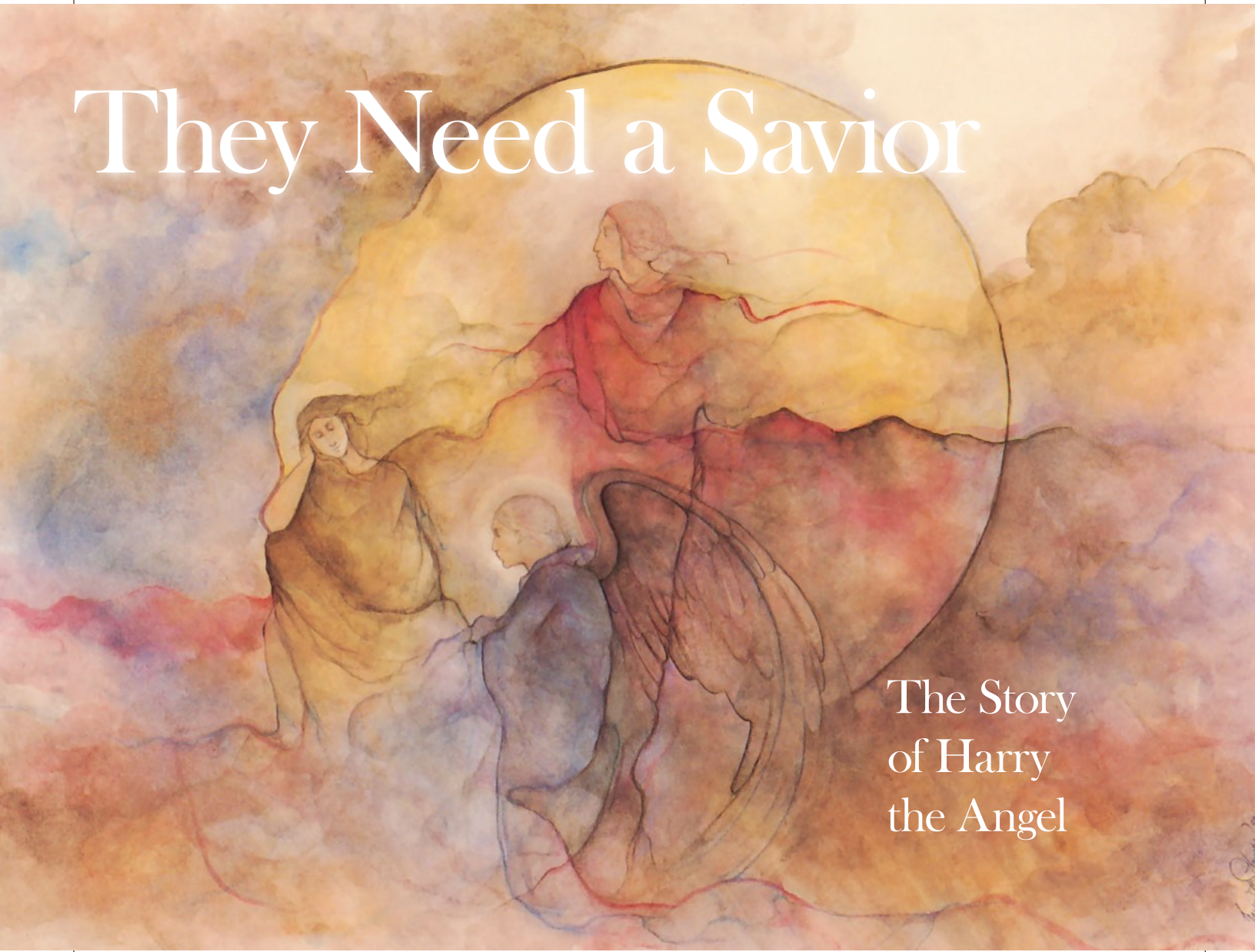


They Need a Savior

The Story
of Harry
the Angel



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Someone They Can Touch

HARRY, ANGEL 4-R (4TH RUNG), moved closer to the odd structure standing curiously weighted amidst the diaphanous splendor of heaven. It seemed to have grown up, like an ugly block-shaped mushroom, out of the vaporous terra of the heavenlies. The cube appeared as a gross uncleanness within the pristine dimensions of God's domain, with textures and unpleasant colors foreign to its inhabitants.

It's so ugly it hurts the eyes, Harry thought. *They must have told me wrong. How could The Son possibly be in that thing.* He moved closer, his curiosity overpowering the revulsion that filled him at the ugly sight.

Harry peered around one of the cube's corners. The second side looked exactly like the first. He crept ahead, carefully staying clear of the cube's surface, fearful that contact with the coarse material might inflict damage to his person. Reaching the end, he craned his neck around the next corner. This side was much the same, except that it contained a rectangular irregularity in its middle. A seam ran straight up to a point just above Harry's head, angled sharply right, where it met up with another seam running straight up from the cube's base. Near one of the vertical seams a loop of hemp rope protruded from the cube.

How does one enter such a beastly thing? Harry wondered.

Knock on the door, Harry, came the reply into his head.

“What?”

Make a fist and rap your knuckles against the door, just above the rope.

Harry clenched his fingers into a tight ball and struck his knuckles against the rough wood. Knock.

“Ow.” Knock. “Ow.” Knock. “Ow!”

“Come in!”

Harry stood staring at the wall. He stared at the seams that formed a rectangle. He stared at the hank of rope. *How?* He screamed into the space between his ears.

Pull the rope.

Harry yanked down on the loop of rope. The rectangle shifted, but failed to open.

Pull the rope toward you, Harry.

He grasped the rope firmly in his hand and yanked it straight out toward him. Suddenly the door flew open, sending Harry careening backwards, leaving him sprawled in a tangled heap.

“Well, hello Harry! Good to see you.” The Son reached down and set Harry back onto his feet.

“Y—you *know* me, God?” Harry stammered, nervously putting himself back in order.

