

Priam and Hecuba's choice (⌚ 4:10)

Far, far away from that island, where Achilles had been dressed as a girl and hidden by his mother; far, far away across the blue Aegean sea there stood a city. Imagine the walls towering high above your head. Imagine painted palaces, carved temples, broad streets, houses of wood and stone. The great city of Ilium, the magnificent city of Troy.

- 5 The king of that city was called Priam – white-bearded Priam, the father of Troy, the father of the bull-herding Trojans. And the queen of the city was called Hecuba, Queen Hecuba. Now Hecuba had already had two sons – two strapping boys. One was called Hector and one was called Deiphobus. And now she was expecting another baby. She was big with the baby she was carrying.
- 10 And one night she was lying on her bed, fast asleep, and she had a dream. And in her dream she gave birth. But she didn't give birth to any mortal child. She gave birth to a blazing torch, with red flames and yellow flames like flickering snakes that set the whole city on fire. And when she woke up she told the dream to her husband, King Priam. And Priam said, "You must take this dream to the priests and the wise men."
- 15 And so Hecuba went to the priests and the wise men, and she told them her dream. And they shook their heads and they said, "This dream is a bad thing. This dream means that you will give birth to a son – a baby boy. And if that child is allowed to grow up to become a man, then he will cause the whole city to burn, like a blazing torch."
And Hecuba said, "Then what am I to do?"
- 20 And they said, "There's only one thing you can do. As soon as the child is born, he must be killed."
Well some days later Hecuba gave birth. And she gave birth to a baby boy, but he was the most beautiful child. His face was shining with light. His little hands were opening and closing. And, as soon as he was born, King Priam drew his sword and he raised the blade of the sword
- 25 above his shoulder.
But what would you have done? He looked at the child. He looked at the beautiful boy and he could not bring himself to kill him. And so he called his soldiers and, one after the other, the soldiers came into the room and they drew their swords but not one of them – even the most hardened, cut-throat in his army – not one of them could kill the beautiful child.
- 30 And so he grew up in the palace of Priam and Hecuba, and he was given the name Paris. And from a beautiful baby to a beautiful boy. And from a beautiful boy to a beautiful young man. And the priests and the wise men watched him growing and they shook their heads and they said, "This is a bad thing."

Paris' choice (☉ 4:28)

And seventeen years passed – seventeen long years. And one time Zeus, the cloud-compeller, the king of the gods, on the high slopes of Mount Olympus, Zeus was looking down at the world and he saw Paris. He saw this beautiful young man out hunting on the foothills of Mount Ida – the mountain that stretched up behind the city walls of Troy.

5 Now Zeus had a headache. He'd had a headache for a long time because those three goddesses had never stopped arguing and bickering and quarrelling as to who was the most beautiful. And he looked down at the beautiful young man, a king's son, and he thought to himself, "He will decide who is the most beautiful."

And he called Hermes, the messenger of the gods. And Hermes strapped on his winged
10 sandals and, swift as thought, he flew down out of the sky and he came to Paris. He said, "Paris, I've been sent by great father Zeus. And he has told me to tell you that you must decide which of these three goddesses is the most beautiful."

And he clicked his fingers. And out of the light, three goddesses appeared in front of Paris. There was Hera, the wife of Zeus, the queen of heaven – ox-eyed Hera, magnificent. There
15 was Athene, the goddess of war and wisdom, her grey eyes shining with light. And there was Aphrodite, the goddess of love – beautiful, beautiful Aphrodite.

And Hermes said, "Paris, you must decide who is the most beautiful and you must give her this golden apple." And he dropped the golden apple into Paris' hand and he was gone.

And Paris was left standing, staring, goggle-eyed, at three goddesses. But his eyes kept
20 wandering towards Aphrodite – the goddess of love. And Hera stamped her foot. She said, "It's not fair. Aphrodite is wearing her belt of love and desire. Paris must decide when he's seen us naked." And Athene agreed.

And so it was the three goddesses took off their clothes. They disrobed. They stood stark naked in front of Paris. And now Paris was looking from one to the other and he could not
25 decide who was the most beautiful.

And so Hera stepped forwards, the wife of Zeus, her ox-eyes shining and she said, "Paris, choose me and I will give you power. Choose me and I will make you a king over the whole of Europe and the whole of Asia." And she stepped back.

And then Athene came forwards, her long limbs unblemished and she said, "Paris, choose me
30 and you'll never lose a battle. Choose me and you'll be famous the length and the breadth of the world for your wisdom, your cleverness." And she stepped back.

And then Aphrodite came forwards, beautiful Aphrodite, smelling of musk and honey. And she said, "Paris, choose me and I will give you the most beautiful woman in the world."

And Paris said, "Who is she?"

35 "Her name is Helen. She's the wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta. I will blind her with love for you. She will give you everything."

And Paris said, "What does she look like?"

And Aphrodite said, "She is as beautiful as I am." And she stepped back.

And Paris lifted the golden apple above his shoulder and he looked from one goddess to the
40 other. What did he do? What would you have done? Well he looked from one to the other and then he said, "The golden apple goes to Aphrodite."

***Helen's choice* (☺ 4:39)**

And Hera and Athene were furious. They turned on their heels. They flashed into the sky and they were gone.

And, as for Aphrodite, the goddess of love, she loosed an invisible arrow, which struck Paris in the heart. And from that moment, even though he'd never seen her, even though she was
5 nothing more than a name, an idea, he was in love with Helen, the wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta.

And Aphrodite reached down and she picked up her belt of love and desire. And she tied it round her waist, and she was gone.

And, as for Hera and Athene, from that moment they hated Paris, and they were pondering in
10 their hearts how they could bring about his death and the destruction of the whole city of Troy. And, as for Paris, dazed, confused, he made his way back to the city of Troy.

And some little while later, his father, King Priam, called him and he said, "Paris, my son.

You're young, you're handsome. The time has come for you to choose a wife. The city is full of fine women."

15 But there was only one woman in the world who Paris wanted, even though he'd never seen her, even though she was nothing more than a name, an idea. And that was Helen, the wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta.

Let me tell you the story of Helen. Zeus had many mortal sons but only once did he ever have a mortal daughter – Helen. She was the most beautiful woman in the world. Everyone who saw
20 her fell in love with her. Some said this was a blessing, others that this was a curse.

Rumours of Helen's beauty spread across Greece. Many a Greek king wanted her for his wife. They travelled to the palace of her foster father. He had an idea. He welcomed all of the Greek kings into the bronze-floored feasting hall of his palace, and then he led into that hall a stallion. He slaughtered it with his sword. He laid out the severed pieces of the stallion across the floor.

25 Here the legs, there the flanks, there the neck, there the head. And he made each of them stand upon a severed piece and swear an oath, make a promise, that when Helen chose a husband, they would accept her decision. And, if ever she was stolen, they would come to her husband's aid.

Once they had done this, the doors of the hall opened and in came Helen. All of them stared at
30 her. What was she to do? Who was she to choose?

She looked from one to the other to the next. And then she took the hands of the red-haired king of Sparta, Menelaus. Him she chose for her husband.