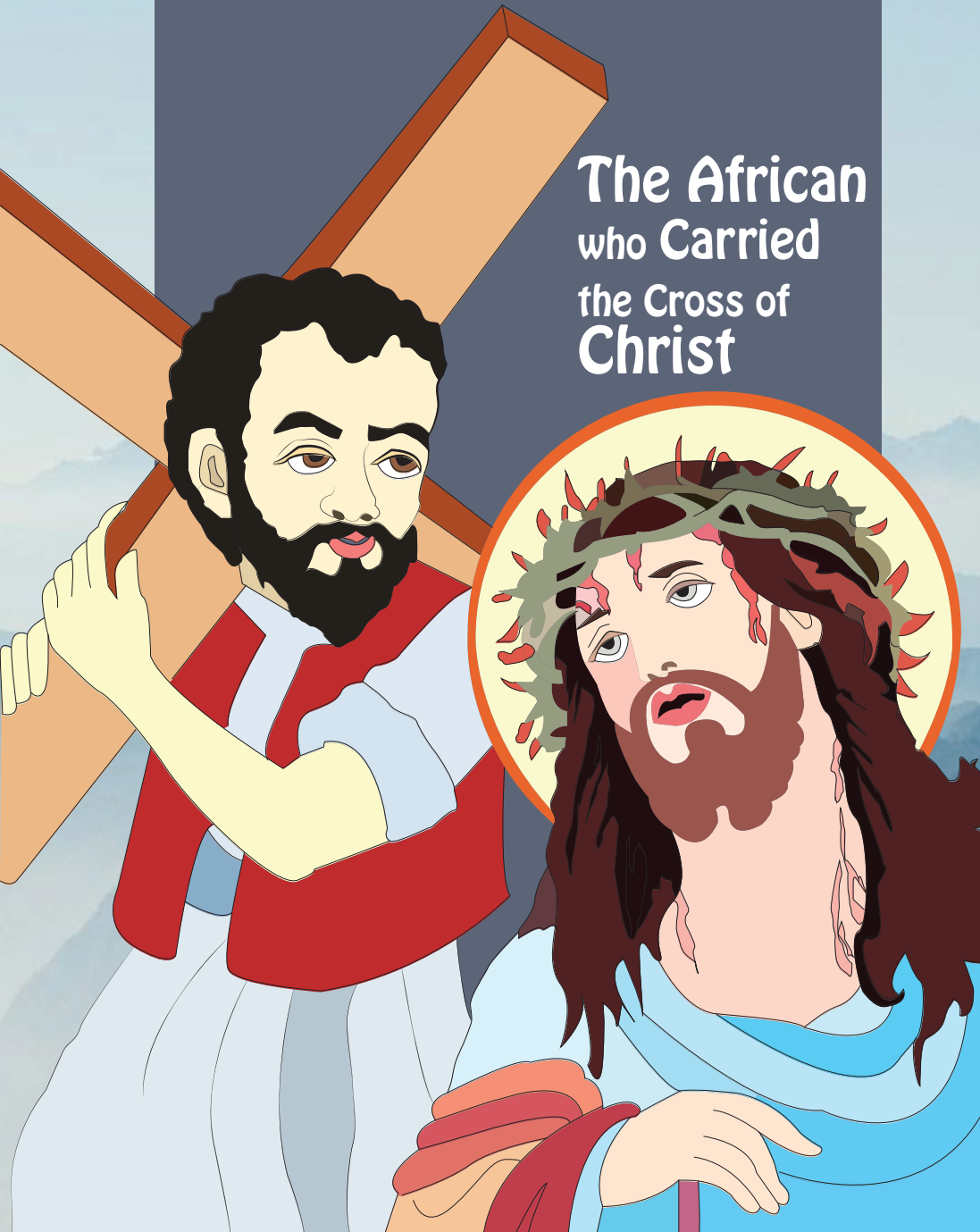


# The African who Carried the Cross of Christ



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# **The African who Carried the Cross of Christ**



Our Young Heroes in Pascha week  
The events of the Holy Pascha from Christ's  
Entry into Jerusalem until  
the Glorious Resurrection Feast

## A Family Discussion On a Shipboard

The ship was crowded with many Jews who were traveling from Cyrene (in Libya) to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. They were all joyful and cheerful like one big family, especially the children who were all gathered together.

In one of the corners of the ship, Simon the Cyrenian, his wife, and his two children, Alexander and Rufus, were gathered.

The younger son, **Rufus**, said: “I was thinking of this exciting annual trip. It’s true that in Cyrene we meet daily, especially in the evenings to pray and read the Bible together, but in Passover we find this wonderful occasion an opportunity for us to be together day and night.

We also take the blessing of the great temple of Jerusalem, which is located in the center of the world between the east and the west. How joyful it is to see the millions of people who come from all over the world to meet as one family. Every year, we meditate on the awesome works of God when He saved our fathers from the slavery of Pharaoh and sent Moses the Prophet and Aaron the High-Priest to lead the people out of Egypt into the wilderness, where Moses received the law and the divine commandments. Then, Joshua was handed the lead after the death of Moses and lead them to cross the Jordan river and into the land of Canaan where they enjoyed the promised land with all its goods. However, I had some questions to which I couldn’t find an answer.”