The Son smiled warmly. “Of course I do. Now, what can I do for you?”

“What *is* this thing?” Harry asked, studying the curious structure. “Is it a new kind of throne?”

“No, no. It’s a house—a mud brick house that people live in down on earth. And this is how one comes and goes from inside,” He said, swinging the wooden door on its hinges. “Come on inside, Harry. It’s rather cozy.”

Harry followed The Son into the structure. “More like *confined*,” he suggested. Inside it was dark, smelled

of clay and damp straw, and the four walls and low ceiling seemed to move in on the angel, leaving him feeling uneasy, and more than a little claustrophobic. He sucked in his breath, as if air were in short supply.

The Son laughed and moved about the room testing its dimensions. “I think one could get used to it. Now, Harry, what’s on your mind?”

The angel had never before been so close to God. Only one among countless millions, he had always been lost in the crowd of those offering praise and worship to the throne. He knew that the upper echelon—the splendid archangels—was almost constantly in the presence of God, but those of his stripe were seldom so close to the throne and the magnificent Presence.

Now here he was, granted a private audience with The Son, and without warning his tongue became a leaden obstacle to expressing his thoughts. But he pushed back the powerful feelings of inferiority—feelings that even he realized were created solely in his own mind—and pressed ahead with the purpose of his visit.

“W—well, God,” Harry began, “I—I’ve heard a rumor—a rumor about *you*—and I thought I’d check it out for myself.” Harry exhaled, relieved to have finally gotten it out.

“A rumor, huh?” The Son said. “This can’t be good. What have I done now?”

“Oh, *no!*” Harry cried, horrified that The Son would think such a thing. “No—nothing like that, God. You see—”

“Listen, Harry,” The Son interrupted calmly, reassuring the angel with a warm hand on his shoulder, “pretty soon I’m going to be taking a new name—a *human* name. Why don’t you help me get accustomed to it by using it now.”

“Uh, sure. I could do that.”

“Good. The name’s ‘Jesus.’”

Into Flesh

Harry rolled the unfamiliar word around in his mind, sampling the flavor of it, mentally affixing the name to The Son. “Je-sus. Well, that shouldn’t be so hard. Jesus.” He grinned up at The Son, feeling his earlier nervousness slip away more with every moment spent in the Presence. “Well, God,” he began. “Sorry; Jesus, I’ve heard others talking about you going down to earth for awhile, and—”

Suddenly a light went off in Harry’s brain. Of course! The new name, the curious structure in which they now stood—these were in preparation for The Son’s visit! Harry was slow, he knew; he wasn’t still on the 4th Rung after all his centuries for nothing. But sooner or later he was able to put the pieces together.

“Then, of course,” Harry blurted out, “it *must* be true! Why else would you need a human name!”

Jesus grinned at the angel. He winked and said, “Harry, don’t ever let them sell you short. You’re right on the ball.”

“Then it’s true?”

Jesus nodded. “That’s why I made this house: so I could get used to living as humans do—to experience the sights and smells and sounds of their existence.”

“But Jesus,” Harry shook his head, perplexed, “You’ve never done anything like this before.”

“Sure I have. A few times, anyway. Don’t you remember when I visited Abraham and Sarah at the oaks of Mamre?”

Harry did remember, and recalled how fascinated he had been watching The Son personally give the two old believers the news that Sarah would indeed give birth to a son. Yes, and he now recalled even more instances in which God had visited earth to deal more directly with His people.

“So then,” Harry said, “this is no big deal.”

The Son turned quickly serious, moving about the small room as if measuring its circumference. “Actually it is,” He said, stopping before the wall opposite the door. Instantly a small square opening appeared in the mud brick, and white heavenly light pierced into the dark interior of the structure. “This time, Harry, will be *quite* different. This time I’ll be there in the flesh.”

Horried at the prospect, Harry felt his stomach twist in revulsion. “*Flesh?*”

“Oh, it isn’t all *that* bad,” Jesus chided. “There are millions of people living that way right now.”

“Yeah, but they’re *used* to it! You’re used to so much better.”

“But it’s the only way it can get done.”

“What?” Harry screwed up his face. “What would be so important that you’d have to do all that?”

They Need a Savior

The Son looked into Harry’s eyes in a penetrating way that the angel had never before experienced, and said, “Their redemption. It’s time for me to go down to earth and fulfill the law We established long ago.”

Becoming transfixed by the Presence, and The Son’s willingness to sacrifice His own comfort, Harry said in a hushed tone, “But, in person? Couldn’t you do it from up here?”

The Son moved toward a corner and a small, crude stool appeared. He sat down, rested his chin in his hand, and said, “There was a time, long ago, when We considered that. But you know, Harry, these people need a Savior. They really do. They need someone they can see with their own eyes, whose voice and words they can hear for themselves—and they need someone they can touch, and feel is really there with them.”

Having never been assigned to earth, Harry’s experience with humans was strictly secondhand, but he was

beginning to understand how, because of the type of beings they were, they might appreciate God meeting them on their own level. He turned to The Son and said, “They need a ‘Jesus.’”

“It’s the best way to show them God’s love,” Jesus said. “Put Him into flesh.”

Harry stared out the newly formed window, gazing into the more familiar brilliance that enveloped the tiny hovel. “Okay, I think I can see this,” he said. “But one thing—and please, Jesus, I don’t mean any disrespect—are these the right people? Is this the right time? As I understand it, the world’s a pretty small place right now, and these people have a lot to learn. Things are fairly primitive down there.”

“It was worked out long ago, Harry. Now’s the time.”

“But is it necessary to give all this up—the throne,

the grandeur, the *glory*—to go where people live like this?”

The Son answered with a sigh. “It’s a small thing, really, to give up my glory for a little while, so that so many others might have it for eternity.”

“But Jesus,” Harry said seriously, “you’ll be losing who you *are*—your identity.”

“No, I’m not losing it. Just setting it aside for awhile. I’ll still be God, only now—for a little while—I’ll also be man.”

