

# READY TO HELP

## **A Story About 'Omar Ibn Al-Khattab**

Once a man wanted to make a request to Caliph 'Omar Ibn Al-Khattab in Medina. After a long journey, he sat down in a coffee house and ordered a drink. He asked the man sitting next to him how to approach the Caliph. The man took him out of the shop and showed him a butchery where people were lined up waiting for their turn. The man pointed towards a poorly dressed person in the line with a basket in his hand: "This one is Caliph 'Omar Ibn al-Khattab." The visitor was greatly surprised and asked others, but all of them said: "That man is the caliph." The caliph saw the visitor asking and called him to come. On the spot he dealt with his request.

# READY TO HELP

## **The Good Brothers**

Once two brothers who were very close and always working together tended a field in Jerusalem. During the threshing season they would divide the corn among themselves by making two heaps of equal height. Afterwards they would stay the night at the place in order to guard the fields against robbery.

On one such occasion, one of the brothers woke up during the night and mumbled: "It is not really right that I receive the same amount of corn as my brother does. He raises a family and has many more expenses than I do." He stood up, removed seven measures from his own pile and put it on that of his brother. Then he went back to sleep. Shortly afterwards his brother also woke up and thought by himself: "It is not right that I receive the same amount of corn as my brother. He is alone and misses the joys of life that I experience." He too stood up and removed seven measures from his pile and put it on top of his brother's.

When both of them woke up in the morning, they were astonished to see that the piles had remained the same. God blessed their deeds and declared the threshing floor to be holy forever.

# *HOSPITALITY DENIED*

## **A Bet**

Once a Sultan quarreled with his Wazir about the nature of humankind. The Sultan contended that both rich and poor could be generous. The Wazir was of the opinion that only the rich were willing to help others. They made a bet.

To find out who was right, the Sultan disguised himself as a common citizen. In the company of a dervish he went out. They saw a humble house. A poor man invited them to come in. Immediately their host begged the guests to honor him and his family by joining a meal with chicken. The Sultan and the dervish said that due to a vow they were not allowed to eat chicken. The poor man left the house and asked his neighbor for a lamb which was immediately slaughtered.

The next day the Sultan and the dervish continued their wanderings. After a while they saw the house of the Wazir. The Wazir observed them disapprovingly from the window, and ordered the house servant to chase away what he thought were beggars. The man found out that he not only had lost the bet but also his job.

# *HOSPITALITY DENIED*

## **You Gain When You Give**

There was a man, who was told by a Bedouin fortune teller: “When you are forty years old, you will die, a serpent will kill you.” So when the forty years were nearly passed he thought: “If I make a great feast for rich and poor, perhaps I will stay alive. He gathered people together and made a big feast for them. He slew five sheep and five camels and prepared rice and ground wheat to supply them with a great meal. But it was no good. The next day he saw a serpent following him. He realized that when he prepared the feast he had forgotten the blind woman. He told his wife: “Go knead dough, knead for her a cake, bring it to her and ask her forgiveness.” The blind woman said to her: “The bit you give pays your due” and at that word the serpent, still following the man, burst and died.

# ATTACHED TO HOME

## **The Bag of Sand**

One day, a wise judge saw a sobbing old woman accompanied by a young man. Only a donkey and an empty bag were with them. The woman explained, "After my husband died the caliph asked me to sell the land because he wanted to build a palace there. After I refused, he told me one day: 'Since you refuse to sell it, you will lose the right to accept compensation'. He chased us away. Now I have nothing, what can I do?" The judge asked her to give him the donkey with the empty bag. He went to the caliph, and begged him to revoke his decision. To no avail. Then the judge brought the donkey and the bag forward and asked the caliph respectfully: "Do this woman at least one favor. Please, fill for her one bag with the earth she once possessed and put it on the donkey." The caliph did it. However, he found out that he could not lift the earth. The judge then said: "If one sack of earth that you are willing to restore to its rightful owners is already too heavy for you, how will you bear the burden of this whole piece of land that you have confiscated by violent means?"

# *ATTACHED TO HOME*

## **The Caliph and the Neighbour**

Once a famous Persian ruler, King Casroe, wanted to build a palace. However, a widow had her home exactly on the spot where he wanted to build and she did not want to sell the house against any price. The King invited her into his palace, angry that she did not want to sell it but also curious to know why. The widow said: "Houses I can find everywhere, but not a neighbor like your Majesty. This honor I will not give away for any price." The King was pleased by the woman's wit and courage and ordered the house to be left in the possession of the widow.

