

FAMILY  SCHOOL

Christmas Stories for the Soul



A collection of some of our *favorite stories*
to help your family feel the *Spirit of Christ*
throughout Christmas

The Year of the Flexible Flyers

by Aney B. Chatterton

(*The Ensign* /December 1984)

The year was 1932 and the nation's economy was at an all-time low. The disastrous crash of '29 had left its mark, and we were experiencing a time that was to become known as the Great Depression.

I was in the eighth grade, and we all started school that fall with few clothes and school supplies. There was no lunch program, and for many students there was no food to bring. So those of us who could bring something to eat shared whatever we had.

I remember that whenever any of us had an extra penny, we would put it in a envelope and hide it; when we had twenty pennies saved, we would take them to the store and buy two cans of Vienna sausages, a treat far better than candy. Then we would find a secluded area, put all our lunches together, open the cans of sausage, and divide everything equally. Those were special days.

As Christmastime approached that year, we didn't feel the excitement that usually comes with the holiday season. We understood about the Depression and knew there would be very little for any of us.

But there was one desire we all had, though none of us would have mentioned it to our parents. A new sled had appeared on the market called the Flexible Flyer. With its sleek finish, sharp runners, and smooth handlebars that steered it easily and gracefully, it was the Rolls-Royce of all sleds.

We all marched to the hardware store one day after school to see the new wonder sled. "How much are the sleighs, Mr. Evans?" one of the boys asked.

"Well," he replied, "I think I can sell them for \$4.98."

Our hearts sank. But that didn't stop us from dreaming the impossible dream.

School was finally dismissed for the holidays, and when Christmas Eve came we had our usual Christmas play and party. We returned to our homes, happy, yet sad, feeling keenly the weight of those depressed times.

I awoke early Christmas morning but was not anxious to get up. My mother finally called, so I dressed and we all went to the living room where the tree was. I was surprised to see that the tree had been redecorated and was more beautiful than ever. But the biggest surprise was still in store. There underneath the tree, with a big red ribbon tied around it, was a shiny new sled--a Flexible Flyer!

I let out a startled cry and dropped to the floor, sliding my fingers along the satiny finish, moving the handlebars back and forth, and finally cradling the precious sled in my arms. Tears rolled down my cheeks as I looked up at my parents and asked, "Where did you get the money for it?"

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My mother wiped away a tear with the corner of her apron and replied, "Surely you believe in Santa Claus. Open your other presents."

I opened another box and there was a beautiful dress, and though I loved it, my eyes were on the sled. I could only stand and gaze in awe. I was now the owner of a Flexible Flyer.

After our midday Christmas dinner, Mother announced, "Put on your boots and bundle up warm. We're going to town. We have another surprise for you." I didn't think anything could compare with the surprise I already had.

Dad hitched up the team to our big sleigh, I loaded in my new sled, and we went to town. As soon as we crossed the bridge I saw what the surprise was. Kids were everywhere, and so were Flexible Flyers. Main Street had been roped off so that we could start at the top of the hill and glide all the way down across the bridge without danger from cars. The entire community had turned out. Boys and girls were all jumping up and down, some were crying, most were throwing their arms around each other and shouting, "You got one too!"

Our parents finally got us calmed down long enough to listen to instructions. Three farmers with their horses and sleighs would take turns pulling us to the top of the hill where we would start. The older boys went first, running and then flopping "belly first," as we called it, onto their sleds. We watched as they glided effortlessly over the crusted snow. Faster and faster they went, crossing the bridge and coming to rest amid the cheers and clapping of parents. We all took turns, and as the day wore on we got braver and wilder. The boys discovered they could do tricks by dragging their feet in a certain way, causing their sleds to turn around and tip over. We all got caught up in this adventure, tumbling in a tangle of arms and legs, laughing helplessly as we slipped around, ending up in a pile of bundled bodies.