“Sounds complicated,” Harry said, screwing up his face.

“Yes, I suppose it is,” Jesus said, rising from the stool. “But nobody ever said it would be easy to save all of mankind.”





Just Like Everyone Else

JESUS PUSHED OPEN THE WOODEN DOOR and held it for Harry to leave the small house. From the compressed dirt floor of the building, Harry expected to step onto the familiar, unresisting surface of heaven, but instead found himself standing upon another, even more unpleasant surface: mud.

“Oh,” he blanched, grimacing as his foot sank down into the wet muck. “What’s this?”

Jesus laughed. “What’s the matter, Harry. Afraid of a little mud?”

“Mud?”

“A mixture of water and dirt,” Jesus explained. “This is what happens to a road in Palestine when it rains.”

“Rains?”

“Never mind, Harry.” Jesus sighed, stepping carefully through the muck until he found a drier path, which he followed down the middle of the roadway that passed between two rows of dwellings almost identical to the one they had just left.

Harry tried to keep up, placing his feet carefully along the same path as Jesus, trying to keep his steps out of the unpleasant mud. The light level was dramatically reduced, and his eyes were having a difficult time adjusting. Harry strained to see through the faint light: the seemingly endless rows of drab, mud-colored houses varied only by the dim glow of oil lamps that could be seen through a few of the open windows.

“Why is it so dark, God?”

“Ah,” The Son raised his finger to remind Harry of his mistake. “Jesus, remember.”

“I’m sorry. Yes. I’m having a hard time remembering. Why is it so dark, Jesus?”

“This is what is called ‘night’ on earth. It’s how it looks when the earth has rotated out of the sun’s path.”

“How terrible for them!” Harry gasped. “And how often does this phenomenon occur?”

“Every twenty-four hours, of course.”

“Oh my! No wonder they’re in such a terrible state.”

“Not at all,” Jesus chuckled. “It signals a time of rest for them. Very important for the human body. Since I’ll be spending a little time in one, I wanted to get the feel of it early on.”

They Need a Savior

“This seems like such a drab existence,” Harry said, continuing on just behind Jesus. He imagined the impact on the residents when The Son burst upon their community, and his breast swelled with pride, knowing that he—a lowly 4th Rung angel—was playing even

a small part in God’s preparation. “I sure wish I could be there when you make your grand entrance,” Harry said, his voice heavy with awe. “It’ll sure be something to see.”

“Why do you say that?” Jesus said, continuing down the street, glancing here and there at the houses painted by the fading light.

“What? What do you mean?” Harry stammered excitedly. “Why, just picture it: The Son of God arrives on earth in all his heavenly glory! There’ll be trumpets and cymbals and cheering throngs to greet you when you show yourself to them. Why, they’ll be so *surprised*—so happy that the Messiah has finally come, in all your majesty!”

Jesus turned quickly around, stopping the effervescent angel by the shoulders. “Harry, settle down! Listen to me now: It’s not going to be that way.”

Harry gazed up into the eternally patient, yet insistent face of The Son. “It’s not?” he said meekly.

“That’s not how humans are born.”

“*Born?*” Harry cried, his gut filling again with revulsion at the thought of that most unseemly human practice. “But, you—I mean you’re already—”

“Yes. I am,” Jesus said firmly. “But I must become flesh, and flesh must be born. It doesn’t just appear.”

“But Jesus, isn’t the whole idea to make some kind of an impact down there? To actually *change* the world and its ways?”

“The idea, Harry, is to save lives. The idea is to give people a chance to live with God forever.”

“Okay. Right. And I would think the best way to accomplish that is to make a real splash. Give them a display of your power—your *might*. Really impress them!”

“Harry, Harry,” Jesus shook his head sadly. “You don’t know these people as well as you may think. They

aren't impressed with 'splash.' You're forgetting about the biggest splash We ever made. Remember when We helped Moses save the people from the clutches of Pharaoh? We split the Red Sea into two parts, revealing the dry land, gave them safe passage between towering walls of water. Talk about an impressive miracle!" Jesus gazed sadly around him at the people beginning to emerge from the houses after their small evening meal. "Before the water could even fill in the dry channel they were grumbling and complaining to God." He sighed, and spoke with a voice heavy with sadness, yet at the same time filled with overwhelming compassion. "No, they may be impressed for the moment, but that's as long as it lasts: a moment. They don't need a parade. They need a Savior."

A Lot to Take In

Harry was silent, watching the face of The Son as he studied the people around the houses, images momentarily oblivious to their audience. Harry felt the sadness like a great heat coming off The Son's figure, and enveloping even him like an uncomfortable woolen cloak. The angel could not bear the weight of God's emotions, and stumbled back away from him.

Harry still felt he needed to confirm the unbelievable news. Finally breaking the silence, he said, "So you'll be born."

"Just like everyone else down there," Jesus answered quietly.

The angel shuddered and said more to himself than to his companion, "There's got to be a better way."

Jesus grinned at Harry, relaxing again. "Oh, and We've already picked out my mother," he said teasingly. Harry, still having a difficult time comprehending all this, remained silent. "She's a sweet girl," Jesus continued, "from Nazareth—a small town very much like

this." He swept his arm around to encompass all the streets and dwellings and people around them. "She's engaged to be married to a man from the same town, so I guess that'll be my home town." Then he repeated the name, as if enjoying the simple act of forming the word between his lips. "Nazareth."

Their path had taken them to where the rows of houses stopped, where the road broadened into the coarse scrub of the surrounding low hills. Jesus stopped, scanning the horizon, still immersed in thoughts of his new family.

"Her name is Mary," he said with quiet delight. "That's a nice name, isn't it Harry. Her betrothed is Joseph. Mary and Joseph—they'll be my parents."

