**THE STORY OF ESTHER**

A long time ago there was a powerful kingdom called Persia which was ruled by a powerful king called Xerxes. Now Xerxes needed a wife. He ordered his servants to search the land for the most beautiful women. When they had gathered them all together, the servants brought them to the palace so the king could choose his bride. The most beautiful of all was a woman called Esther and it was she who was immediately chosen by the king. But Esther was not only beautiful – she was also good and wise.

Unfortunately, there was one problem: King Xerxes did not know it, but Esther was an Israelite. A caring relative named Mordecai had adopted Esther as a child, and raised her as his own daughter. H e had always warned her not to tell *anyone* she was an Israelite.

Now he had his bride, King Xerxes was a happy man. He placed the royal crown on Esther’s bowed head, and she became his wife and queen. A huge party was organised to celebrate the occasion.

E:\Woodcut Religion\LANDSCP2.WMFMordecai was pleased at Esther’s good fortune and often sat outside the palace gates to hear how she was getting on. Then one terrible day, he overheard men plotting to murder King Xerxes. Straightaway, Mordecai passed the information on to Esther, and she ran to tell the king. The bad men were arrested, and Mordecai's good deed was recorded in the king's special record book.

Later on, a powerful man named Haman became angry at Mordecai. Haman knew that Mordecai was an Israelite, and he encouraged King Xerxes to make it legal to kill all Israelites.

Esther knew this law meant that she too must die. ‘I will do all I can to change this,’ she said to Mordecai. ‘ Even if it means that I am killed. Please ask my people to pray for me.’

C:\Users\Kath's\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\PCJCZ34I\MC900036415[1].wmfAnd Mordecai did.

Esther asked to speak to the king. When King Xerxes saw her, he asked, ‘What can I do for you, dear Queen? I will give you whatever you ask, up to half my kingdom.’

‘I have prepared a banquet for you and Haman. I would like you to be my guests,’ said Esther.

So the king and Haman came and enjoyed a delicious meal served by Esther. ‘Now, dear Queen, tell me what it is I can do for you,’ said King Xerxes.

‘If you both could come for another feast tomorrow,’ said Esther, ‘then I will tell you my request.’

The next day, King Xerxes and Haman came to another fine banquet. ‘Now, tell me, my Queen, what your request is?’ said King Xerxes. ‘What can I give to you?’

‘Dear King,’ said Esther. ‘If you are pleased with me, I beg you to spare my life. And also spare the lives of my people. If we were to be sold as slaves, I would not have bothered you, but it seems unfair that we are to be put to death.’

‘Who dares to do this?’ demanded the king.

‘It is this cruel Haman,’ said Esther, pointing to her enemy. The king ordered Haman to be hung that very same day.

Esther and her people were safe!

C:\Users\Kath's\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\7I1RAOJW\MC900413694[1].wmf