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The Lost Tomb of Jesus



Nihal Mathur
Filmmaker,
writer, bon vivant

#IT COULD BE

It is an old story that goes back more than 2000 years when a child was born to a poor Jewish couple - Joseph and Mary from Nazareth. The birth of Jesus according to the Gospels, was a prophesied event. It said that a virgin named Mary will bring a boy in this world who would be the 'Saviour' of his people. We know little about the life of Jesus as a child but we do know that as an adult he began preaching around 27-29 AD for a short period that lasted only a couple of years. But during this brief time, the young man in his thirties, drew crowds where ever he went with his message of love.

Jesus had a large following and perhaps that is why he was persecuted because he was considered a dangerous false messiah who was leading the Jewish masses in confrontation with the rulers of Israel in Rome. His popularity threatened Pontius Pilate who was the Governor of the Roman province of Judaea - the area around modern day Israel. On a charge of treason, Jesus was arrested and crucified in Jerusalem. The disciples took the body down from the cross, wrapped it in linen and carried it to a tomb. Today, that tomb is inside the Church of Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. There on the third day, Jesus is said to have risen from the dead - known as the Resurrection of Christ. And then Jesus ascended into the heavens not only in spirit but also in body. Since then, the tomb of Jesus has been empty, bereft of a body but still venerated by the devout and tourists who come from around the world.

Resurrection and Ascension

Resurrection and Ascension are two key concepts that lie at the very heart of Christianity. But there have always been many who have challenged these core Christian ideas and many have even been killed in expressing their views. Many sources suggest that Jesus did not die on the cross and that he survive crucifixion. In all probability, Jesus had completely passed

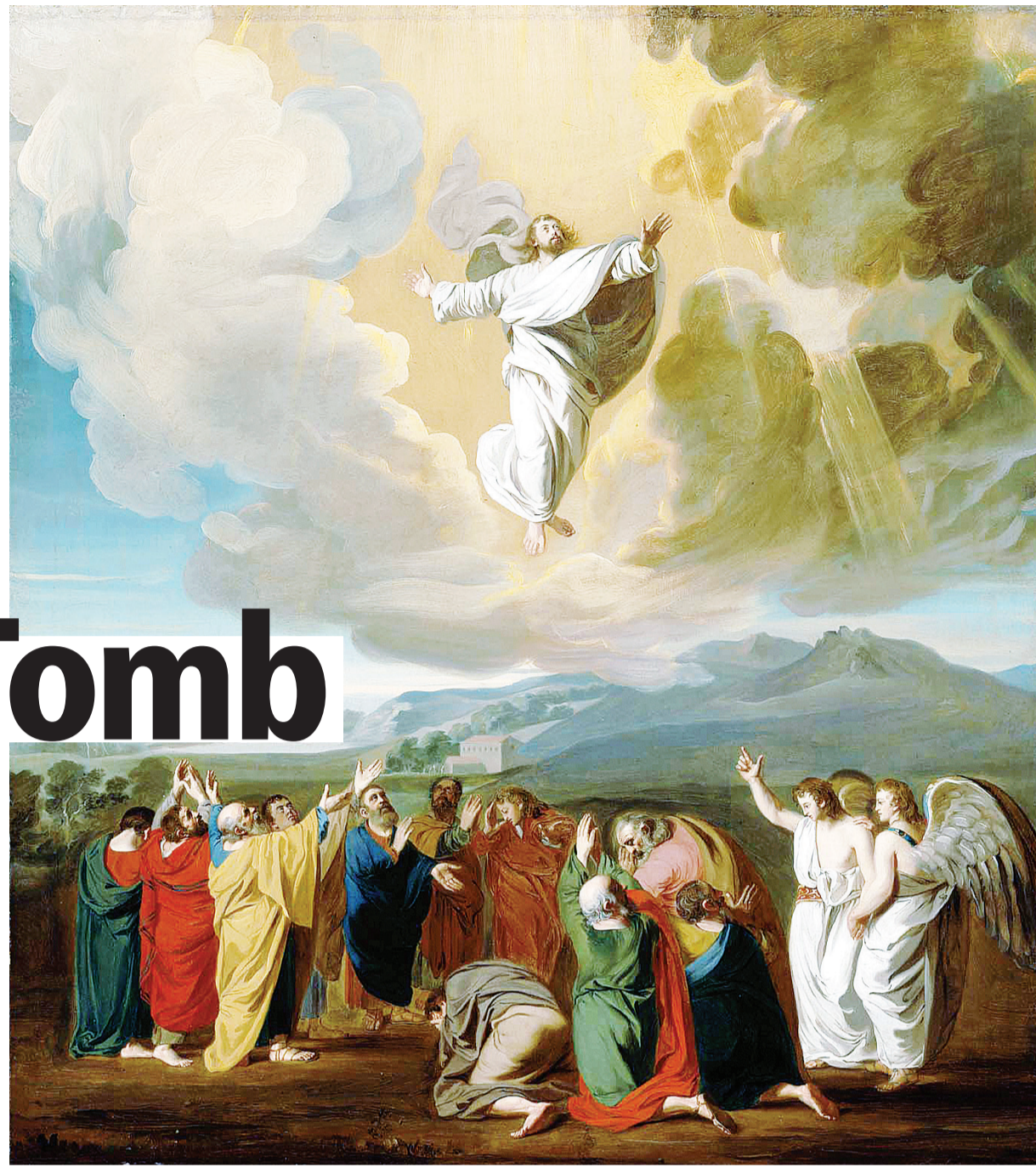
out and was brought down from the cross as dead but later revived in the tomb. In fact, in the Gospel of John 19:39 there is a reference of herbs being brought by the disciples in the night to heal Jesus. If Jesus did indeed recover from the near death experience of crucifixion then that was surely a 'Resurrection' of sorts - but Ascension? This is hard to believe in our age of science that a human body can actually lift against gravity and rise into infinite space to heaven. It must have been just as hard even then for people to believe in ascension. The most likely scenario was that Jesus regained energy and with help from the disciples and then tried to dodge and hide from the Romans for whom he was a southern France man condemned.