As night drew near, our parents called for us to stop--it was time to return home for chores. "No, no," we cried. "Please let us stay." Reluctantly they agreed, releasing us from chores for this one time only. When they returned it was dark, but the moon shone brightly, lighting the hill. The cold wind blew over our bodies; the stars seemed so brilliant and close, the hill dark and shadowy as we made our last run for the day. Cold and hungry, but happy, we loaded our Flexible Flyers and returned home with memories that would last a lifetime.

Everywhere I went in the days that followed, my Flexible Flyer went with me. One night I decided to go to the barn, as I often did, just to watch Dad at work. I noticed that one of the stalls was empty, and I asked, "Where's Rosie? She isn't in her stall."

There was an awkward silence, and my dad finally replied, "We had to sell her. She cut her foot in the fence."

"Sell Rosie?" I thought. "Gentle, friendly Rosie?"

"But the cut would have healed," I said. "Why didn't you sell Meanie? She never does anything we want, but Rosie always leads the herd into the barn."

Dad didn't say anything, and suddenly I knew. Rosie had been sold to buy my Flexible Flyer. She was the best and would bring more money; and my parents had given the best they had--for me. I had always understood that my parents treasured my dearly, but until that moment I had never known a love so great. I ran from the barn in tears and hid behind the haystack.

I returned to the hill the next day and told my best friend about Rosie. "Yes, I know," she said. "My dad took ten bushels of apples from our cellar and took them to Pocatello and sold them door to door. He's never had to do that before. That's how I got my Flexible Flyer."

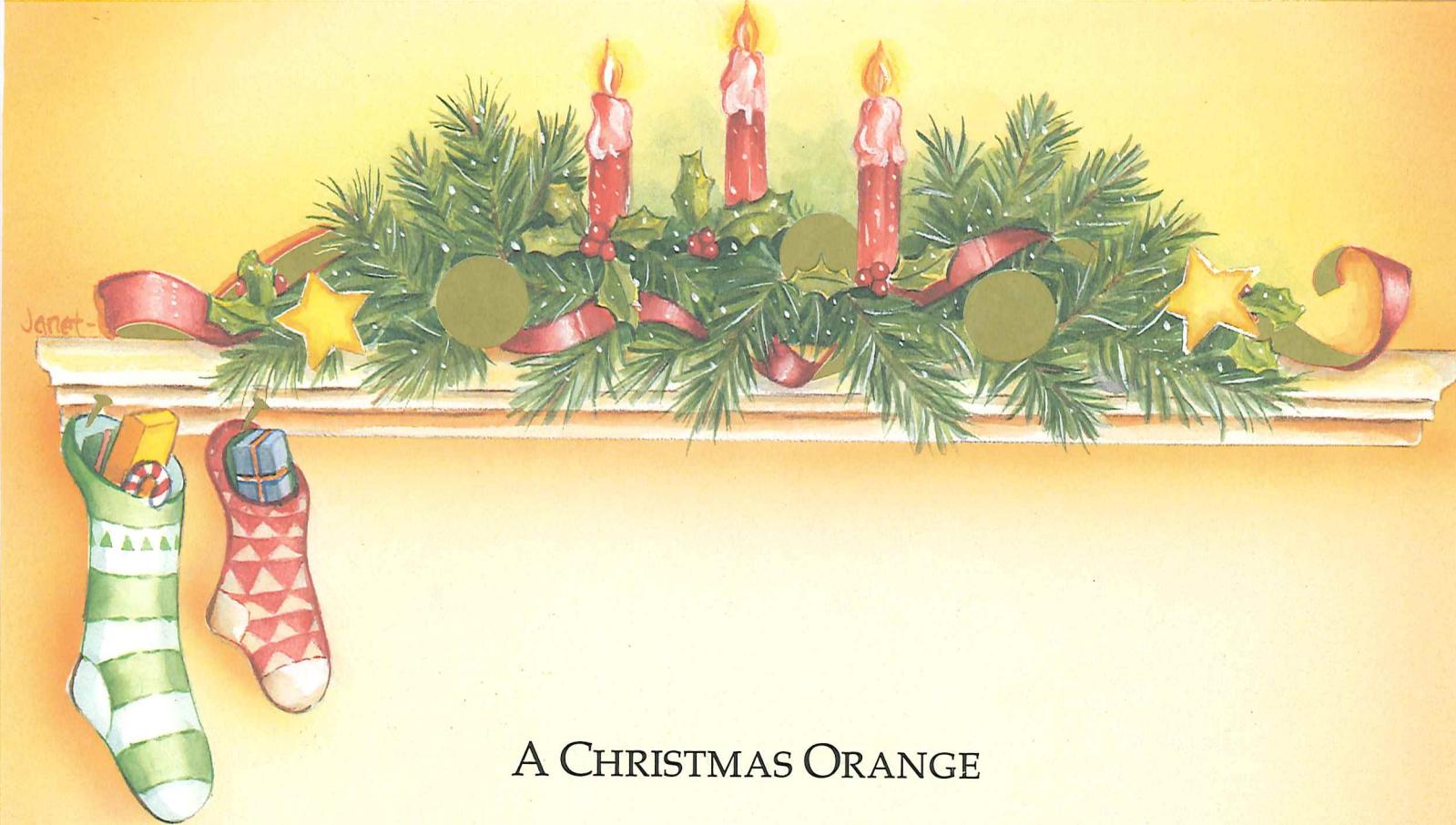
A growing amazement overtook me. "But how did they know?" I asked. "I didn't ask for a sled, so how did all the parents know we all wanted Flexible Flyers?"

