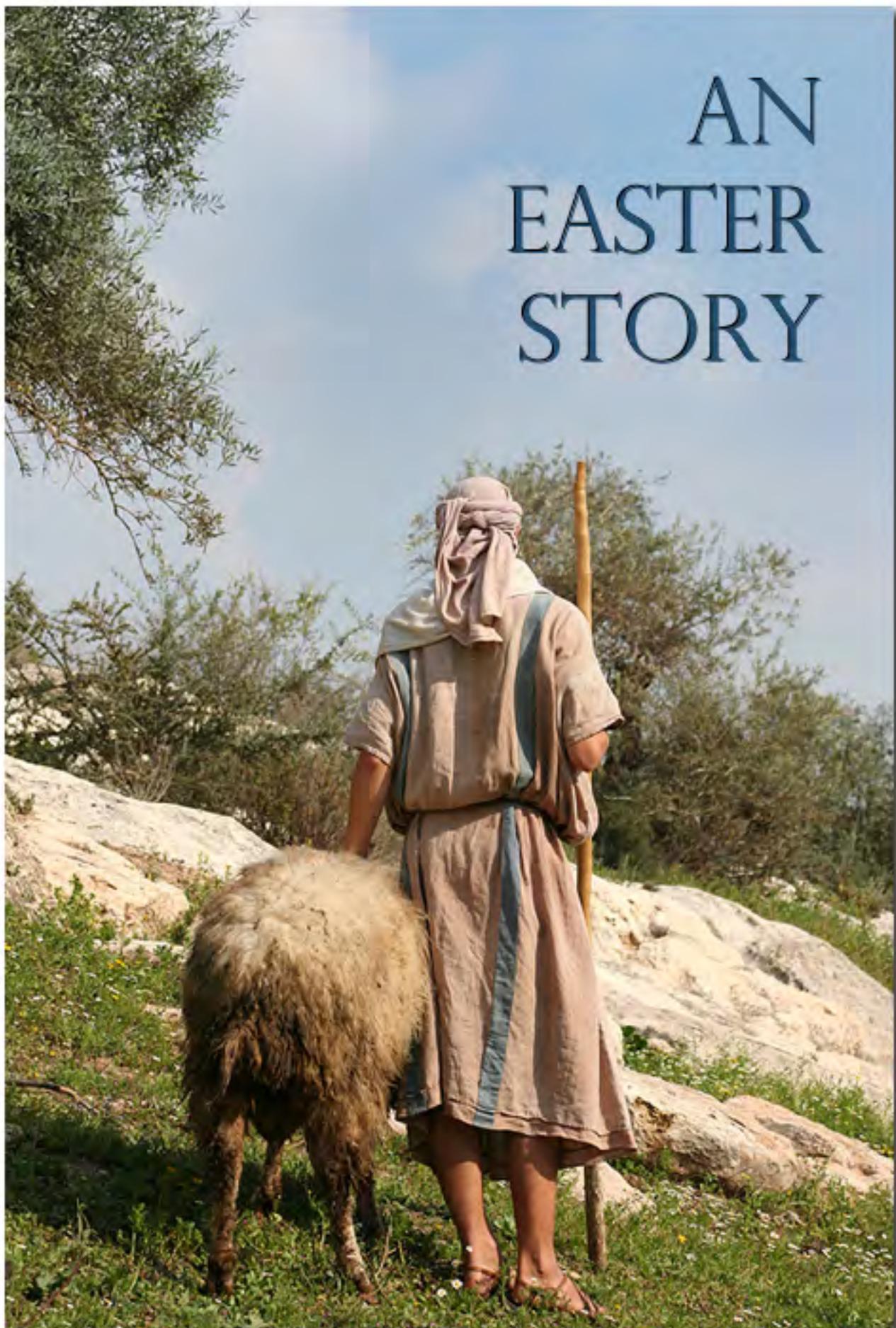


AN EASTER STORY



BY BARBARA GREENYER

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By Barbara Greenyer

The boy, Jacob, led his father down the rocky hillside that led up to Jerusalem from Jericho. His father, Ezra, had been blind from birth. Each day from daybreak until dusk he sat on a boulder, always the same boulder, begging for food or money from pilgrims on the road. Sometimes very few passed by, and he would get only a few denarii, but today there were many groups going up to Jerusalem for the Passover feast.

Jacob left his father and climbed again up the hillside, where he tended the flocks of their neighbor. Jacob lived with his father, Ezra, and his mother, Anna, and his younger brothers and sisters in a tiny dwelling near the little village of Bethpage. They were very poor, sometimes having little more than a handful of rice in the house.

