

THE MESSIAH IS AMONGST YOU

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A monastery had fallen on hard times. It was once part of a great order which, as a result of religious persecution lost all its branches. It was decimated to the extent that there were only five monks left in the mother house: the Abbot and four others, all of whom were over seventy. Clearly it was a dying order.

Deep in the woods surrounding the monastery was a little hut that the Rabbi from a nearby town occasionally used for a hermitage. One day, it occurred to the Abbot to visit the hermitage to see if the Rabbi could offer any advice that might save the monastery. The Rabbi welcomed the Abbot and commiserated. *"I know how it is"* he said, *"the spirit has gone out of people. Almost no one comes to the synagogue anymore."* So the old Rabbi and the old Abbot wept together, and spoke quietly of deep things.

The time came when the Abbot had to leave. They embraced. *"It has been wonderful being with you,"* said the Abbot, *"but I have failed in my purpose for coming. Have you no piece of advice that might save the monastery?"* *"No, I am sorry,"* the Rabbi responded, ***"I have no advice to give. The only thing I can tell you is that the Messiah is one of you."***

When the other monks heard the Rabbi's words, they wondered what possible significance they might have. *"The Messiah is one of us? One of us, here, at the monastery? Do you suppose he meant the Abbot? Of*

course – it must be the Abbot, who has been our leader for so long. On the other hand, he might have meant Brother Thomas, who is undoubtedly a holy man. Certainly he couldn't have meant Brother Elrod – he's so crotchety. But then Elrod is very wise. Surely, he could not have meant Brother Phillip – he's too passive. But then, magically, he's always there when you need him. Of course he didn't mean me – yet supposing he did? Oh Lord, not me! I couldn't mean that much to you, could I?"

As they contemplated in this manner, the old monks began to treat each other with extraordinary respect, on the off chance that one of them might be the Messiah. And on the off off chance that each monk himself might be the Messiah, they began to treat themselves with extraordinary respect.

Because the forest in which the monastery was situated was beautiful, people occasionally came to visit the monastery, to picnic or to wander along the old paths, most of which led to the dilapidated chapel. They sensed the aura of extraordinary respect that surrounded the five old monks, permeating the atmosphere. They began to come more frequently, bringing their friends, and their friends brought friends. Some of the younger men who came to visit began to engage in conversation with the monks. After a while, one asked if he might join. Then another, and another. Within a few years, the monastery became once again a thriving order, and – thanks to the Rabbi's gift – a vibrant community of light and love.