Southern France

The question that is often raised is: If Jesus didn't ascend to the heavens, then where did his body go? Where was he buried? From Jerusalem to the villages of southern France and distant land of Kashmir, there are many legends and stories that claim evidences of the lost tomb of Jesus. Researchers often wonder what would a living Jesus who was running away from the Romans, want to do? Surely he would want to slip away to a secret quiet life, as far as possible from the Roman Empire. He may well have done just that. There is a story about Jesus and Mary Magdalene, a constant and trusted companion of Jesus, who along with a small group of people, slipped past the Romans checkpoints & sentries and managed to reach southern France. There according to local legends, they led a simple life and died in obscurity. Although the cult of Mary Magdalene is pretty strong in southern France there is no sign of any tomb of Jesus. Just stories and legends.

India

But why would Jesus want to go west to France risking a journey across the length of the Roman Empire when for instance he could go to India anytime. The passage to India was just as easy by land on the Silk Route as it was by sea on the Spice Route. All one had to do was ride a camel to the Arabian coast and hop on to one of the spice ships returning back to India and



soon one was far away from the world of Roman legionaries. In fact, Saint Thomas the Apostle, did in fact take the how to ancient city of Muzris, close to the present day Cochín area and founded the first Church on Indian soil in 54 AD.

Three Wise Men

There is also a very special connection between Jesus and India. It is written in the Bible that three wise men from East, bearing gifts, came following a star, at the birth of Jesus to pay their homage to the



Roza Bal shrine and tomb in Srinagar.

coming of the Prophet. This sounds very similar to the Tibetan traditions where after the death of the Head Lama, senior monks on the basis of stars, signs and omens, set off to find the child that was considered to be the reincarnation of the Lama. When the child was big enough, he was taken away from the parents and groomed in Buddhism, to be the next Head Lama. There are stories that say Jesus as a young boy was also taken away from home to the distant Himalayas to be groomed a Buddhist.

Ladakh & Srinagar

There is another story of one Nicholas Notovitch, a Russian writer travelling in India in the 19th century who discovered an

ancient manuscript at the Hemis Monastery in Ladakh which shed light on life of Est, as Jesus was known in Islam. In fact, in 1984 Nicholai wrote a book "The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ" (which stands largely discredited) in which he claimed that Jesus between the age of 14 and 29 was in India where he studied with the Buddhist and the Hindu monks before returning back home to Israel to preach. In the teachings of Jesus, there seems a deep connection with Buddhist philosophy

rather than Jewish. No wonder there are uncanny similarities between the teachings and miracles of Buddha and Jesus. After his rescue from crucifixion it made sense to return back to Kashmir to escape the Romans. In remote Himalayas there still lives a tribe that is considered to be the descendants of one of the ten lost tribes of Israel who consider Jesus as their Youza or 'Leader of the Healed'. Jesus or Ziarati Hazrati Youza Asouph is said to have returned to Kashmir in his 30s where he continued to live and preach till he died in 80 AD and was buried at Roza Bal shrine in Srinagar. Local researchers point out many details to establish that this is indeed the real tomb of Jesus. But no serious work has

been done to determine whether it is the tomb of Jesus or not.