# POWER OF THE SMALL

## **King Suleiman and the Locusts**

Suleiman invited the animals to his palace. When the wolf entered, the king said “Peace be upon you.” However, he did not raise from his throne. When the hyena came in, he said “Peace to you, please come in,” yet again did not rise. The same happened when the lion came in.

Then the little locust entered the room. Immediately the king rose from his throne and said “Welcome, welcome, please come in.” The three great animals were insulted and humiliated. “Are we dung under your feet?” they cried. “You rose for this little fellow and not for us?” Suleiman said: “Do you want to wage war to those little fellows?” “Certainly,” the beasts said. Upon hearing this, the sheikh of the locusts said to his people: “As soon as they attack you enter their ears and stay there for the rest of the day.”

The battlefield lasted long but the big animals became dizzy from the locusts crawling in their ears. Finally they gave up. Suleiman ordered them around his throne and told them: “Now you understand why I showed my full greetings only to those little ones.”

# POWER OF THE SMALL

## **The wasps**

A long time ago one of the invaders of Palestine persecuted the Christians; some of them were banished, some were killed and their churches were defamed. The leader of the invaders ordered his men to enter the Church of Nativity, loot all its treasures, and destroy it. When his soldiers entered this holy site and tried to steal all precious things in it, all of a sudden large numbers of wasps came out of the five holes of one of the pillars of the Church and attacked the soldiers harshly. They were forced to retreat from the Church but the wasps continued to run after them until they reached a place called Qaws Al-Zararah where the soldiers were encircled and besieged. This narrow location was later called after the incident. Some of the soldiers escaped and the wasps ran after them until they reached another place called Ras Iftas. This road is still named after this place where the remnants of the army died because of the wasps.



# *SAINTLY HELP*

## **Church of Nativity**

A terrible earthquake occurred in Bethlehem and left devastation and horror among the people in the town. The Bethlehemites resorted to praying and appealed to God to protect them and save their Church from destruction. While people were praying, the Virgin Mary appeared in the Church and placed her five fingers on one of the pillars of the Church and the quake abated. The five holes left by Virgin Mary's hand can still be seen.

# *SAINTLY HELP*

## **Mar Nicola**

Mar (Saint) Nicola, who came from Cappadocia in Asia Minor, is reputed to have inhabited a small cave in Beit Jala for a period of three years. The present Mar Nicola church was founded on the site of the old cave. In one of the many stories about the Saint the Saint appears as the defender of the town against certain unruly tribes who surrounded it and launched an attack on it. The defenders of the town withstood the onslaught bravely. Every time the invaders tried to take it by storm they saw an old man (Mar Nicola) with a lance obstructing them. The invaders felt that even the olive branches of the trees surrounding the town were taking part in the battle against them. The raiders related how relatively unaffected they were by bullets of the townspeople in comparison with the harassing of the Old Man who “impeded us” and who never allowed them to proceed to their target.

# WISDOM OF AGE

## **The Emir of Bedouins and his Guarantee**

Once it happened that a draught persisted for such a long time that the people ran out of crops and became hungry. The kinsmen of a tribe asked their emir for help. They told him that there was a prosperous village in Syria where the people had stored wheat.

The emir went to the village together with his notables. The village elder gave orders to package the wheat and calculate the price. Then he asked the emir: "What kind of guarantee can you give us?" The emir took a comb and combed his hair. Three hairs were left in the comb. He put these three hairs in a paper, which he carefully wrapped and handed over to the village elder, saying: "These hairs are from my beard and therefore of great value." The elder bowed and took the paper. He handed over the wheat and blessed the visitors.

A brief time later, an emir from a neighboring tribe heard about the arrangement. He headed for the same village and asked likewise for wheat on credit. The village elder asked him for a guarantee. He said: "My neighbor gave you three hairs from his beard. I will give you my whole beard." He cut off his beard and gave it to them. But the village elders said: "If your hairs mean so little to you that you give them all away we cannot accept them as a guarantee since it means that you will not keep your word."

# WISDOM OF AGE

## Harun al-Rashid

“When out riding one day, the Caliph Harun er-Rashid noticed a very venerable-looking old fellah planting a fig tree. The Caliph asked why he was taking the trouble to plant a tree of the fruit of which he could hardly hope to taste.