Jacob spent all day on the hillside watching the sheep and the newly born lambs. It was nearly evening when he noticed that one of the lambs was missing. The mother ewe was bleating piteously, and Jacob set out to find the little one that had wandered away from its mother. When he found the lamb it was late, and the sun was already disappearing behind the city of Jerusalem. He bounded down the hillside to fetch his father home.

He came to the highway and ran along the rough road to the boulder where his father was always waiting for him, but when he came to the place, the boulder was empty! His father was not there! Jacob stood there trembling with fear; surely his father had not tried to make his way home alone up the hillside that was full of rocks and stunted thorn bushes? Then a worse thought struck him. Had robbers attacked him, a defenseless blind man, and robbed him of the money that had been given to him and thrown him over the rocks? Then Jacob looked up and saw a man coming towards him down the highway from Jerusalem. He was an upright man, walking carefully but with a firm tread and shading his eyes as if from a bright light. He looked as if he was someone to be trusted, and Jacob went toward him to seek his help. Then, as he came nearer, Jacob stopped. The man was his father, Ezra!

"Jacob," Ezra called, "I can see! I can see! As I sat by the wayside, listening as the people passed, I heard them saying that Jesus of Nazareth was coming, so I called out to him. 'What do you want,' he asked me. 'I wish to see, Master,' I said. Then, Jacob, he touched my eyes and slowly, slowly I began to see—first shadows, and then people, trees, hills, everything. I followed the crowd towards Jerusalem, wanting to find him. I had to, Jacob, I had to. But he was lost in the crowd, and I had to turn back. Was he the long-awaited Messiah, Jacob? The man who gave me my sight?"

Was he the long-awaited Messiah? Jacob and his father walked slowly up the rocky

pathway to their home wondering, wondering.

What rejoicing there was in Jacob's home that night! In the next days, Jacob showed his father the sheep and the lambs, all the flowers on the hillside. He showed him the stars at night, and he showed him the towers of Jerusalem. "God is so good!" said his father.

A few days later was the feast of the Passover meal, and, although they still had very little to celebrate with, their hearts were full of thanks to God.

"I would like to go to Jerusalem to find Jesus," said Jacob.

His father, Ezra, looked at him and said, "I think you should, Jacob. I think you should look for Jesus and thank him for all of us."

"After the Sabbath, you shall go," said his mother, Anna.

And so very early on Sunday morning, the day after the Sabbath, Jacob set out for Jerusalem. There were already many people thronging the streets of the city, but he followed a group of pilgrims and soon found himself in the outer court of the Temple. He stood there in the midst of the jostling crowds, who were shouting, bargaining, and chanting. It was very bewildering for the little boy. Where would he find Jesus?

It was then that he saw one of the Pharisees passing through the crowds on his way to the inner sanctuary, and he ran to him. "Please, please," he said, "where can I find Jesus of Nazareth?"

The tall, proud Pharisee looked down at the small boy. "Who are you?" he said.

"I am Jacob, son of Ezra, and I am looking for Jesus of Nazareth."

Then the Pharisee took Jacob by the arm and led him to a quiet corner behind one of the pillars. "Jacob," he said, "that name must never be mentioned again in the Temple. That man has been scourged and crucified by the Roman Governor. And there is no more to be said."

"But," said Jacob, "he cured my father of his blindness."

"Jacob, son of Ezra," said the proud Pharisee, "go home and never, never tell that story to anyone." And with that he pushed him away.

Jacob left the Temple, and with eyes full of tears and choking with sobs, he ran and ran, stumbling through the streets of Jerusalem, not knowing where he was going until he ran straight into the arms of a woman.

"What is hurting you, child?" she said. Jacob looked up into her kind face and he told her the whole story.

Gently she took him by the hand and led him to her house, where there were other women gathered, and when he had eaten the meal she had set before him, she said, "Yes, it is true that the Roman guards took our Jesus and scourged him and crucified him, but we know he was the long-awaited Messiah. Today, when our sisters here went to the place where he had been buried, they found that the stone had been rolled away from in front of the tomb. An angel stood there and told them that Jesus had risen from the dead, just as he had promised. Jesus has truly risen from the dead, and we have seen him, and he has spoken to us. Jacob, tell your father that Jesus, who took away his blindness, was the son of God as it was prophesied."

"I would have fought for Jesus if I had been there," said Jacob.

"Jacob, you can still fight for him but not with weapons against the Romans. You must fight for him only with love, just as he taught us to do."

At that, Jacob's tears were turned into tears of joy. Out of the city of Jerusalem, away from the shouting, unheeding crowds thronging its narrow streets and back down the highway and over the hill Jacob went, to tell his father, Ezra, and his mother, Anna, all he had heard.

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