Talpiot Tombs

Then, one day in the spring of 1980, two tombs came to light in the East Talpiot neighbourhood, not far from the old city of Jerusalem, where a construction company was digging the ground to lay foundations of a housing complex. During digging, one of the tombs (Tomb 2) was damaged by the excavator and it was sealed up again without any investigation or documentation of what was inside largely because there was pressure from religious groups to leave it undisturbed. The distinctive thing about these unearthed tombs was that they had a prominent symbol above the doorway. It was a chevron - a V-shaped mark, often inverted with a circle in the middle. There are several plausible meanings but the symbol still remains a riddle today.

Talpiot Tomb 1

Talpiot Tomb 1 was a typical rock cut tomb which was laid out in a traditional design. It consisted of a central chamber around which there were 6 deep cavities large enough to lay out a dead body. Burial customs of the time demanded that after a year, the tomb be opened again and the skeletal remains collected and placed inside an ossuary. Now an ossuary is like a small coffin box made of sandstone, in which only bones were stored. Ten ossuaries were found in Tomb 1. In Jerusalem, a living city since last 5,000 years, it was natural that archaeological objects like ossuaries would frequently come to light during development diggings. In the 1970s and 80s, during the construction boom, thousands of ossuaries were found along with other artefacts. The standard procedure was to call the office of the Israel Antiquities Authority the IAA, who would then send a team to document the tomb before development work was allowed to resume. And, whatever that could be removed was taken away to the

Authority's warehouse not far from Jerusalem and stored for later scrutiny.

And that's exactly what happened. Twenty years later, in year 2000, the Talpiot tomb ossuaries came up for closer examination. After the bones and remains found inside the ossuaries were all bagged and boxed and reburied outside Jerusalem, the process of cataloguing the bone boxes began. Six out of ten ossuaries from the Talpiot Tomb had the name of the dead person inscribed on the side. One of them had an astonishing name: Yeshua son of Joseph.

Family of Jesus

Could this be the ossuary of Jesus (known as Yeshua in Hebrew)? And if yes, then all the other nine must be from his family. The second name discovered on the Talpiot ossuaries was Maria in Hebrew for Mary. Could this be the Virgin Mary's ossuary? Then they found another family name: Jose who was a brother of Jesus and then Matthew who figures in the genealogy of Mary. Critics said that these are very common Jewish names from that period and it would be farfetched to suggest that this was the tomb of Jesus. But a documentary filmmaker thought otherwise.

Docu-Drama

In 2007, Discovery & Vision TV in Canada co-produced a documentary that covered the findings of the Talpiot Tombs. They came into this project like investigative journalists determined to find the truth whether the Talpiot Tomb was indeed that of Jesus and his family or not. In that sense they were the driving force of research and inquiry into this subject which had lain dormant for more than half century. And they reached shattering conclusions. That story they told in their documentary, "The Lost Tomb of Jesus"

Statistical Probability

One of the first things they did was try and decipher the names. Out of the six names on the ossuaries, they could figure out only four i.e. Jesus son of Joseph, Maria or mother Mary, Matthathia or Matthew from Mary's lineage and Jose, brother of Jesus. From a list of hundreds of names found on the ossuary, Andrew Feuerverger a Prof. of mathematics at the University of Toronto examined the statistical probabilities of these 4 names and concluded that this could possibly be the Jesus family and should be investigated seriously.

Mary Magdalene

Then they uncovered yet another name on one of the Talpiot ossuary. The inscription had two parts. The first one read 'Mariam' and the second read as 'Mariamne' - which is another name for Mary who was also known as Mara. But it doesn't make sense to find two ossuaries with the name of Mary in the tomb of Jesus - until unless this Mara or Mariamne was none other than Mary Magdalene who was a constant companion of Jesus. Mary hailed from a place called Magdala which was a trade centre close to the Sea of Galilee. Mary and her brother often took Jesus' teachings



Talpiot Tomb Entrance at the time of discovery.