‘O Emir el Mumenin,’ replied the greybeard. ‘Inshallah, I may be spared to taste the fruit of this tree, but if not, my sons will do so.’ ‘How old are you?’ asked the monarch. ‘One hundred and seven,’ exclaimed the husbandman. ‘Well, in case you really do live to eat fruit from this tree, let me know.’ Several years passed, when one day Harun was told that an aged peasant desired an audience, saying that by the Caliph’s own command he had brought him a basket of figs. Having ordered the man to be admitted, Harun was surprised to find that it was the same fellah he had once seen planting a fig tree, who now brought him some choice fruit from that very tree. The Commander of the Faithful received the gift most graciously, making the old man sit beside him on the diwan, and commanding a robe of honour to be put on him; he gave him a gold dinar for each fig, and then dismissed him with honour.

The neighbor heard about it and also brought some figs hoping to receive a similar reward. On hearing this reply the guards reported the case to Harun, by whose orders the foolish man was pelted with his own fruit.

# PRICE OF BOASTING

## **The hungry Bedawi**

Once a fellah and a Badawy met together. Good food was spread for them on a low table. The Badawy asked: "What do you bring for the bride, O fellah?" The fellah said: "We bring all the clothes that are needed, the bridal dress, the black head veil, the red woolen belt, the velvet jacket with gold thread work, the silver bracelets and the silver chin chain, and European shoes. And so on.

While the fellah told of all these things, the Badawy ate the best of the food. "And you," said the fellah, "What do you bring for the bride?" A face veil, a head veil, a dress and a cloak". The fellah looked at the table. All the best food was gone.

# PRICE OF BOASTING

## **King Suleiman and the Birds**

King Suleiman was the wisest of mankind. He even understood the language of animals. One day he took a rest near his palace. Before him two birds twittered happily.

As the king watched, the male bird said to his wife: "Who is that man seated there?" His mate answered: "That is King Suleiman, whose fame fills the world." The other bird answered proudly: 'Phhh... Do they call him mighty? I can destroy his palaces by just fluttering my wings.' His spouse was impressed. Suleiman listened in astonishment. He signaled the bird to approach. "What is the cause of your pride?" he asked. The trembling bird asked the King forgiveness, and said that he had only wanted to please his wife. King Suleiman laughed and dismissed the bird.

Upon his return, his mate asked why the King had ordered him to come. His chest growing with pride, the male bird answered: "The King asked me to come because he had overheard what I was saying and he wanted me not to destroy his palace." After King Suleiman heard this he became angry and, as a warning to others not to boast nor to encourage boasting, he transformed the birds into stones.

# FILLED WITH ENVY

## **The dog and the cat**

Ages ago when the different kinds of animals in the world had their various duties assigned to them, the dog and the cat, though domestic animals, were exempted from slavery, the former for his fidelity, the latter for her cleanliness. At their special request they received the written document attesting and confirming this privilege. It was handed to the dog for safe-keeping, and he buried it where he kept his bones. Filled with envy, the horse, ass and ox purchased the services of the rat, who, burrowing, found and destroyed the charter. Ever since that time the dog has been liable, on account of his carelessness, to be tied or chained up by his master; and, besides that, the cat has never forgiven him. Both the cat and the dog hate rats and kill them when they can. The horse, ass and ox, on the other hand, permit the rats to share their food.

# FILLED WITH ENVY

## **The Blind Eye**

Once a man performed a good deed, and God wanted to reward him. However, he had been badly treated by his brother and now nourished a deep hatred. Not wanting to encourage him, God sent His Angel and told the man that as a remuneration for his deed he would receive anything he wished - on the condition that his brother would receive twice as much.

The angel gave the man time to think. The man dreamed about the mountains of gold he could get... but then his brother would get even more. He dreamed about the lands he would farm... but his brother would receive more lands. He dreamed about having many children but his brother would have more.

The angel came to hear his decision. The man trembled, caught between his dreams and hatred. Finally he told the angel: "I wish to be good but I cannot. Please leave me with one eye."



