**Samira’s Story**

I offer you my greetings, my lords and ladies, who are listening to my story today. My name is Samira, and I am the first wife of my Lord and husband Melchior – and wise and noble scholar of the land of Persia.

I would like to recount my story of how it came to be that I, Samira, journeyed with my husband to meet the baby and his mother – the new-born King. So that you may understand how it came to pass.

It is not the usual way for a wife to accompany her husband on such a long and perilous journey such as this – I will admit that. But I have no children at home to care for. I have only my Lord and husband, whom I love deeply. After I bore him our only child, a daughter – with whom I laboured for three days and three nights, but who never drew a breath, the wise women and the physicians who attended upon me told me and my beloved Lord that I would never again bear a child, and thus it came to pass. It has been a great sorrow to me, and I told him that he must take another wife to continue his line and inherit his name – and so it was done.

He has now five healthy children, three sons and two daughters – and he could have cast me aside in shame. Sent me home to the house of my father, the merchant, to be a burden to him. But my Lord and husband did not do this, for he loves me just as much as I love him. Although is older than me by some several years, I have become his companion and helpmeet, and he tells me much about his studies and his thinking – and so it was, I remember when nearly twelve months ago now, he came downstairs from the rooftop terrace, where he goes to study the dances of the stars in the skies and he said to me that he had seen a great wonder. A new star had been born in the night sky to the east and it foretold only one thing: It heralded the birth of a new King – the ruler of the Jews A mighty and powerful ruler ordained by the heavens themselves. A ruler such as the world had never seen before. He was excited and fearful and he gathered around with his friends and colleagues to discuss this wondrous sign.

I served them with many cups of wine and fine cakes – and I sat quietly listening while they discussed this portent and all that it could mean. They determined together that such was the importance and wonder of the significance of the sign that they had seen in the heavens, that they would have to go on a great and dangerous journey to see the King that the heavens had spoken about.

I have to tell you, my honourable listeners, that I did not share in their enthusiasm – for I was fearful. I had heard stories about the desert and the demons that dwelt in the land of sand beyond the horizon of the city since I was a child. It is said that the demon who dwells there has a breath like the hottest of wind and leaves those who meet him like dried up leaves blowing in the wind, and that there are snakes and other monsters in the sands that drink the blood of the living, leaving only their whitened bones behind.

And then there are the robbers and vagabonds said to rob unwary travellers in the lands of the stranger - for they are not cultured peoples such as we are. They do not prize learning as our scholars do – and they kill animals on their altars. I have heard that also they do not welcome strangers – but nevertheless, my beloved husband and his closest companions decided to make this perilous journey.

When his colleagues had left, I went, and I threw myself at the feet of my Lord, my husband Melchior and I begged him not to go, and I told him all these things I had heard from my childhood in the house of my father, the merchant. But he was determined – for he said that the greatest King of all time had been born and his birth had been shown to them by the heavens themselves – and they had determined that they would go and worship him, for no king before him had been shown by the heavens and, he was certain, that ne king to come would ever be proclaimed by the heavens themselves.

I could not persuade him otherwise. Even though I wept with fear. Finally, I said to him: “My Lord and husband, I can see that your heart and mind are set upon this course, and so I beg one favour of you – let me come too. For if I stay here, I shall be shamed and sent back to the house of my Father if you do not return. We have such love for one another that if you should die, I would far rather die with you, than live without you.” And so, listening to my earnest plea, my Lord and husband agreed that I should come with him and his companions on the journey.

And so it was – I gave to my husband the gold bracelets my father had given me upon my marriage to pay for the journey, for the provision of camels and goods to provision for the journey – and he sold many of his finest scrolls and robes. He bought his gift for the new King – the finest he could buy. Scholars are not well paid, even though they are well regarded, and we knew that if we returned, we would have little set by in reserve upon which to live. I sold my wedding dress, and all that I had that was of any value. He bought for the king a beautiful box made of pure gold. And we bought two camels, tents, blankets and provisions enough for the journey of six months. Along with enough money to reprovision ourselves for the journey home. It was all we had. Enough but no more.

On the day we left, our caravan comprised numerous camels, some with riders, some with provisions, but no guides for the dreadful journey ahead – save the heavens above. My father, the merchant, who had made a healthy profit out of my husband and his fellow travellers, muttered into his beard that we were mad setting off on a journey as foolhardy as this – and were bound to meet our doom in the dangers of the desert - being as we were all such inexperienced travellers! But my husband turned on him and said that we were being guided by the very heavens themselves and they would see us safe to our destination. I was so proud of him for standing up to my father (who I privately thought had been very greedy) but I was still very afraid.