Little by little we began to put the pieces together like a jigsaw puzzle. Everyone had a similar story to tell. Then we began to realize how the entire community had united in one monumental effort of sharing, trading, peddling, extra working, and, most of all, caring, to buy the Flexible Flyers. None of us ever had the slightest hint of what was going on right under our noses. That had to be the best-kept secret of all time in so small a community.

When school resumed and we marched into our classroom and stood by our desks waiting for the teacher to say those familiar words, "You may be seated," it seemed we all stood just a bit taller. Not that we had grown in stature, but we had grown in a different way. Nothing had really changed, yet everything had changed. The economy was still the same and we still shared our lunches and saved our pennies for the sausages, but inside we had all changed. We were happier, we played harder, and we studied more diligently. It was as if we had all committed ourselves to be the best we could be, to make our parents and community proud of us. It was the only way we knew to say "thanks."

When the snow finally melted and it was time to store the sleds, we were reluctant to part with them. We clung to them as a child clings to a favorite blanket. They had given meaning to our lives and provided us with a sense of identity. That terrible monster, the Great Depression, no longer seemed such a threat to us. Somehow we knew there would be better times, a brighter tomorrow, and a more prosperous future.

Many years later, long after I married, I asked my mother how they had pulled that secret off, and who started it. Her eyes twinkled. She gave me one of those warm, loving smiles that only a mother can give and replied, "My dear daughter, you must never stop believing in Santa Claus."



A CHRISTMAS ORANGE

Jake lived in an orphanage with nine other boys. In the wintertime it seemed that any extra money went for coal to heat the old buildings. At Christmas, the buildings always seemed a little warmer, and the food a little more plentiful. But more than this, Christmas meant an orange. At Christmas each child received an orange. It was the only time of the year such a rare treat was provided, and it was coveted like no other thing they possessed.

Each boy would save his orange for several days, admiring it, feeling it, loving it and contemplating the moment he would eat it. Some would even save it until New Year's Day or later, much like many of us relish saving our Christmas trees and decorations until New Year's just to remind us of the joy of Christmas.

This particular day, Jake had broken the orphanage rules by starting a fight. The orphanage mother took Jake's orange away as punishment for breaking the rules. Jake spent Christmas Day empty and alone. Night-time came and Jake could not sleep. Silently, he sobbed because this year he would not have his orange with the other boys.