# NOT TO BE WEAKENED

## **A folk story from Artas**

Long ago there was a rich and stingy man who owned sheep and needed a shepherd. God sent an orphan to him. The orphan said: "Do you need a shepherd?" "Very well." "And the terms?" "The terms are that the one that you lift over the sheepfold wall at the end of the year, she shall be yours." "Very well, master, done with you." The orphan became his shepherd. Now the stingy master only fed him on onions and buttermilk – nothing else. The shepherd saw that he was becoming weak and thin. He went to a wise man and said: "o my father, advise me. My agreement is that the one that I can lift over the sheepfold wall at the end of the year, she shall be mine. I have eaten only onion and buttermilk; how can I lift a ewe over the wall? There is no strength left in my body." "My son," said the wise man, "the ewes are in your hand. Milk them and make cheese and make sweet milk cheese and exchange some milk for oil for yourself and throw the onions and buttermilk over the tree." The shepherd went, took the advise of the wise man, drank milk and oil and ate cheese, and threw the onions and buttermilk on the tree. The shepherd's health was first rate. The year was ended and the company came to the ewes in the sheepfold. And waiting there were the owner of the sheep, his wife, and his daughter, a sweet pretty girl. "Choose, o shepherd," said his master. "The agreement was that the one you lift over the sheepfold wall, she shall be yours. Please choose, my son." The shepherd took the pretty girl and lifted her over the wall. She became his. That was quite right. God gave the orphan a bride.

# NOT TO BE WEAKENED

## **Story from Tequa**

Owing to excessive taxation one of the inhabitants of Tequa near Bethlehem decided to stand it no longer and to emigrate, secretly, for fear of being intercepted. Surreptitiously he sold his possessions bit by bit, explaining that he needed the money. Being anxious to teach his townsmen a lesson, he brought two pigeons and clipped off the wings from one of them, and placed both pigeons under a large wooden bowl, in the middle of the room. He then escaped to safety with the members of his family. Next day he was missed, and his friends and relatives went to his house to enquire about him. They forced open the door and found the house clean and empty. Instantly one pigeon flew out while the other crawled around helplessly. They soon realized the meaning of the lesson he had meant to teach them: They should flee while they were able, and before they were rendered too weak by oppression to do so.

# TRUTH OF NATURE

## **The white flower of innocence**

Between forty and fifty years ago there lived in Al-Khadr, near Artas, a girl of happy nature, who would laugh and talk with everyone. Now you must know that in the village such conduct is not thought well of. A woman should walk abroad in seemly fashion, looking down at the ground, with her head veil well pulled down on the forehead and wrapped round over shoulders and breast, and if she has to hold converse with any, she should not smile or show her teeth, O how shocking it is to show the teeth! But this girl went on smiling and showing her teeth, laughing and talking with everyone.

Then her brothers came to her and said, "Why do you do so? We will not have this. You shall be punished if you do not behave differently." But she was such a merry girl, she could not change her ways. Therefore one day her brothers slew her in their anger. Very soon afterwards, a white flower grew from her grave. It was the flower of a gourd plant climbing upwards, and some of the people passing by saw it. "Ashka el khabbar-all is now plain," they cried, "Look at the white flower, what have we done? She is innocent."

# TRUTH OF NATURE

## **Habib**

Once there was a very poor but honest man. His name was Habib. He was a farmer, he used to make grape juice and sell it to the villagers. He used an injection to take some blood of the person, and then gave him grape juice to purify the blood. He walked around the village and in the countryside while singing all along the way. Once the king heard about him and he asked his servant to bring Habib. The king asked Habib: "Why is your juice so delicious and why is what you do so healthy?" Habib answered: "I make grape juice without sugar or any additions, honestly. And I use an injection to purify blood, and that's what I sing: 'I am Habibi and my juice is from grapes.'" The king believed Habib and he asked him to take some blood from him. But the prime minister disagreed and said that the injection was old, and that he would bring a new one. But Habib was smart. He asked the king to be careful and to let the prime minister use this injection on himself first. The king forced the prime minister to do that and what happened: he dropped down dead because it was poisoned. Then the king understood that Habib was a honest man and he told him that he could take some blood from him. Then he drank the grape juice. Because of his honesty the king appointed Habib as his new prime minister

# SHAMING

## **The Beggar and the Sheikh**

Once, in the streets of Damascus, a beggar approached a sheikh who was known to be generous. The sheikh stopped, opened his bag, and handed over a cloth. The beggar respectfully thanked the sheikh, but after taking a close look at the piece of textile he noticed that it was threadbare.

