



BE strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. (Deuteronomy 31:5-6)

In the days in which heroes and heroines have lived, their names may have been the center of dialogue in every household. How sadly strange that men and women of great spiritual presence and self-sacrifice are so easily forgotten with the passage of time. We would be better served if we continued to honor such persons as Sir Francis Drake, Joan of Ark, Wycliffe, Tyndale, Luther, Cranmer, Washington, Lee, and Livingston. Our youth would profit even more than we by their examples.

In the 19th century, the African continent was steeped in the darkness of superstition, slavery, sorcery, cannibalism and internecine warfare between villages and regions. God had people in the darkest corners of that continent who needed to know that they belonged to Him. So, he prepared a vessel to go among the people, live as they lived, eat the food they ate, and to suffer all of the deprivations they suffered. It seems amazing that God would select a faraway city called Aberdeen from which to draw that vessel, but He did!

In 1848, a beautiful baby girl was born to Robert and Mary Slessor - a working class family of Aberdeen. The child had unusually fair skin and brilliantly red hair. Her name was Mary Slessor, second child of seven born to the Slessors. Mary had two brothers - one studying for the ministry, and another studying at law. When the brother aspiring to become a missionary in Africa died of a tragic accident, his brother resolved to take his place; yet he died also soon after with a fever. Finally, both mother and father of Mary also died and Mary found herself the breadwinner at age fourteen for herself and her sisters. She worked as a factory jute worker, and finally as a street girl. Though her mother, a devout Presbyterian, had taught her about our Lord Jesus Christ, Mary fell from a Christian influence in her life. But God had already made preparations for that eventuality by raising up an elderly lady who invited the girls of the street to attend her regular Bible studies. Mary became an avid Bible scholar and resolved to give her life and labors to the Lord.

She applied to the Church for posting to Africa as a missionary, but in those days, Africa was considered too dangerous to send women missionaries. After the death of the renowned missionary, Dr. David Livingstone, in 1874, Mary redoubled her efforts to go to Africa. The Church finally relented and posted her to a missionary hospital (now Mary Slessor Hospital) in Nigeria as a nurse in 1876. But God had lit a burning flame in Mary's heart to go to the lost of Africa and to teach them the beauty of God's redeeming love. She eventually left the hospital and went into the darkest jungles of the Congo where no male missionary had ever come out alive.

Instead of the usual fare of killing and eating, the natives of the first village were intrigued by the color and fineness of Mary's red hair. They allowed her to remain in the village. She lived among them as one of them. She learned their language and shared their diet. Eventually, she was able to lead the village chief to Christ. After this success, many followed. Hundreds fell in line to receive and live the Gospel at Mary's teaching. But Mary was a white woman all alone among the many tribal groups of the Congo. She needed workers to harvest the fields white/black for harvest. This too was foreseen by the providence of God.

Mary discovered a dark superstition of the locals that involved twins born to a native woman. Twins were considered taboo and bad luck for the village; so, when twins were born, they were taken into the wild and left to die by being eaten by ants or wild animals. When twins were thus taken into the bush to be abandoned, Mary followed. When the party left the twins, Mary would secretly bring them back to her little cottage and raise them as her own. The chief learned of this and was outraged, but Mary's patience and persistence won out. She eventually raised many such children as her own. When her recurrent malaria rendered her unable to go on long walks, these children would push or carry Mary on a cart. Eventually, they became her missionary workers, too. This was another provision God made for His people of Africa. Mary had become famous throughout Europe and America for her service in Africa. But she chose to remain there with 'her people.'

Finally, in January 1915, Mary took sick with an unrelenting fever and died. Her body was sent down river to Duke Town where her body, casket draped with the Union Jack, was given a state funeral with honors. The drums beat from village to village in that part of Africa pounding out the poignant message: "*Come, Come, Come to the big village! Everybody's mother is dead.*" On her deathbed, Mary was heard by Jane (one of her adopted children) to say in the Efik tongue, "O Abasi, sana mi yok." Or, in English, "O God, release me." As the day dawned on 15 January 1915, Mary Slessor closed her eyes in the jungles of Africa only to open them to the brilliant Sunrise of Heaven – everybody's mother was finally home.