A soft hand placed on Jake's shoulder startled him and an object was quickly shoved into his hands. The child then disappeared into the dark to leave Jake alone to discover a strange looking orange...an orange made from the segments of nine other oranges...nine highly prized oranges that the boys would have had to break open that Christmas night, instead of saved, admired and cherished until a later date.

At Christmas time, let an orange remind us all of the selfless love of nine orphaned boys--the same kind of selfless love taught us by Him whose birth we celebrate.



This Christmas...

Mend a quarrel.

Seek out a forgotten friend.

Dismiss suspicion and replace it with trust.

Write a letter.

Give a soft answer.

Encourage youth.

Manifest your loyalty in word and deed.

Keep a promise.

Forgo a grudge.

Forgive an enemy.

Apologize.

Try to understand.

Examine your demands on others.

Think first of someone else.

Be kind.

Be gentle.

Laugh a little more.

Express your gratitude.

Welcome a stranger.

Gladden the heart of a child.

Take pleasure in the beauty and wonder of the earth.

Speak your love and then speak it again.

President Howard W. Hunter

First Presidency Christmas Devotional, December 4th 1994



The Gift of the Magi



NE DOLLAR AND EIGHTY-SEVEN CENTS.

That was all. She had put it aside, one cent and then another and then another, in her careful buying of meat and other food. Della counted it three times. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be **Christmas**.

There was nothing to do but fall on the bed and cry. So Della did it.

While the lady of the home is slowly growing quieter, we can look at the home. **Furnished** rooms at a cost of \$8 a week. There is little more to say about it.

In the hall below was a letter-box too small to hold a letter. There was an electric bell, but it could not make a sound. Also there was a name beside the door: "Mr. James Dillingham Young."

When the name was placed there, Mr. James Dillingham Young was being paid \$30 a week. Now, when he was being paid only \$20 a week, the name seemed too long and important. It should perhaps have been "Mr. James D. Young." But when Mr. James Dillingham Young entered the furnished rooms, his name became very short indeed. Mrs. James Dillingham Young put her arms warmly about him and called him "Jim." You have already met her. She is Della.

Della finished her crying and cleaned the marks of it from her face. She stood by the window and looked out with no interest. Tomorrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only \$1.87 with which to buy Jim a gift. She had put aside as much as she could for months, with this result. Twenty dollars a week is not much. Everything had cost more than she had expected. It always happened like that.

Only \$1.87 to buy a gift for Jim. Her Jim. She had had many happy hours planning something nice for him. Something nearly good enough. Something almost worth the honor of belonging to Jim.

There was a looking-glass between the windows of the room. Perhaps you have seen the kind of looking-glass that is placed in \$8 furnished rooms. It was very narrow. A person could see only a little of himself at a time. However, if he was very thin and moved very quickly, he might be able to get a good view of himself. Della, being quite thin, had mastered this art.

Suddenly she turned from the window and stood before the glass. Her eyes were shining brightly, but her face had lost its color. Quickly she pulled down her hair and let it fall to its complete length.

The James Dillingham Youngs were very proud of two things which they owned. One thing was Jim's gold watch. It had once belonged to his father. And, long ago, it had belonged to his father's father. The other thing was Della's hair.

If a queen had lived in the rooms near theirs, Della would have washed and dried her hair where the queen could see it. Della knew her hair was more beautiful than any queen's **jewels** and gifts.

If a king had lived in the same house, with all his riches, Jim would have looked at his watch every time they met. Jim knew that no king

had anything so valuable.

So now Della's beautiful hair fell about her, shining like a falling stream of brown water. It reached below her knee. It almost made itself into a dress for her.

And then she put it up on her head again, nervously and quickly. Once she stopped for a moment and stood still while a tear or two ran down her face.

She put on her old brown coat. She put on her old brown hat. With the bright light still in her eyes, she moved quickly out the door and down to the street.

Where she stopped, the sign said: "Mrs. Sofronie. Hair Articles of all Kinds."