The beggar thought by himself how he could bring the gift's imperfection to the attention of the sheikh. Suddenly an idea crossed his mind. He took a pencil and wrote on the backside of the cloth: "There is no God but Allah." Then he put the cloth aside. After a few days the sheikh passed by. The beggar quickly pulled up the back of the cloth. The sheikh stopped and, greatly surprised, asked the beggar, "Why don't you complete the formula and write: 'There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is His Prophet?'" A sly smile on his lips, the beggar told him: "I wanted to do so but when I inspected the cloth I found out that it was made far before Mohammed's time. Nothing about the prophet could have been written on it, because he did not yet exist!"

# SHAMING

## **Basin of Peas**

To the north of Bethlehem, on the way from Jerusalem to Bethlehem at a distance of one kilometer from the town are some fields known as the “Basins of Peas.” The tale attached to this site is very famous. It is said that Jesus Christ (in some tales the Virgin Mary or Saint Joseph) were passing by those parts when he saw a peasant sowing peas. He asked him, “What are you sowing?” The peasant replied briefly, “Stones.” Whereupon Jesus answered, “Very well, then you will reap stones.” And it was as he said. In the harvest time, when the sewer came to collect his product, you cannot imagine how great his shock was when he found nothing but petrified peas. Visitors to that place have, until recently, kept some stones that looked like peas.

# TEARS OF NATURE: GRIEVING AND CARING

## **The vine**

“When Adam and Eve were in Paradise God sent His Angel to drive them forth. The Angel grieved for them, and when returned to Paradise he thrust the staff into the ground and leaning on it wept bitterly over it. Then the staff grew and in a little while became a tree and the fruit of it was like the tears of the Angel. He ate of it and saw that it was sweet. Then he gave of it to Adam and said to him ‘Sow seed of this.’ And Adam did so and the name of the tree is the Vine.”

# TEARS OF NATURE: GRIEVING AND CARING

## **The Olive Tree is mourning**

“When the Prophet Mohammed died all the trees mourned and cast down their leaves. Then came one and said to the Olive Tree, ‘O Olive Tree, the Prophet is dead and all the trees mourn and why do you not mourn?’ The Olive Tree replied, ‘Break my wood and see the grief within at my heart.’ So he broke a branch from the Olive Tree and saw the grief in her heart. For her grief was within and not to be seen by men.” So to this day you can see the black streak in the wood of the Olive, which is the sign of her mourning.



# THINK BEFORE YOU HASTE

## **King Suleiman, the mole and the snake**

King Suleiman once went to visit Syria. A mole heard that Suleiman was in Syria. She asked him: "Why, O Ruler, have I no eyes like others?" Suleiman replied: "This is not the place for me to tell you. My throne is in Jerusalem."

Afterwards a snake also learnt that the famous King was in Syria. She came and asked: "O King, why do I have no feet like others?" He gave an answer like the one he gave to the mole: "O snake, O mole, meet me in Jerusalem; there is my throne."

Now Suleiman had a noble horse. He rode like the wind; he reached his throne. He found the mole and the snake waiting there for him. They were rested and pleased. Suleiman said to the mole: "You arrived before my horse could. If you had eyes, you would ruin the world. God preserve us from your evil." So also said he to the snake: "You arrived before my horse could. If God had created you with feet, you would ruin the world. God preserve us from your evil." And he drove them from the throne.

# THINK BEFORE YOU HASTE

## **The Virgin Mary and the plowmen**

When the Virgin Mary, peace be on her, was on the flight to Egypt with the son in her arms, she passed by some plowmen making furrows in their field. She said to them: "Though today you are only sowing, before the sun rises tomorrow morning, your field will be ready to harvest. But remember, if anyone comes this way and asks about me, say, "She was here just as we were getting ready to plant these chick-peas." Indeed when the people who were after the Virgin, came to the place on the very next day, these same plowmen were busy harvesting chickpeas. The people asked: "Has a woman carrying a child passed your way recently?" The plowmen replied: "By God, such a one did go by, but that was when we were digging the furrows to sow this crop." "O ho," said her persuers, "that must have been some time ago. How will we catch up with her now?"

