**READING CHAIR – The Hidden Life: Death of Joseph**

*“Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called the Christ.” Mt 1:16*

“Your father was a wonderful man, Jesus,” Mary said. “If you only knew him before we were married.”

“Somehow, I can’t imagine father being different,” Jesus replied.

“You are right,” she said. “He was so protective of me then.”

“Mother, I understand,” he said. “I have heard the rumors too many times.”

“You are so much like him,” Mary continued, saying with pride, “It is almost like he is standing here in your place.”

“I loved father very much,” Jesus reminisced, “and I miss him too, especially the walks in the country side.”

“He certainly loved all God’s creation from the ground to the sky,” Mary thought. “You know, son, we met in the country side.”

“Oh? You never mentioned this before,” Jesus said surprised. “Here I thought it was an arranged marriage.”

“Not all marriages are arranged before the couple meet,” Mary said. “I certainly met Joseph before I even knew that marriages were arranged. He was out walking in the country side. I later found out that was his custom.”

“He certainly loved to take me for walks,” Jesus said reflecting, “and it wasn’t always looking for trees to cut.”

“I’ll be honest,” Mary confessed. “I used to time my walks so that I could get a glimpse of this wonderful man who loved nature.” Jesus was listening more intently now. “One time I came upon him standing there in the country side with his hands out stretched and palms up. At first I thought he was praying, but suddenly several sparrows came up and landed on his hands. I quickly realized that he had seed in them to attract them. Then he caught me watching him. I was embarrassed at first.”

“What did he do then,” Jesus asked excitedly now.

“He motioned me to him,” she said, “and I walked slowly so as not to scare the birds away.”

“And then what?” Jesus asked.

“He quietly told me to raise my hands and then he poured some seed from his hand into mine. The birds came almost immediately and landed in my hands and ate the seeds there!” she said excitedly.

“Mother,” Jesus said excitedly himself, “Father did the same for me. Their little feet tickled my hands and I couldn’t keep from laughing out loud. They flew away!”

“Me too,” she said laughing. “And I am sure he told you that this is our little secret!”

Jesus laughed!

After a few moments they were quiet. Then Jesus said softly, “I feel at times, Mother that God is like my father! You know…gentle, kind, loving.”

“Even his somewhat calloused hands could feel so gentle,” Mary said reflecting.

“And I see God so much like father in how even nature responds to those of such a heart like him, like when even the birds come and feed so trustingly from my hands.”

“That is why I said you are so much like your father, Joseph,” Mary repeated, “especially when you talk about nature, the birds, and the mustard seed, and the flowers of the fields…”

“…not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of them,” Jesus added. “Father always liked to point that out!”

“Your father would have been proud of you, Jesus,” Mary said, “especially now that you will begin your ministry to the people. They need to hear about God’s love for us, especially in these difficult times.”

“Mother,” Jesus said, “I miss him.”

“I know you do son,” Mary said. “I miss him too!”

“I need to remember him this one last time,” Jesus said, trembling.

“Your father, Joseph, blesses you, Jesus, in whatever you do” Mary said.

And Jesus wept!