**Simon the Cyrenian:** 'What are your questions, Rufus?'

**Rufus:**

- "Is God really pleased by the shedding of the blood of thousands of lambs in Passover?"
- Does God need the shedding of blood of these lambs when He is the Creator of the whole universe and is not in need of anything?
- And why do all these families endure the burden of traveling from all around the world to Jerusalem to present these offerings?
- Can the shedding of these innocent animals' blood reconcile the Holy God who is praised by all the heavenly hosts with humanity on earth that suffers from the deception of the devil, worldly desires and sin?"

*With a sweet smile,*

**Simon answered his son saying:** "God's wisdom, dear Rufus, is different from us humans. We consider things from a materialistic point of view, and so we say that the Passover costs Jews millions of pieces of silver. However, a time will come when silver, gold and all what is seen and felt in this universe will come to an end, to then live with God in heaven like the angels. There we will enjoy the heavenly glory and participate with the angels in praising God. Only then we shall realize that our life on earth has vanished away like

vapor, a shadow, or a dream. Nonetheless, we cannot forget that it is a precious life because it leads us from earth to heaven.

As for the lambs, by common sense, they are irrational animals incapable of talking or of being a mediator between God and humanity. In addition to that, the sacrificial lambs do not present themselves to slaughter, but humans are the ones to slaughter it. These animals don't love humans to the point of shedding their blood on their behalf but even if they did die, how is their blood a way to reconcile us with God?!"

**Rufus then asked:** "Then what is the importance of Passover in this way? Why are all these lambs slaughtered?"

**Simon answered:** "These lambs are only a symbol of the Messiah, The Lamb of God, who is one with The Father by being the Word of God, His Son, His wisdom, and His power (1 Corinthians 1:24). We are waiting for Him to come and declare the God's wonderful love and to reconcile us with The Heavenly Father.

- Thousands of clear prophecies are about Him in the Holy Bible (Old Testament), ever since the fall of Adam and Eve, so that when He comes, we may know from the prophecies that He is indeed the Messiah. Only Him can gives reconcile us by His divine love and His holy will.

- This is what God promised our ancestors, Adam and Eve, with in the book of Genesis (Genesis 3:15-16; Galatians 4:4)
- Isaiah the Prophet prophesied since about 370 years ago that He will be born from a virgin without the seed of man (Isaiah 7:14), and “His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6)
- The prophets also declared that His Kingdom will include believers from all people and nations (Isaiah 56:7)
- God promised Abraham that all nations will be blessed by His descendants (Genesis 17:46-).
- And Abraham gave his only son as a sacrifice, symbolizing the offering of the Messiah.
- God promised His beloved prophet King David that from his descendants He will reign forever (2 Samuel 7:16), who is the Messiah, Son of David.

## **ALEXANDER** **then participates in the conversation**

The older son **Alexander** remained silent, listening to the conversation that went on between his father and Rufus, but he then quietly interrupted the conversation saying:

“Father, do you think that the Messiah will be greater than Jesus whom we have been seeing for the last





three years? What more do we expect from the Messiah and here is Jesus wonderful in His love to everyone? He loves everyone; His love is tremendous even to sinners and tax-collectors.

He is Holy and Pure and attracts sinners to holiness. By His gentle calm soul, He transformed the hearts of many people. Do you think that He is the Person whom Isaiah mentioned 730 years ago when he said:

“He will not shout or raise his voice

Or make loud speeches in the streets

He will not break off a bent reed

Or put out a flickering lamp.” (Isaiah 42: 24-)

**Rufus said:** “Were you reading my thoughts, Alexander? During the last three years, I have been reading the Bible passionately and raising my heart to God to enlighten my sight. I have been asking Him if Jesus is the true Messiah. He opens the eyes of the blind, heals the sick, and even raises the dead...

The only thing that confuses me is that the Messiah is supposed to be a King who would rule from one end of the world to another, but Jesus is only a simple man who surrounds Himself by simple people and fishermen. Can Jesus ever form a professionally trained army to stand against the Roman Empire? It is true that His popularity is increasing, but only amongst the poor people who have no power. Even the Jewish religious leaders don't like Him.”





**Their mother interrupted here saying:** “I think that all the Jews worldwide are expecting something great and unpredictable to happen. I personally wish to remain in Canaan only to see Jesus who seems to me that He is not from this world!

I am really happy to be alive during the lifetime of Jesus and I would be happier if we would settle in a country near Him. I am sure He will do something extraordinary, not only to our nation but to the whole world.”

**Rufus asked his mother:** “What do you think this great role of Jesus will be, mom?”

**Mother answered:** “I do not know exactly, but it is clear that He is not from this world but from above, and He has the power to lift our hearts to heaven. Whenever we come to Jerusalem every year, I hear about His love to the Jews and even to the gentiles, in addition to His marvelous works. I am becoming increasingly convinced that He is the Messiah. But how and when He will rule is something I do not know.”