# FRAGRANCE OF NATURE

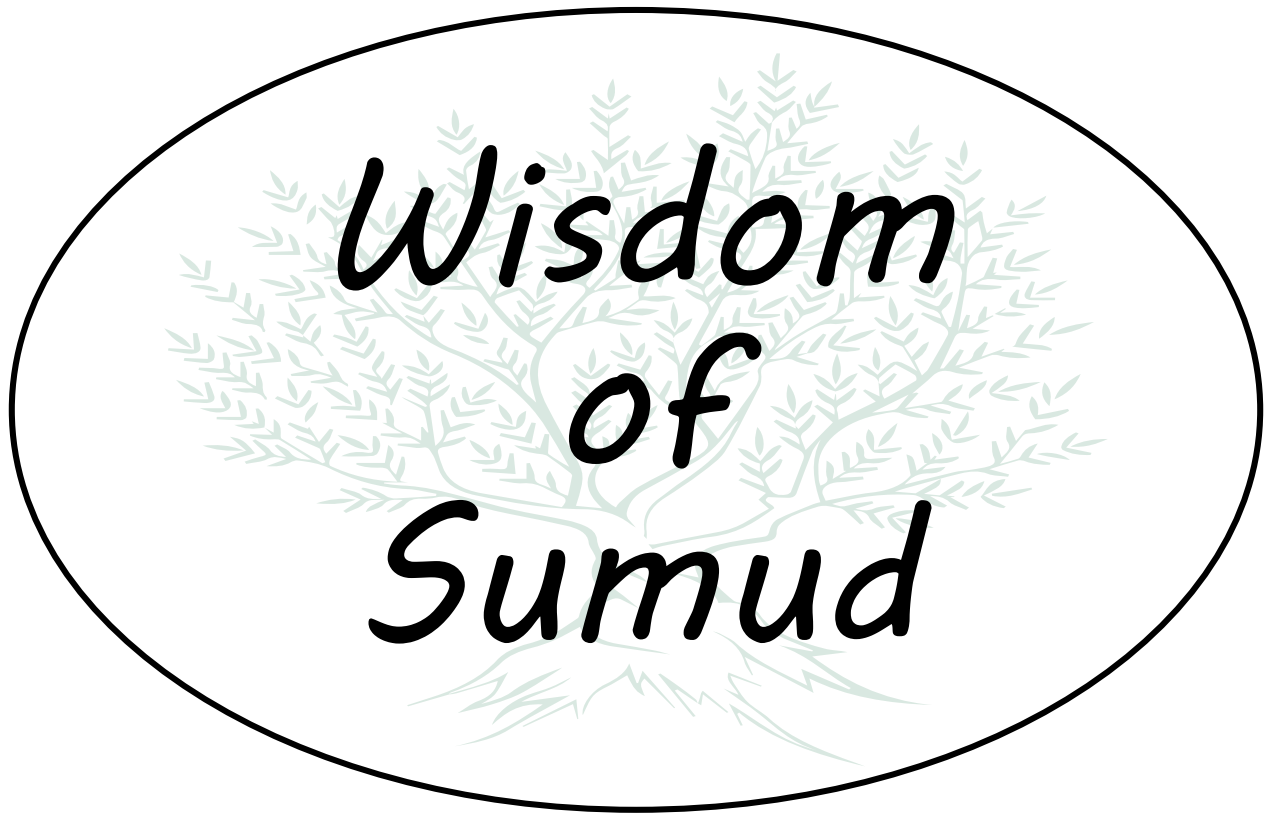
## **Miriamiya**

Why is the Miriamiya plant so blessed? This is the story of the Miriamiya. When Our Lady Miriam fled from King Herod into Egypt with Our Lord Jesus and he was yet a little Child, she sat down, weary, under the shade of a shrub. And she broke a sprig from the shrub and wiped the sweat from her face with the leaves until she found refreshment because of its fragrance. Then she said to the plant “Be thou blessed for ever” and since that day the plant is called Miriamiya in her memory, and truly it is blessed.

# FRAGRANCE OF NATURE

## **King Solomon and Balquis**

Balquis, the queen of Sheba, heard about the well-known wisdom of King Solomon. One day she invited him to her imposing palace and welcomed him wholeheartedly. She then showed him two bunches of very beautiful flowers, one of them natural, the other artificial. The resemblance between them was so close that it was impossible for the viewer to differentiate between them. Then she asked King Solomon to disclose to her which of the two branches was the natural one. But the king was not helpless. He presently summoned a swarm of bees to the palace. As soon as they entered the hall they swooped down on the natural bunch of flowers. That was how King Salomon easily discovered the solution to his problem which seemed difficult.



*Celebrate Christmas but don't forget Bethlehem*