Church of the Holy Sepulchre, built on the site of Jesus' Crucifixion and burial.

to the Greek speaking Jews living there. And so it was perhaps a natural that Mary's followers and family would have written her name in Greek. Mariamne's is the only ossuary found in the Talpiot tomb where the inscription is written in Greek. As Prof. Andrew Feuerverger found that the statistical probabilities become compelling as soon as we add Mary Magdalene's name to the cluster of 4 names from the Talpiot Tomb. From 1 in 97,200,000 the probability ratio jumps to 1 in 600!

It is well known that after Jesus' death, the strong leadership displayed by Magdalene was not appreciated by the male dominated Church that rejected two manuscripts that held Mary in high esteem. They were 'The Gospel of Mary Magdalene' and 'The Acts of Philip' that described her brother's work as a preacher. For centuries these manuscripts were available in fragments only. Then in 1974 a complete copy of the Acts of Philip came to light in a Greek Monastery. It was here the researchers found that Mary was also known as Mariamne.

After Jesus' death Mary went to France. According to Acts of Philip she did not die in France but died in Jerusalem. Mary has been described variously in the holy books as a missionary who teaches, preaches and baptizes. And she also carried the title of Apostle. No wonder, Mary Magdalene was then Mara because in Aramaic (ancient Syrian) language it means Master. It would have been absolutely natural for a disciple to scrawl Mara in addition to Mariamne on the ossuary of Mary Magdalene. Now if it is indeed the ossuary of Mary Magdalene, then the question is how did she find a place in the family tomb of Jesus? In other words, what was her relationship with Jesus?

DNA

One sure way to determine any relationship is by doing a DNA test. Since the bones had been long reburied, Steven Cock a forensic archaeologist from New York State was roped in to recover potential DNA material from inside the Talpiot ossuaries. The samples were sent to a lab in Lakehead University, Canada. Here they managed to retrieve the Mitochondrial DNA from bone fragments and human



Running Low on Fries?

Around the world, McDonald's has been a favourite for many. Some of the items on the fast food joint's menu are classics and have been served and consumed for generations. But what happens when there is a shortage of something that is craved globally? In Japan, the world's biggest fast food company has run out of the famous French fries. The company has said it is experiencing delays in the shipment of potatoes. This has led to outlets in Japan selling only small portions of fries.



Leonardo da Vinci's drawing of Mary Magdalene.

residue left behind in the ossuary and the results concluded that the two occupants were not blood relations on their mothers' side. Hence Mary Magdalene could not have been a sister or a daughter of Jesus. So for Mary to be in the family tomb of Jesus was indeed an intriguing discovery unless of course, they were husband and wife.

Judah Son of Jesus

For centuries people have speculated about the relationship of Mary Magdalene and Jesus. Mary appears more frequently than other women in the Gospels, always a close trusted follower of Jesus. Her presence at the crucifixion is consistent with the role of a grieving wife. So they were perhaps married but had kept their union a secret - one that was kept thru the ages. That was till they retrieved another ossuary of a child from Talpiot Tomb 1 with the



Director of the Documentary inside the Talpiot Tomb.

inscription: Judah son of Jesus. Now that was big news. New Testament doesn't say Jesus had a son. But archaeology revealed what the New Testament didn't. If indeed Judah was his son, his existence would have been kept a secret since Jesus was perceived to be a pretender to the royal throne. His son would have also been a target of the Roman authorities

Talpiot Tomb 2

To take the inquiry further, the filmmakers tried to uncover more evidence and one way to do that was to find the Talpiot Tomb 2 which was sealed before it could be examined. Nobody knew what secrets that tomb contained. It was now more than 25 years ago when the two Talpiot Tombs were reburied and cemented all over to make way for the apartments to be built on top of it. Even if the exact location of the tomb was ascertained it would have been impossible to get into it the tomb considering the tons of cement that was poured into its foundations. But they were lucky. Consulting the decades old architectural plans of the residential complex and cross referencing with Israel Antiquities Authority IAA records they not only found that there was an access to the tomb below but managed to enter it.

What they found inside was a huge heap of decomposing pages of holy books. According to Jewish law, biblical books cannot be just discarded. They have to be buried.

Among the pages of holy books they found the Book of Jonah, that Jesus refers to as key to understand his ministry - i.e. his work as a preacher. Once a disciple asked Jesus, what are you up to Master? Jesus replied read the Book of Jonah. Jesus always spoke in parables and codes which not surprising for a man who was seen to be leading a seditious movement against the Roman tyranny and was destined for crucifixion!