Harry was still wrestling with the mental picture—struggling to place The Son in the lowly confines of a humble village such as the one in which they now stood, surrounded by people of low means, such as these that milled about the town's mud streets. He tried to imagine The Son as a tiny babe held in the arms of a young girl named Mary, and the idea was so incredible to him that the image kept vaporizing before he could complete the picture in his head. It was just too much for his small mind to comprehend. Harry thought about the girl, her innocence, her fragility, and the amazing idea that she could actually hold God in her two small hands.

"Will she know?" Harry asked.

"Know what?"

"That she's giving birth to the Son of God."

Jesus nodded his head. "Gabriel's already told her."

Harry was beginning to realize that these humans must be made of tougher stock than he had first imagined. "Must be quite a lot for a young girl to take in," he said seriously.

Jesus turned to head back down the street, deeper

into the darkening light between the crude hovels, back
to the villagers now preparing to retire for the night.

“Yes. I imagine so,” He quietly sighed.



Meek and Lowly



THE ROAD BORDERED BY MUD BRICK HOUSES WAS GONE. The mingling people going about their evening business were gone. The whole untidy scene was gone, replaced by the opaque purity of heaven. The uncomfortable sensation of being trapped in a wrong place was leaving Harry as the two walked together upon the more familiar surface of the angel's home. Far in the distance was a dark speck, and Harry wondered if they were perhaps returning to the first dwelling in which he had found The Son.

"You're looking forward to it, aren't you?" Harry volunteered.

"I'm looking forward to what it will accomplish," Jesus replied.

"Well, at least your parents—since they know you're the Son of God—will surely give

you a suitable lifestyle. Certainly you've selected parents from a priestly, or even royal family."

Jesus brightened. "Actually they are of the royal line of David. I'll be meeting them for the first time in Bethlehem—the City of David, and Joseph's hometown."

Harry was getting confused again. "But you said they were from Nazareth. That's in the north, isn't it?"

"They are from Nazareth," Jesus said, "but you see, the emperor down there—it's Caesar Augustus right now—he'll be ordering everyone to return to their family towns to be registered for a census." Jesus grinned at the angel. "See how it's coming together? He's counting heads, so I'll be born in Bethlehem instead of Nazareth. Bethlehem is Joseph's family town, so he and Mary will go there to be counted."

"Ah, then they have a second home there," Harry said triumphantly.

"Uh, no..."

"Family to stay with?"

"Harry," Jesus sighed, "they're in the royal line, but Joseph is a simple carpenter—an honorable man, but with very little in his purse."

A Rough Hovel

The angel was again frustrated by what seemed to him a convoluted logic. Surely, he thought, the best way to get the message out—the best way to accomplish the planned task—would be to place The Son into a prominent family, into a situation from which many would hear the message of deliverance. Or, if not a highly-placed family, at least near someone with a position of authority in Jerusalem—better yet, at the temple itself.

"But why a carpenter," Harry moaned, "when there are so many really important religious leaders in Israel—"

"Yes," Jesus grimaced, "too many."

"Wouldn't any one of them be a better choice?"

Jesus answered with a heavy sadness in his voice—with the sound of a father whose children have disappointed him deeply. "You may find this hard to believe," he said, "but most of the problems I'll have on earth will be caused by the religious leaders. They will become the biggest obstacle to people believing in me. And they'll go out of their way to get rid of me."

As Harry and The Son continued on, the far distant speck had gradually become larger, until the angel could see that it was some sort of rough hovel, similar to, but also different from the first. This dwelling appeared to have been carved out of solid rock. Instead of standing free, like the first, this one was a deep depression in the side of a hill. As they drew closer Harry saw figures milling excitedly about the crudely-arched entrance, craning their necks to see inside.

But Harry's mind was still on God's logic in placing The Son in a humble, peasant family, rather than with a more esteemed family of prominence. It still seemed foolish to him. Exasperated, he said, "Will there at least be emissaries present to properly inform the public?"

"Mmm—yes, in a manner of speaking," Jesus smiled as the pair came closer to the crowd of people outside the cave. "The shepherds will be close by," he explained, "and they'll tell others."

"Shepherds?" Harry squawked, emitting a sound similar to that of a person being strangled. "Out in the country? What will you be doing out in the country?"

"Well, you see," Jesus said as they approached the entrance to the cave, "the town will be filled with travelers there because of the census." The people smiled happily at the pair, and politely moved aside to give them passage. Past the scruffy onlookers, the two stepped just inside the opening, their feet shuffling onto the

deep mat of straw spread about on the floor. “So,” Jesus stooped to peer back into the cave’s dusty interior, “the only available lodging will be a stable.”

Who Is This?

Harry was again feeling that nagging sensation in the pit of his belly: the feeling of being in an alien place. The dust-filled air attacked his nose with the sharp stench of aging manure; around him came the bleating of lambs nuzzling for their place at a teat, and the baritone lowing of placid bovines incessantly chewing their cud. The light was so dim—one small oil lamp supplied the only illumination—that Harry could just barely make out the crouched figures huddled back inside the cave. And on top of everything else, he had a sinking feeling that he had just stepped in something warm and squishy.

Harry felt The Son’s hand on his arm. He looked up to see the smaller of the two figures before them reach down into the deep hay mounded atop a stone. The young woman appeared to be exhausted, her face worn and ringed by sweat-stringed hair that betrayed some great exertion. That she could hold herself up was a

wonder, but she lifted the tiny form to her breast. As the baby found the nipple, the woman smiled down at him and murmured something private and warm.

“Who is this?” Harry asked, still uncomfortable in this strange place, yet strangely drawn to the scene being played out before him. Who were these scruffy peasants with their newborn child taking refuge in such a wretched domicile? What sort of person would be so careless and unthinking as to give birth where the beasts were lodged? Surely these folks were the lowest of the low.

“I told you, Harry,” Jesus said quietly, as if he didn’t want to intrude on the moment, “I have to be born.”

The angel stared up at The Son, stunned. He couldn’t believe his ears! “You’re telling me that the long-awaited Messiah—the King of Kings—the very Son of God will be born in a filthy stable?”

