Isis and Osiris

When the great god Atum-Re decided that he was too old to rule the world, he asked Osiris to take his place. Osiris, who was the son of the earth god Geb and the sky goddess Nut, was a good and wise young man and brought great prosperity to Egypt. He was also brave and kind and always tried to rule in a fair and honest way.

Osiris had a brother called Seth who had always been jealous of him. When Seth saw how much the people loved his brother, he made up his mind to get rid of him once and for all. Seth was as devious as Osiris was wise, and one day he organised a big party with lots of wine. In the middle of the room was a large, beautifully carved wooden chest. Seth announced that anyone who fitted into it perfectly could have it as a gift. Everyone tried but no-one was the right size. Then Osiris got in. He fitted exactly but, before he could get out again, Seth slammed down the lid and threw the chest into the Nile. Osiris tried to get out but the lid was closed fast – and so he drowned.

When Osiris's wife Isis heard what had happened, she immediately set off to look for his body. She walked for miles before finding the chest washed up at the side of the river at a place called Abydos. She took Osiris out of the water and laid him gently on the river bank. Isis and Osiris had never had any children and now that he was dead she realised that she wouldn't have anyone to remember him by. So she used her magic powers and turned herself into a bird, hovering over Osiris just long enough for him to give her a child.

At that moment, Seth arrived and found out what Isis had done. Angrily he cut Osiris's body into fourteen pieces and scattered them across Egypt.

Again, Isis did not give up. She walked for miles, picking up each piece. Then she summoned Anubis, the jackal-headed god of funerals, and asked him to help her bandage the different parts of Osiris's body together so that he could be given a proper burial. Osiris then passed into the afterlife and was made the judge of the souls of the dead.

Isis had her baby, a son called Horus, who became ruler of the world. But jealous Seth hadn't finished yet. One day he returned and forced Horus to fight him to avenge the death of his father, Osiris. But although they fought long and hard, neither emerged as the winner. According to Ancient Egyptian beliefs, the battle between Horus and Seth will continue until Horus wins. Only then can Osiris come back to rule the world.