

2006 Ruth program

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Ruth enters from SE goes to Altar and faces East holding Sheaf.

The story of Ruth has many beginnings for her constancy and beauty of spirit enriched all those whose lives touched hers. One of these was Naomi who with her husband and sons, Mahlon and Chilion lived in Israel until a famine forced them to leave for the fertile valleys of Moab. There is the beautiful city of Heshbon. Elimelech and his sons soon found employment as metal workers and the family gradually became accustomed to this strange new land despite the differences in customs and religion. They continued to worship their one God, Jahveh though the Moabites bowed to pagan idols.

After a time, Mahlon and Chilion fell in love with two lovely Moabite girls, Ruth, the daughter of an Edomite warrior and her friend Orpah. However, their differences in religion seemed an obstacle to marriage and Naomi opposed her sons in taking foreign girls as their brides. At length though she was won over and Mahlon and Ruth, Orpah and Chilion were married. Ruth's devotion to her husband soon overcame her idol worship and she then became converted to the Hebrew religion.

The family dwelt together in happiness for about 10 years. Then in an attempt to prevent war between Moab and their homeland, the men of the family were killed leaving Ruth and Orpah widows along with Naomi. For a time the three lived together in Moab, but soon Naomi knowing the famine was over in Israel resolved to return there. She instructed Ruth and Orpah to return to their families leaving her to journey back to Israel with a group of traveling herdsmen. Orpah and Ruth begged Naomi to go with them to the Edomite tribes where their wealthy families would give them all sanctuary. Naomi however had but one wish and that was to return to her homeland to live and die in peace. Finally Orpah left to go to her family, but as we all know that Ruth in the most beautiful words ever written spoke "wither Thou goes I will go, where Thou lodgest, I will lodge. Thy People shall be my people and thy God my God".

Together Ruth and Naomi made the difficult journey back to Israel. By the time they reached Bethlehem all of their money and valuables were gone, but despite this, Ruth was overjoyed at her mother-in-law's happiness.

They expected sanctuary at the home of Tob, Naomi's nearest of kin, but Tob who had been profitably using Elimelech's fields in their absence was not happy to see Elimelech's widow return and refused them his hospitality.

In the fields near Bethlehem the poor were allowed to pick up the grain left by the reapers. So it was that Ruth went to glean in the fields of Boaz. At first she was pushed aside by the other gleaners because she was a Moabite – but when Boaz came to visit his fields he saw her and wondering who the beautiful stranger was, asked of a worker, "who

is this?" On being told that she was the widow of Mahlon, his own kinsman he instructed his workers to see that her gleanings were plentiful.

At the time of the Harvest Festival all Bethlehem rejoiced, for the crops were in and were plentiful. Boaz also was filled with joy, for during the harvest season he had seen much of Ruth and they had come to love each other dearly. Though Boaz had asked Ruth to marry him, she was troubled for she knew that first the question of inheritance must be settled. According to the laws of the land, Tob as the nearest of kin to Naomi must be given the first opportunity to purchase the property of Elimilech and to marry Ruth the widowed wife of Mahlon.

Tob, at first was reluctant to relinquish his rights, but at last he was persuaded to do so. And then after years of distress and grief, great joy came to Naomi, Ruth and to Boaz. For Boaz took Ruth as his wife and of the marriage a child was born.

“and Naomi took the child and became nurse until it. They called him Obed, he is the father of Jesse, the Father of David. Of this man’s seed hath God, according to his promise, raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus.”

Here before you is the emblem of the Yellow ray of our Star, the sheaf. Ruth’s story was one of the most beautiful ever written.