## Passover in Jerusalem

In Jerusalem, Simon and his family could not find a vacancy in any hotel because there were about two million Jews coming to Jerusalem from Egypt, Libya, Greece, Italy, and Asia. However, they were all received with love by some relatives whose houses were full of guests, but they were all happy and cheerful.

**Two days later, Rufus said:** “I’ll pay for the Passover lamb this year because Alexander bought it last year and dad bought it the year before. Now it is my turn to buy it and get this blessing.”

Everyone remained quiet and were very pleased with what Rufus said, but Simon did not react to what was going on around him, he was rather thinking deep inside him of something important.

**Alexander said:** “Dad, what are you thinking about? I noticed your silence these last two days.”

**Simon answered quietly:** “I am thinking about all what is happening around me. I see families preparing to celebrate the feast, and I see you discussing who will buy the Passover lamb, while my whole heart is overwhelmed with Jesus, His unique personality, His marvelous works, and His words that overtook my heart.

Is there anything in this life that can stop me from thinking about Him? I am seriously thinking of remaining here to follow this unique man and never to return to Cyrene.”

**Rufus sighed heavily and said:** “Dad, it’s true that Jesus is so great, wonderful, and attractive, and we are all eager to follow Him wherever He goes, but...”

**Alexander:** “Why are you sighing Rufus?”

**Rufus:** “I heard bad news. Herod is planning to kill Jesus. What upsets me even more is that all the high priests

are planning to get rid of Him. They are just waiting until the feast ends to avoid an uproar of the people, because so many people love Him and as for what I know, the religious leaders are so enraged with Him to the extent that I don't think this Passover will pass by without getting rid of Him. It's said that in a few days, they will put an end to this problem."

**Simon:** "They can do what they want, but He who is able to raise the dead will not be affected by evil plans, and not even death can overcome Him or the tomb able to destroy Him. He will not die!"

**Alexander:** "Dad, I heard Jesus saying to His disciples that He will be arrested and handed over by the elders and high-priests to the hands of the gentiles and that He will be put to death, but on the third day He will rise from the dead. These news spread among many people and no one knows what He really means by this."

**Simon:** "Can you believe that the One who raises the dead will die? If He will be raised on the third day, why then will He die in the first place? In all cases He is the conqueror of death!"

**Mother:** "Oh! How strange?! Thousands of people are busy slaughtering the lamb and preparing for the celebration of Passover, Herod is devising a plan to kill this Righteous man, and the chief priests are busy thinking of their vain glory. But only Jesus is busy thinking of the salvation of mankind!"





## On the Way to Golgotha

With every hour, Simon's heart was getting increasingly overwhelmed, longing to follow Jesus Christ.

Simon was following all the events in Jerusalem, the Praetorium, and the surrounding regions. Finally, Jesus came out carrying the cross on His way to Golgotha. All His Body was bleeding after He had been whipped severely. Simon and his family were amongst the crowd which followed Jesus.

Simon felt like he was in a nightmare. He kept saying to himself, "How can this be?! Or am I hallucinating?! **What did Jesus do to deserve this?!**"

Jesus fell from the heavy burden of the cross. He was extremely exhausted so He could not lift Himself up to carry the cross.

The soldiers looked to the right and to the left and one of them pointed at Simon, as they saw him being a foreigner not from Jerusalem and thought that if he would order a stranger to carry the cross, the people would not rebel against them.

Thus, he immediately ordered him, "You man over there, carry the cross!"

Simon started to hesitate: "Me? I didn't do anything!" The soldier did not allow him to defend himself, but as a roman colonizer, he yelled at him: "I order you to carry the cross! Do not utter a single word! Do you understand?!"

His two sons tried to defend their father, but the father, fearing that his sons would be caught or would be beaten by the soldiers, he hurried and lifted up the cross.

Alexander whispered to his father, “Why did this soldier choose you? Is it because you are not from Jerusalem?”

The father looked at his sons and shouted: “That’s true, but it is also God’s choice, for why has He brought us here? It is a great honor for me to carry the cross!”

Jesus looked up to Simon and spoke to him with the spiritual words: “Blessed are you Simon the Cyrenian, for you have carried the cross of shame with Me. For your sake and for all mankind I am carrying this cross. By this, you partake in the glory of my sufferings! Thank you Simon!”

Simon whispered in a gentle voice, “Now I know that you are the Messiah, the Savior of all.



**I THANK You  
My SAVIOR,  
O You Who Sacrificed Your  
Life For Me!**

**I Thank You For Choosing Me  
To Carry Your Cross With You!**

**I Believe In You! You Are  
Truly The Son Of God!**

**I Will Testify To You And  
Your Love Wherever I Go!"**

**"I Have Been Crucified With  
Christ, It Is No Longer I Who  
Live, But Christ Lives In Me."**

**(Galatians 2:20)**