Jesus chuckled at the angel’s not unexpected response. “You make it sound like a bad thing,” he said. “Harry, I’m not going to earth to be a member of royalty waited on by his subjects. I’m going down there to be a servant—so that I can wait on *them*.”



The background of the top half of the page is a painting. It depicts a landscape at either dawn or dusk. The sky is a vibrant mix of orange, yellow, and red, with a large, dark, silhouetted tree in the center. In the foreground, there are dark, silhouetted trees and a body of water reflecting the light from the sky. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

They Need a Savior

HE NEVER HAD BEEN DOWN TO EARTH BEFORE, but now that he had been sent, Harry was determined to make the best of it. He was determined to get along.

If the truth be known, Harry had never been terribly impressed by the human species; he had always considered them a most inconvenient, unsightly bunch. But ever since The Son had gone down to be born and live amongst them, Harry had acquired a new level of interest in the inhabitants of earth.

Harry had been set down in the hill country of Lower Galilee, directly west of the lower tip of the Sea of Galilee—the great fresh water lake around which lay the cities of Capernaum, Gennesaret, and Tiberias.

Almost immediately his feet began to ache. The road was hard-packed soil, and on this day it seemed to the angel that it may as well have been forged iron beneath him. Each step on the compacted earth jarred his bones. Meanwhile the gravity of the globe worked against him. Harry was unaccustomed to these physical constraints; heaven's surface did not press back against one's feet, and there was likewise no force constantly pressing one down toward the ground. *How do these humans bear it all?* He wondered.

The road followed the contours of the land, rising and falling, curving around the small hills. After awhile the road widened, here and there small dwellings began to appear nearby: an inn, a metal smith shop, a pottery shop surrounded by orderly rows of mud bricks drying in the sun. The private dwellings became more numerous, even sharing walls, until Harry realized he had entered what these people would call a town, or village.

To the angel everything was intolerably filthy. The walls of the houses were constructed of baked mud; the street was made of the same: dry or wet dirt; even the people themselves, in Harry's opinion, were badly in need of a bath: their exposed flesh—and especially the feet—was caked with dust. To Harry even the air itself was filled with dust, making it a challenge for him to breathe.

Flesh

Feeling perfectly miserable, and increasingly homesick for the purity of heaven, Harry continued on, passing down the road bordered by businesses and houses, until he came upon a shop surrounded by the pleasant aroma of freshly cut wood. Affixed to the outside wall was a hand-lettered sign that read "Carpentry." Harry peered inside the open window; planing a new tabletop, a

middle-aged man stood working on a floor littered with the curled shavings created by his tool.

Harry heard a rasping sound coming from a narrow alleyway next to the building. Crouched on a bench was a teenage boy filing a narrow piece of wood, smoothing the rounded surface to become a leg for the table being finished by the older man inside.

What is it about him? Harry thought. *He looks familiar, but how can that be. I've never been here before.* But something drew him closer to the boy. He stepped into the alley and moved toward him, mentally devising reasons he could use to explain his interest. Just then the boy heard Harry and looked up. Instantly his face broke into a broad smile, and the angel suddenly knew what it was that had drawn him inside.

"J—Jesus?" He said, not daring to imagine it was true.

"Harry!" The boy cried, leaping to his feet. "It's sure good to see you!"

His heart beating and his throat choked with emotion, Harry embraced Jesus, but then, remembering himself, quickly pulled away. "I—I'm sorry, God."

"Oh Harry," Jesus grinned, embracing him again, "I'm just so glad to see you again."

"I wasn't sure it was you," Harry said, suddenly aware of the odd sensation of touching flesh. He touched Jesus' arms, shoulders, gripped his hands. "So this is what it's like."

"How have you been, Harry?"

"I've missed you. We all miss you."

"I've missed you, too," Jesus said, picking up the table leg on which he had been working. "But I've got a pretty good life here."

"So," Harry glanced around, "when will it begin?"

"What?"

"C'mon," Harry said confidently, but leaned closer,

in case Jesus didn't want others to hear, "you're the Messiah! You came down here to save these people. When will you be taking over?"

"Take...over?"

Once again Harry was confused—and it was an unpleasant sensation. Why did he always end up feeling like such a dunce around The Son? There was always such a vast gulf of understanding stretched between them—as if Jesus had already made it safely to shore, but he still floundered out in the waves.

"Am I missing something?" Harry said, betraying his frustration. "Isn't that why you came down here in the first place? You said they needed a Savior!"

Jesus looked down, and Harry could feel the powerful wave of sadness emanating from him. "Oh, they sure do."

"So when will it begin?" Harry said insistently.

The Lamb

"Come with me," Jesus said, drawing Harry out from the alley and into the street. He led him down the street a ways, to where the houses stopped, then pointed toward a nearby hillside. "Harry, do you see that shepherd over there—the one surrounded by all his sheep?" Harry nodded, wondering what Jesus was getting at.

"Do you see how he keeps the flock close by, protecting the sheep from any predators?"

"Predators?"

"Wolves, jackals—they can come attack the sheep, kill them for food."

"Hmm—yes, I see," he nodded.

"Harry," Jesus explained, "I've come as a good shepherd, to offer protection and life to my flock."

"These people are up against some pretty stiff competition," the angel snorted. "Caesar, the Roman army,

Herod—don't you think they could use a little more than a simple shepherd?"

"You're right," Jesus said, "and they'll *have* more."

"Well, I would think so."

"Notice the small lamb in the arms of the shepherd," Jesus said, pointing again. "See how quiet and gentle it is, so spotlessly pure?"

"Yes, I see it," Harry sighed impatiently.

Jesus said quietly, "I've come as the Lamb of God—the sacrifice that will take away the sins of the world." The angel could only stare at Jesus incredulously.

"Harry, these people need a Savior," Jesus continued, "but not another king or warrior. They've already had that. I'm not here to save them from a power-hungry emperor, or an army, or a wicked king. I'm here to save them from themselves. Only God Himself will be a sufficient sacrifice to cover all that."

