I must go, even if it be away from Nazareth."

Mary sighed softly, but her voice did not falter.

"Yes, my son," she said, "when Jehovah calls you, you must go!"

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

The book and jacket contain illustrations throughout by Arthur Harper. As no details have been located regarding this illustrator, copyright status cannot be established. The illustrations have been omitted for this reason. Transcriber has added short descriptions of the illustrations to assist the reader. These descriptions are placed in the public domain.

[The end of *Boy of Nazareth* by Marian Keith [M.E.M. MacGregor]]