Missing Ossuary of James

The opening of the Talpiot Tomb 2 coincided with another twist in the story. What was found and recorded by the IAA was that there were ten ossuaries from Talpiot Tomb 1 but now the IAA warehouse had only nine. One was missing. Perhaps stolen because ossuaries fetch handsome prices with antique collectors. In 2002 an ossuary surfaced in the private collection and it bore the inscription James son of Joseph brother of Jesus. The well-known private collector, Oded Golan, said that he bought the ossuary around the 1980s - from an Arab antiquity dealer in the old city of Jerusalem and was unaware of the significance of the inscription. After Jesus' death his brother James took over the leadership of Jesus' followers. He was also feared for his religious popularity and influence which was considered to be a threat to the Jewish hierarchy and had him executed in Jerusalem by stoning.

Patina

What followed was a battle between Christian scholars and science over the authenticity of James ossuary. Theological experts had declared that James' ossuary was a forgery. What would it take to conclude that the missing ossuary was from the Talpiot tomb? The 'Patina' should prove the case one way or

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iron that were unique to James Ossuary. This matched perfectly with patinas from the Talpiot Tombs. There were other random patinas collected from different ossuaries and the tests showed that none matched the patina from the Talpiot tomb. When James' ossuary is included in the cluster of names for the statistical model, then the probability factor drastically changes from 1 to 600 to a substantially higher probability, strongly suggesting that this is the tomb of the family of Jesus of Nazareth.

Criticism

After finding all these facts contrary to Christian beliefs, the filmmakers couldn't have escaped sharp criticism. After media picked up this story of the Talpiot Tombs, a symposium was organised at Princeton in January 2008 where most of the speakers accused Simcha Jacobovici, the director and James Cameron (of Titanic fame), the producer of the film for misleading the media in claiming their theory as viable. A majority of leading experts - archaeologists, theologians, linguistic & biblical scholars, epigraphers & other scientists rejected the filmmakers' claims roundly and called their documentary a "typed up film which is intellectually and scientifically dishonest." Such insulting language was used to describe the film because it raised up issues that challenged the core of Christian beliefs.

Conclusions

Resurrection was the coming back of Jesus from the dead. In theory and practice the concept is possible. A new design can be resurrected and same is the case with Ascension which is simply understood as the Spirit rises into the heavens leaving the body behind as we find in the Talpiot Tombs. But this could be considered blasphemous since it is cardinal principle of faith that says Jesus rose to the heavens in His body. The other sacrilege the filmmaker committed was to prove that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were husband and wife when there is no such mention anywhere in all of Christian texts. And then to prove that they had a son called Judah was also equally heretical. Clearly when your truth happens to shake the very core of the system then the entire establishment rises to maintain the status quo. It is painful but the wise let things pass because in the end, everything becomes just another story.

writetoarbit@rashtradoot.com



Talpiot Residential Complex which was built over the tombs.

#FESTIVITIES Underwater Christmas Tree



Make your own underwater Christmas tree in just 7 easy steps. Aqua artist Mayur Dev shares how to nurture an aquarium with a DIY decorative piece made up of real moss and plants to replicate a Christmas tree.

It is time to decorate your Christmas tree with baubles, bells, stars and lights! But how about ditching the traditional tree set up and experimenting with something that is fun and also extremely unique?

Aqua artist and aquascaper, Mayur Dev, shares how to nurture an aquarium with a DIY decorative piece made up of real moss and plants to replicate a Christmas tree, but underwater. With a simple seven-step process and some products, one can have a bright and colourful tree like structure in time for Christmas which can also support fish.

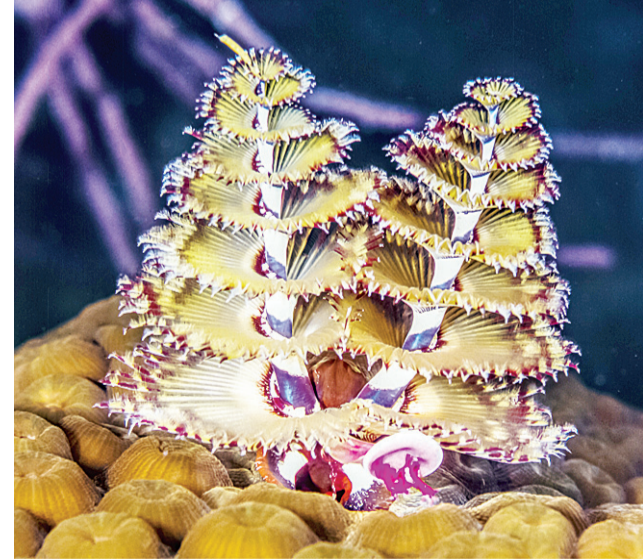
Step 1: Place a thin layer of moss on a cylindrical sand-like product called 'DOQA Terra Base'. The base can absorb water and support the growth of plants.
Step 2: Next, place Pinnatifida UK along with white Anubias on the terra base. This will add a shade of red to the décor. A dash of pink can be added by attaching Hygrophilla. Ensure your base is moist at all times by using an atomiser spray. Wood and stone can be glued to the terra base for decoration.
Step 3: Once the terra base is ready with the plants, wash and add DOQA Tropical River Sand in the centre piece to showcase the gentle stream of water to remove dust. It is white in colour, which reflects light and makes the terra base look bright. Once the sand is placed, the base can be placed in the tank along with a light source on top.

