The story of Tobit
Do you remember the story of Jonah the grumpy prophet, who was sent to tell the people of Nineveh to stop being bad and start behaving themselves? Well, one of the bad things which they did was to take people captive. They took lots of Jewish people as captives. One of these was a man called Tobit, who lived with his wife Anna and his son Toby.
Tobit was a good man, who liked to help people. But he was bit of a show-off and a drama llama. He also did some very silly things. One day he slept outside under a flock of sparrows and let them poo in this eyes. The sparrow poo was so dirty and sticky that poor Tobit went blind. Even the doctor couldn’t help. “I’m very sorry.” Said the doctor “But why ever did you let birds poo in your eyes? That was never going to end well.”
In those days it was hard for blind people to work, so the family had to depend on Tobit’s wife Anna. She made beautiful cloth, and sometimes her customers gave her presents as well as money. One afternoon she came home with a goat, but instead of being grateful, Tobit started screaming and shouting that she must have stolen it. They had a huge argument. Anna took the goat inside and fed her the lentil stew which would have been Tobit’s dinner. The goat loved the lentil stew. Tobit was left alone feeling very sorry for himself. He knew that he had been horrible to Anna, and also really wished he could see again. He prayed to God and asked for help.
Tobit wasn’t the only person having a miserable time. Far away, a young woman called Sarah was feeling really fed up. She had tried to get married seven times, and each time her husband had been eaten on their wedding night by an evil demon called Asmodeus. Sarah was bored of eating wedding cake, and just wanted to find a nice man who could manage five minutes without being gobbled up by a monster. She prayed to God and begged him to help her.
Now it just so happened that Tobit’s prayer and Sarah’s prayer arrived before God at the exact same moment. God decided to help both of them at the same time, and sent the Archangel Raphael to do it.
Tobit suddenly remembered that someone in a faraway country owed him money, and sent young Toby to collect it. Toby didn’t know the way, so went into town to look for a guide. Now in the town, the Archangel Rafael was waiting for Toby, disguised as a human being. Toby thought that he had been very lucky to find a guide so quickly. He went back home with the Archangel and his little dog, said goodbye to his parents, and the three of them started out on their journey.
After travelling for a while, they stopped by the Tigris river. Toby went in to paddle, and a fish bit his foot. Toby screamed like a piglet, but Rafael called out “Don’t stand there squealing, grab the fish! We can eat it for supper, and it’s internal organs will be really useful as medicine.” Toby was a bit surprised by this, but he did as he was told. Toby asked his friend “What kind of medicine can you make from fish organs?” “The gall is good for blindness” Replied the angel “And if you put the heart and liver on a fire, the smoke drives away demons.” “That’s handy” said Toby.
When they arrived at the city, Rafael told Toby that they were going to stay at the house of Toby’s distant cousin. “There’s a young woman there called Sarah who is looking for a husband.” Said Rafael “And you’re going to marry her, won’t that be a nice surprise for your mum and dad?” Toby was quite keen on this idea, until he found out that Sarah’s last seven husbands had been eaten by a horrible monster. At this point he freaked out.
When Toby had stopped screaming, Rafael reminded him about the fish organs. Toby was confused “So, I’m supposed to fight a monster with bits of fish? Rather than a big sword or something?” “No” replied the archangel patiently. “You put the pieces of fish on the fire and the smell will drive away the demon. Actually, it will be so stinky that it will drive away more or less everyone. Just do that, and pray, and God will take care of the rest.”
Again, Toby did as he was told. The smell of the burning fish pieces was so foul and fetid that Asmodeus felt too sick to gobble up Toby. Instead he flew out into the night, all the way to Egypt. But Rafael chased him and caught him, making sure that he never hurt anyone again.
Sarah was over the moon to have got rid of the monster, and loved Toby as much as he loved her. They had another wedding party, which was much more fun as nobody was worried about being eaten. Then Toby, Sarah, Rafael and the little dog all went back to Tobit and Anna. They used the other fish pieces to heal Tobit’s eyes, and the family were very happy. They wanted Rafael to stay with them, but that was a bit awkward. In the end he explained that he couldn’t, because he was really an archangel and had work to do in Heaven. But he promised that God would watch over them, and also that the dog would stay with them and keep them out of trouble. Rafael thought that the kind of people who sat under pooing birds and ran away from fish probably needed a bit of looking after.

I don’t know whether the little dog was another angel in disguise, it’s especially hard to tell with dogs. But I do know that he took very good care of them either way, and they loved him very much.

THE END
HYMN

Give me joy in my heart, keep me praising,
give me joy in my heart, I pray.
Give me joy in my heart, keep me praising,
keep me praising till the end of day.
Sing hosanna! Sing hosanna! Sing hosanna to the King of kings!
Sing hosanna! Sing hosanna! Sing hosanna to the King!

Give me peace in my heart, keep me resting,
give me peace in my heart, I pray.
Give me peace in my heart, keep me resting,
keep me resting till the end of day.

Give me love in my heart, keep me serving,
give me love in my heart, I pray.
Give me love in my heart, keep me serving,
keep me serving till the end of day.