A New Beginning

Harry couldn't believe his ears. "So, you gave up everything...only to..."

"I love these people, Harry. I came to experience what it's like for them—what it's like to live with a body that ages and dies, what it's like to suffer loneliness and pain, to feel the pull of sin, to experience—as much as I can—what it is to be human."

"And I'm sure you've already experienced all that. Isn't it enough?"

Jesus turned to Harry, and again the angel could feel the powerful emotions of The Son pushing out from the small body of Jesus. "My living like them won't save them, Harry. But my dying like them will." He sighed and moved toward the hillside sprinkled with grazing sheep, as if he would like nothing better than to simply step away from his responsibilities. But then he stopped. "Later, when I'm an adult," Jesus continued,

"I'll spend some time teaching and discipling a few followers. But most people won't believe, and the religious leaders will conspire against me. They'll work with the Romans to put me on trial."

"*Trial?*" Harry squeaked.

"This isn't heaven, Harry. They won't easily believe who I am. They'll find me guilty—"

"Guilty of *what?*" Harry cried, his voice rising.

"It doesn't matter—it won't to them. They'll humiliate me, and put me to death with other criminals."

"But *you're* not a criminal!" Harry protested.

"I have to die, Harry. It's necessary—for them."

The thought of The Son being tortured and killed for these low, sinful beings filled Harry with anger and revulsion. How could they? How dare they kill the very one who had come to save them? Didn't they realize it was He who had *created* the world? Created even *them*?

His gut ached, and his mind was gorged with anger at these people. But still—even through his powerful emotions—Harry understood that all this was, incredibly, part of God's plan, and it was not his place to question. But his sadness for The Son was almost over-

whelming. He reached toward his friend. "Jesus..."

"But it's all right, Harry," Jesus consoled him. "Don't feel badly. It won't be the end—but a new beginning!" He smiled. "I won't stay in the grave. I'll return to heaven. And because of it, these people will have a chance for life—*real* life with the Father!"

"How much longer will you be here?"

"In earthly terms, quite awhile," Jesus said, placing his hand on Harry's shoulder affectionately. "But in heavenly terms, no time at all."

"Then we'll look forward to that day," Harry said bravely.

"As will I, my friend," Jesus said, turning back toward his home, "as will I."

Harry turned to leave, but then glanced back at Jesus, watching him return to his work at the carpentry shop. He would be returning to heaven still confused about the reason for Jesus to be here on earth. But he also understood that it really wasn't important whether he did. More important was that the *people* understood, for they were the ones needing a Savior.





One Thing Only

DANIEL, ANGEL I-R (1ST RUNG), DESCENDED EFFORTLESSLY from the euphoric wisps of heaven's upper reaches. Harry peered intently overhead, into the diaphanous strata that comprised both the atmosphere and terra firma of his home and place of creation. As Harry watched, his superior glided smoothly to a stop just in front of him. He had never before spoken directly to an angel of such high rank, but ever since he had become an intimate acquaintance with the Son Himself, Harry had lost some of his unease around those of more exalted title.

Some, but not all.

"Are you ready, Harry?" Daniel asked without preamble.

“Y—yessir,” Harry answered quickly, “but where are we going?”

“The Father has told me of your relationship with the Son,” Daniel said, ignoring the question, “so it seemed appropriate for you to accompany me on this mission.”

“Mission, sir?”

Daniel drew himself more erect, towering even higher over his inferior. “I am to be the messenger of the Resurrection.”

Harry’s face brightened immediately. “Resurrection? Then it’s true!” Ever since the recent crucifixion and burial of Jesus, Harry had been inconsolable. How could this be right? How could *this* be part of God’s plan? Ever since that most horrible and depressing series of events that ended with Jesus buried inside a stone tomb, Harry had mourned the death of his friend. He had occupied the long hours recalling his times with the Son—examining the odd and claustrophobic structure He had created to sample the dwellings that would be His on earth, walking the muddy village street with Him, and then discovering the newborn Jesus. And Harry had thought back to his later sojourn on earth, during which he had found Jesus at the carpentry shop, how Jesus had explained to him why He was there—and what it would mean for humanity.

Harry had accepted that the Son, as Jesus, would be sacrificed for the sins of mankind, but, in retrospect, he realized that he had never believed that the death would be, well, so *real*—that Jesus would actually *die*. It simply was too much for Harry to comprehend. Jesus was still the Son, and the Son could not die. He was eternal. He was God.

“What have you heard?” Daniel sniffed imperiously, interrupting Harry’s thoughts.

“Well, sir, there’s been talk.”

“Talk?”

Harry dipped his head in subjection. “Yes sir. We didn’t know for sure. I mean, the rest of us are never given all the details—”

“Need to know, Harry,” his superior reminded him. “Need to know.”

“Yes, of course. Still, we are curious, and it seemed to me there had to be a way out.”

“A ‘way out’?”

“The Father would never permit the Son to actually die.”

“But He has, Harry.”

Harry dared to look up into the eyes of his superior. There he saw that Daniel was sternly serious. “And n—now,” he continued nervously, “the Father has given Him a way out. There will be a resurrection.”

“There is a reason angels of your rank are not always given full information,” Daniel sniffed dismissively. “You do so poorly with what little you know.”

Harry hung his head, embarrassed.

The Tomb

It was almost dawn. As the two angels approached the tomb, they found it just as it had been prepared by the Roman guards. The large, wheel-like stone still covered the entrance, and still bore Pilate’s wax seal. On one side of the tomb entrance squatted two soldiers, warming themselves against the morning chill around a small fire. As they rubbed their hands together, they grumbled to each other about their lousy duty, and complained about their officers—who were still tucked warmly in their cots back at the barracks. On the other side of the great stone that sealed the tomb, Jesus sat quietly, his eyes closed, a slight smile on His face.