Step 4: Now slowly and carefully fill the tank with water. It is important to level the sand with a flat-tener and remove any floating debris with a net.

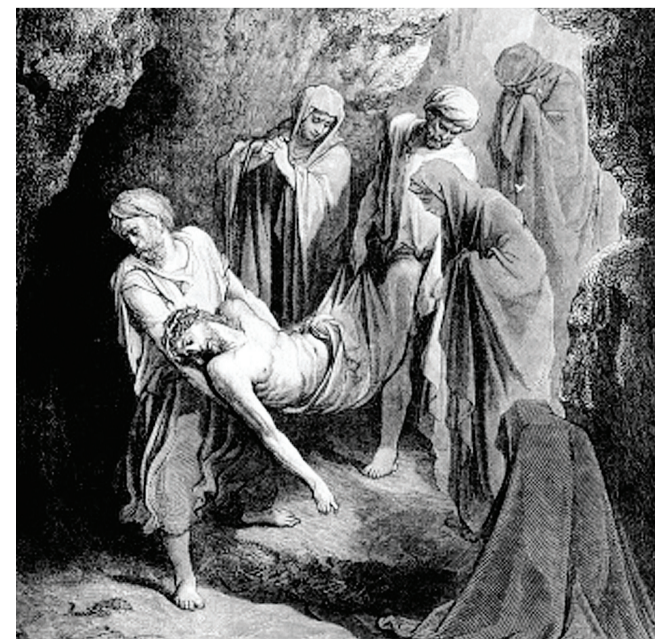
Step 5: Fit a small filter apparatus and CO2 supply to the tank. Once set, a filter starter solution can be added to water followed by fertilizer product of choice. Completion of Step 5 makes the tank ready.

Step 6: This step involves waiting for a few days. The tree needs trimming once or twice as the moss starts to grow out and 50 per cent water has to be changed for at least a week, and then topped up with fertilisers.

Step 7: You can now add fish to the tank - but only after 15 days. This beautiful process of creating your own underwater Christmas tree can be a fun way of spending family time during the holiday season. Children and adults of all ages can enjoy watching this little aqua-art project bloom just in time for Christmas and the family can have a unique centre piece to showcase while hosting guests.

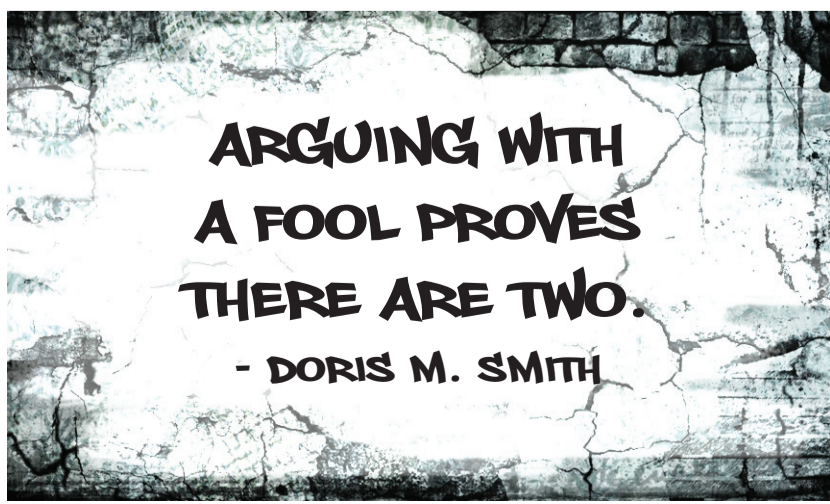


By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman



Descent from the Cross into the Tomb.

THE WALL



BABY BLUES



ZITS