Travelling across the desert was not as difficult as I had feared. We travelled mostly by night – away from the heat of the day. We camped at the desert springs that the stars led us to – safe and cool in the heat of the day under the shadows of the palm trees that supplemented our somewhat meagre rations with fresh dates and clear water, so that neither we nor our camels thirsted. But I grew thinner and lighter even so, for it was cold travelling under the light of the stars, and I grew used to my beloved husband sitting me before him on the camel and enfolding me in the warmth of his cloak and we rode – pointing out to me the wonders of the heavens above and telling me all the stories of the stars and wonders above.

Truth to tell, my lord and ladies, I did not want the journey to end, for it became like the first days after we were married, even though I was greatly frightened of the terrible le-mataya that dwelt in the desert, whom our stories said devoured the very souls of unwary travellers, and of thieves and vagabonds who would have robbed us of our costly gifts, and our camels and left our bones to bleach white in the unending sun of the desert days.

After more than 100 nights, we arrived in the land of the Jews. But that night, my husband became distraught for he and his friends and fellow scholars could no longer see the wonderful sign that they had been following.

The great mountain of the Temple of Jerusalem blotted it out of the night sky – and so they went to the scholars of that land and asked them “Where is the one who is born to be the Great King of the Jews, for we have seen his star rise in the East – and we have come here to pay him the homage that is rightfully his, for his birth has been ordained by the heavens themselves.”

It could not have been more than a little time later that a messenger came and said that the King of the Jews himself wanted to meet with my husband and his colleagues, to question them, about what they knew. In fear and great trembling, we made our way to his palace, filled with guards – who sneered at us with our strange apparel and travel stained clothes. I did not want to leave my beloved husband’s side – for I feared this “king” with all his guards – and so I followed him in and hid behind a curtain.

Herod, for that was his name, questioned them all closely about when they had first noticed the sign in the heavens and what it could mean – and so it was that they told him that it meant that a great king of all the Jew had been born, ordained by the heavens themselves – and they had first seen the sign before his birth and that they now knew, because of the paths of the dancing stars themselves that it had come to pass, but that they had lost sight of the star because it had been blotted out from their sight by the great mountain of the Temple of Jerusalem itself and so they sought the wisdom of the prophets and the scholars of Jerusalem to know where such a great event should be.

And the king, seated upon his throne replied to them and said that he too had sought the same knowledge, having been told of their journey – and had been told that they would find the new King in Bethlehem. And asked them to go and find the baby – and then return to tell him where he might be – so that he too may go and worship him.

But I was greatly frightened by this king Herod seated upon his throne inlaid with gold and jewels, and I did not trust his words, I am ashamed to admit this to you. I thought he was a deceitful man. For he reminded me of my father, the greedy merchant, and I ventured to say this much to my kindly husband as we left the palace – but my Lord, who is good and kind said that they had promised upon their word to return and tell this King Herod – and so I said no more, but I was sad and fearful.

Thus it was, that we set out for Bethlehem, and as the sky once again became dark, so my Lord rejoiced as he once again saw the sign which he has previously lost as we had approached the city of King Herod.

Finally, as dawn approached, it ceased to lead us and it seemed to stop. We arrived, but not at a palace or a temple, but at an ordinary home. Upon entering the house, in a downstairs room, we found them – a mother and her child.

It all looked at first sight ordinary enough – except, somehow, it wasn’t. The light of the rising sun streamed through the window and the room was so bright for it was joined by the light of the setting star that had led us so far.

My beloved Lord and husband gave his gift of the golden casket, and his colleagues gave their gifts, precious gifts of incenses, and myrrh, and I just watched, spellbound.

Finally, his mother, noticing me in the corner, smiled at me and asked me if I would like to hold the baby. I could have asked for nothing more in this world. Trembling I reached into my bag, and I got out my gift – it was nothing compared to the riches presented by my Lord and his fellow scholars, for I had nothing to offer. I got out the blanket that I had woven with love all those years ago, out of the finest goats’ wool, for my own little daughter - the blanket I had embroidered with stars – and, as I took the child, I gently wrapped Him in it. The Baby looked up into my eyes, and all the pain and grief of all those years melted away and I became whole, as he smiled, and drifted off to sleep….

In writing Samira’s story, although it is a story of redemption and healing, I am aware that it may have stirred up issues for people and I did not want to leave people without access to further help and support. Please find details below:

**Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society**

t: 0808 164 3332
e: helpline@sands.org.uk

The [Helpline](https://www.sands.org.uk/support-you/how-we-offer-support/helpline) is for anyone who has been affected by the death of a baby and wants to talk to someone about their experience. The Helpline team are there to listen and give support, and can advise you about finding local help, whether from a Sands group or other counselling services, or information about other relevant support organisations.

May God bless you,

Lesley xx