Drawing closer to Jesus, the angels knelt before Him. “Lord.” Daniel spoke with quiet reverence for

the two of them. Harry desperately wanted to rise and embrace Jesus, but was very much aware not only of his place, but the enormity of the moment. He understood that his being there at all was a rare privilege, and he dare not do or say anything out of turn. He remained with his head down, staring at the dirt and sand that paved the burial ground.

“Harry!” Jesus broke the silence. “I’m so glad to see you.”

“G—God,” Harry gasped, shocked that the just-risen Lord would address him in such a familiar fashion. Daniel, too, seemed a bit stunned that the Son would bypass customary protocol—and *him*—to address an angel of inferior rank first. But Jesus quickly repaired Daniel’s bruised feelings.

“Daniel, your presence is comforting. This will be an important task, and I knew you were the one for it.”

“Thank you for your confidence in me, Lord.” Daniel bowed again.

“I will be leaving in a moment. You will know what to do to get the attention of the soldiers and the women.”

“Yes, Lord.”

Jesus rose from the broad stone on which He had been resting. “Come, Harry,” He said. “Walk with me.”

The Way Out

As the two left the immediate area of the tomb, Harry felt a deep rumbling pass beneath his feet, and a crackling, gravelly sound signaled that Daniel had just rolled back the stone covering the tomb entrance.

“This must be a relief,” Harry offered.

“Relief?”

“Yes, Jesus, that the Father gave you a way out—a way out of death.”

“You make ‘a way out’ sound like ‘escape’—as if

plans were changed at the last minute,” Jesus said seriously.

“They weren’t? You said You had to die—and You did. Wasn’t that enough?”

“The way out was set long ago—and it is just as important as the death. Don’t you remember what I told you years ago when I was a boy? This is all part of it.

“Yes, I had to die. I had to bear that weight.” Jesus sighed, and His shoulders slumped. “That horrible weight,” He whispered, and a shudder passed through Him. “But it couldn’t end with that. Harry, I wasn’t *given* a ‘way out’—I *am* the way out. Because I left the grave, others will too.

“You keep forgetting the people, Harry. It’s for them. It’s all for them.”

And it had happened again. Harry felt that empty twisting in his belly, that unpleasant sensation of indigestion that meant He had once again completely missed the point.

“I guess I’m caught, Jesus,” Harry muttered sadly. “Caught somewhere between God and man—never quite understanding either.”

Jesus smiled and put His arm around the dejected angel. “You don’t have to, Harry. You are who you are—and I love you for it. We created you, but you are not Us. You are higher than man, but you will never understand his longings, his fears, his sinful flesh, his aspirations. You are *meant* to be in between. That, too, is part of grace.”

The Son stopped. They were poised at the top of a rough crag that overlooked the awakening Jerusalem. As they watched the narrow streets begin to fill with early risers beginning another day, Jesus drew the diminutive angel closer, reassuringly.

“Look, Harry. There they are. It’s all for them. And We ask only one thing from them.”

“What’s that?” Harry said.

Jesus turned and looked into the angel’s innocent eyes. “Do you remember long ago, before this all began, when I asked you to do me a favor and help me get used to my new name?”

“Je-sus,” Harry said carefully, sounding out each syllable as if the word were an object of great worth cradled in his hands.

“Yes, you helped me become accustomed to my new

role by using the name. Now I want you to do me another favor. Just as you helped me with my new role, I want you to help the people with theirs. We ask only one thing from them—one thing only.”

Harry said nothing, but stared longingly up into the gentle eyes of the Son.

“I want you to believe, Harry,” Jesus said. “With all your questions, with everything you do not yet understand, I want you to believe. Just believe.”



Enthroned



HARRY, ANGEL 2-R (2ND RUNG), strode with single-minded purpose across the gossamer surface of heaven. Recently promoted from 3-R to 2-R, Harry carried himself with a new and determined, more mature stride. Since angels do not age, Harry was no older, but promotion brought not just privileges, but *stature*. Along with the increased level of respect he now received, Harry was now markedly taller than when he had been a lowly 4-R.

In some mysterious way that he could not fully explain, heaven was different now. Ever since the Son had returned home victorious, after His ascension from earth, heaven had been something it was not before. At a glance, everything around him looked the same;

the air tasted the same; the faces he passed and met and conversed with were the same. But now, somehow, there was a new intensity to the colors and light around him, as if God had repainted heaven from a brand new palette. Now the air was charged, electric, as if the energy and light flowing from the throne had been increased. And though it was not obvious right away, Harry finally decided that there was even a new, more ebullient spirit in heaven's citizens.

Not only was the Son back, but He was back with a new purpose.

God and Friend

Harry knelt on one knee on the fringes of the crowd surrounding the throne. While it is true that he had risen in the ranks, the *people* still came before him and his kind. After the elders and living creatures, archangels, seraphim and cherubim, the throne of the Godhead was encompassed by myriad throngs of everyone from earth who had believed. After them came the rest of the angels by rank.

On his rare visits to earth during Jesus' ministry, Harry was surprised by how distant and small Jesus had appeared in similar situations there. When He would address only a few hundred people from a hillside, for instance, from the back of the crowd Jesus would appear small, His voice a mere wisp to those furthest away. Harry was more accustomed to the rarefied atmosphere of heaven, in which the Voice from the throne rang clear and distinct to those even *millions* of souls away. And no matter how many millions came between, the perspective for every worshipper was as if he or she, alone, were knelt in intimate proximity before the throne.

And, once again, Harry marveled that humans put up with such limitations.

As always when he was before the throne, Harry struggled to satisfy two conflicting urges. The most natural and customary attitude when knelt before the Godhead was one of subjection, with his face to the surface. The sheer power and blinding glory emanating from the navel of heaven had that effect—be the worshipper human or angel. But at the same time the Godhead was so *beautiful*, so magnificent, that it drew one's gaze toward it. Even in the humility of worship and praise, there was an overwhelming desire to gaze longingly, lovingly at the eternal Radiance.

