

*He is Risen!*

**We rejoice in this good news**

## **An Easter Story**

Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

~ 2 Corinthians 9:15

**If you have questions, would like support or prayer please contact:**

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# THE ROMAN CENTURION

By Kathy McMillan

It was very early Friday morning when I got the call from Pilate’s men to prepare for another crucifixion. I’ve seen enough crucifixions to know what to expect, but nothing in my training or experience prepared me for that call!

Through the years, I’ve learned to shut off my emotions when it comes to these criminals. Crucifixions are for the worst offenders — and even then, only the Jewish ones. (Roman criminals are beheaded, never crucified!) I’ve always figured that these convicts have been through the legal system; they’re getting what they deserve. All their kicking and yelling has never affected me. I’ve had prisoners spit and curse at me, but I know it’s not about me.

But this one was different. I could tell right away that this man was unlike the others; no struggling, no revenge in his eyes. For some reason, that seemed to make my soldiers even angrier. They seemed to be repulsed by his quiet spirit, and one man’s mockery seemed to provoke the rest. “So, you’re the messiah?” One of them sneered. I could hear the leather straps hit his bare skin. “Who hit you?” “Look at this — we have a king here. We can’t have a king without a crown, can we?” Crunch. They smashed the thorns into his scalp. It went on like this for hours. The more they mocked, the more resolved he seemed to not reply, and that angered them all the more. It’s almost as if this man were not a man at all . . .

On the cross, he was looking out for other people. I heard him speak to his mother; I heard him give hope to one of the other criminals. He even asked God to forgive us — who were killing him!

I just couldn’t understand. The Jews have brought many violent criminals to judgment through the years and I’ve never really questioned their decisions. But why this man? I can’t comprehend how a group of religious people who claim to know and love God could bring themselves to kill a man that is as gentle as a lamb. What harm could he possibly do to them? But there they were, the people who were always talking about the coming messiah, laughing at Him and saying, “He saved others, but he can’t save himself!”

As the afternoon wore on, an incredible darkness fell. I would have thought it was evening, but the sun had just been in the middle of the sky. It was terrifying to have to grope around in the utter blackness. None of us had lamps, as we hadn’t expected to need them. I heard women crying as they tried to make their way back down the hill toward the city. Minutes seemed to last for hours, but finally the darkness lifted just a bit. Then in a clear, loud voice, I heard Jesus say, “It is finished.” The darkness returned in an instant and I heard a noise like thunder before the earth started to roll. All of us standing on the hill were thrown to the

ground where we lay, waiting for the shaking to stop. There we were: priests, soldiers, his disciples — all of us lying at the foot of his cross. I thought about the many times I’ve seen Jews gathered at the feet of their teachers and somehow, this seemed like the place I wanted to be.

The Jews’ Sabbath passed without much excitement. After Jesus died on Friday, some of his friends took his body to a nearby tomb. Then, crazy as it might sound, Pilate seemed to become afraid. There were rumors circulating that Jesus had claimed he would rise from the dead. Pilate wanted to make certain that no one could forge a resurrection by stealing his body and claiming that he’d come back to life. Because of that, we were ordered to guard the tomb. We were all feeling pretty ridiculous, guarding a dead man!

But that all changed this morning about 4:00 am, before a hint of dawn crept across the sky. It was a black night and truthfully, we were having trouble staying awake . . . until all of a sudden the ground started to shake once again. The brightest light I’ve ever seen filled the sky. We couldn’t do anything but cover our eyes to keep from being blinded. As I slowly lifted my head, I saw Jesus walk out of the tomb, shining like fire. I was absolutely terrified! I’ve crucified a lot of men, but believe me, I’ve never seen one walking toward me afterwards. I wanted to run, but my legs wouldn’t move — and I couldn’t take my eyes off of Him. I remembered back to that sign we fastened to his cross, “Jesus, King of the Jews.” What seemed like a joke now rings true. I believe he *is* a King.

The King has risen; Jesus is alive!