And there, to the right of the Father, was Jesus: the Son, and—dare he think it?—his *friend*. Immersed in the visible spectrums of glory that bathed the throne, the Son's posture leaned slightly toward the Father. So inclined, His lips moved continuously, silently, speaking words heard and understood only by the Godhead—the prayers and yearnings of His children, translated by the Spirit into the holy, unutterable language of God. Here was their advocate, their high priest, personally speaking their petitions to the Father.

Gazing upon the scene, Harry was once again overwhelmed by the two emotions Jesus always evoked in him: awe and love. The Son was undiluted God. He was timeless, pure, unapproachably holy. Yet He was also Jesus. He was tender, compassionate, undeniably touchable.

He was God, *and* He was friend. And these two, seemingly contradictory truths continued to tear at Harry. Before earth, when the Son was still what He always had been, it was natural for Harry to revere Him as deity. While Jesus was on earth, in flesh, it was perfectly natural for Harry to think of Him as a companionable friend. But now what was he to make of the one seated at Father God's right hand?

Reunion

The dark speck appeared suddenly in his line of vision. *What in heaven's name?* He thought. He extended his finger, as if to scratch away the offending fleck of dust. But it wasn't there; it was far in the distance. Harry strode toward it, determined not to permit any such blot from appearing in *his* precinct. But as he drew closer, and the black speck gradually became an ugly, yet oddly familiar cube standing heavy and dark in the vaporous lightness of its surroundings, Harry smiled.

He found the side that contained what he was looking for: a frayed loop of hemp rope protruding from the entrance rectangle. But he hesitated. *What if He isn't in there? Is this just an empty relic left over and discarded?* He thought he couldn't bear the disappointment if the strange dwelling was empty.

Pull the rope, Harry. The voice inside his head rang clear and true, and Harry quickly did as he was told, swinging wide the crude door.

"Hello, Harry!" Jesus said, smiling at him. "It's sure good to see you."

Without even thinking, Harry fell into the warm embrace of the Lord.

Family

"You needn't choose between the two," Jesus explained, after listening patiently to Harry's quandry. "I don't want *them* to."

"Them?"

"Harry..." Jesus frowned.

The angel slapped his forehead. "I did it *again*," he wailed. "I can't believe I did it again!"

"You don't *need* me," Jesus continued. "You are what you are, and you will always be that. Nothing in you changes because of what I did on earth."

"But they need me, Harry. And I want them to see me

for all that *I* am. I am everything of the Father, but I am also everything of them. They need not choose between the two."

"They have such small minds," Harry pointed out. "It won't be easy."

"Their minds may be small, but their hearts are large. They have the capacity to understand, and to decide for themselves."

For the first time, Harry was envious of humans. He was beginning to see that there was something unique about humans. They could have a relationship with Jesus that he never could. He could be a friend of Jesus, but they could be a brother, a sister. As friendly and intimate as his relationship with the Son was, He never could be a part of Jesus. But humans could be *family*. He didn't yet understand everything that that meant, but he did realize that it was something he never could have.

"Harry, long ago, down on earth when I was a boy, do you remember Joseph and Mary? Do you remember how you marveled at how, even with all their differences, the two were still so dependent on each other?"

Harry nodded silently.

"They loved each other so much," Jesus said, smiling at the pleasant recollection of His earthly parents. "They were *bonded*, Harry, joined together not just physically, but spiritually. They were one."

Jesus took the angel by the shoulders and gazed into his eyes with an intensity uniquely His. Harry once again felt the fierce heat of the Son's emotions wash over and through him. He wanted to turn away, but couldn't.

"My friend," Jesus said with quiet strength, "that is how it is with those who are mine. With those who believe in me I am bonded—fused together as one. They are as much a part of me as I am of them. Because of

this, I will be *everything* to them. Because I am God, they will worship me. Because I was flesh, they will know me—as friend, as brother, as husband. They need nothing more. Only to believe.”

For the very first time in his existence, a tear spilled down Harry’s cheek as he looked into Jesus’ face. A great sadness came over him as he realized that he never could have that relationship with Jesus. He never could be *one* with Him.

“Oh, don’t cry,” Jesus comforted him. “Soon you will make 1st Rung, and then I will have work for you down on earth. You are to be my special emissary.”

“S—special?” Harry stuttered excitedly.

Jesus removed the mud structure, and the two of them were back in the vaporous beauty of heaven. “Harry, there will be some very special people down there, and I have chosen you to minister to them in my name.”

“R-really? Special?”

Jesus smiled at his friend. “Really. Do you think you can handle it?”

Harry drew himself up to his full height. “For *you*, Jesus—anything.”

And arm-in-arm they disappeared into the pristine reaches of a place where miracles are born, and life begins for all who would believe.



Bio

We are David and Linda Lampel, and we live in a large country house in the rural area outside Winterset, Iowa, in the middle of the United States. Our home is surrounded by fields of corn and soybeans, and by dense woods that are home to deer, raccoons, possums, wild turkeys, and myriad birds of all shapes and colors.

The tranquility and beauty of this place contribute to what we do. In fact, we believe that the Lord brought us to this home because He knew that here we would best be equipped to serve Him and others.

Both of us work at home—Dave with his writing, and Linda for a data-processing company—where each of our offices looks out over the pond and the woods behind our home. Here we live with our family of three cats.

The Lord has given us a good life, and we are most grateful to Him—especially for our 35 years together as husband and wife.

Our Calling

Acknowledging the Lordship of Jesus Christ, by means of the gifts and skills given by Him, we are called to write and make available, free of charge,

- Christian plays, musicals, worship resources, and instructional books: COMMITTED TO THE EXPOSITION OF GOD'S WORD THROUGH THE DRAMATIC ARTS;
- Christian devotionals in e-mail, print, and booklet form: ENCOURAGING BELIEVERS TO KNOW GOD AND HIS WAYS, AND TO ENJOY A MORE INTIMATE COMMUNION WITH HIM.

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