Up to the second floor Della ran, and stopped to get her breath. Mrs. Sofronie, large, too white, cold-eyed, looked at her.

"Will you buy my hair?" asked Della.

"I buy hair," said Mrs. Sofronie. "Take your hat off and let me look at it."

Down fell the brown waterfall.

"Twenty dollars," said Mrs. Sofronie, lifting the hair to feel its weight.

"Give it to me quick," said Della.

Oh, and the next two hours seemed to fly. She was going from one shop to another, to find a gift for Jim.

She found it at last. It surely had been made for Jim and no one else. There was no other like it in any of the shops, and she had looked in every shop in the city.

It was a gold watch chain, very simply made. Its value was in its rich and pure material. Because it was so plain and simple, you knew that it was very valuable. All good things are like this.

It was good enough for The Watch.

As soon as she saw it, she knew that Jim must have it. It was like him. Quietness and value—Jim and the chain both had quietness and value. She paid twenty-one dollars for it. And she hurried home with the chain and eighty-seven cents.

With that chain on his watch, Jim could look at his watch and learn the time anywhere he might be. Though the watch was so fine, it had never had a fine chain. He sometimes took it out and looked at it only when no one could see him do it.

When Della arrived home, her mind quieted a little. She began to think more reasonably. She started to try to cover the sad marks of what she had done. Love and large-hearted giving, when added together, can leave deep marks. It is never easy to cover these marks, dear friends—never easy.

Within forty minutes her head looked a little better. With her short hair, she looked wonderfully like a schoolboy. She stood at the looking-glass for a long time.

"If Jim doesn't kill me," she said to herself, "before he looks at me a second time, he'll say I look like a girl who sings and dances for money. But what could I do—oh! What could I do with a dollar and eighty-seven cents?"

At seven, Jim's dinner was ready for him.

Jim was never late. Della held the watch chain in her hand and sat near the door where he always entered. Then she heard his step in the hall and her face lost color for a moment. She often said little prayers quietly, about simple everyday things. And now she said: "Please God, make him think I'm still pretty."

The door opened and Jim stepped in. He looked very thin and he was not smiling. Poor fellow, he was only twenty-two—and with a family to take care of! He needed a new coat and he had nothing to cover his cold hands.

Jim stopped inside the door. He was as quiet as a hunting dog when it is near a bird. His eyes looked strangely at Della, and there was an expression in them that she could not understand. It filled her with fear. It was not anger, nor surprise, nor anything she had been ready for. He simply looked at her with that strange expression on his face.

Della went to him.

"Jim, dear," she cried, "don't look at me like that. I had my hair cut off and sold it. I couldn't live through Christmas without giving you a

gift. My hair will grow again. You won't care, will you? My hair grows very fast. It's Christmas, Jim. Let's be happy. You don't know what a nice—what a beautiful nice gift I got for you."

"You've cut off your hair?" asked Jim slowly. He seemed to labor to understand what had happened. He seemed not to feel sure he knew.

"Cut it off and sold it," said Della. "Don't you like me now? I'm me, Jim. I'm the same without my hair."

Jim looked around the room.

"You say your hair is gone?" he said.

"You don't have to look for it," said Della. "It's sold, I tell you—sold and gone, too. It's the night before Christmas, boy. Be good to me, because I sold it for you. Maybe the hairs of my head could be counted," she said, "but no one could ever count my love for you. Shall we eat dinner, Jim?"

Jim put his arms around his Della. For ten seconds let us look in another direction. Eight dollars a week or a million dollars a year—how different are they? Someone may give you an answer, but it will be wrong. The **magi** brought valuable gifts, but that was not among them. My meaning will be explained soon.

From inside the coat, Jim took something tied in paper. He threw it upon the table.

"I want you to understand me, Dell," he said. "Nothing like a haircut could make me love you any less. But if you'll open that, you may know what I felt when I came in."

White fingers pulled off the paper. And then a cry of joy; and then a change to tears.

For there lay The **Combs**—the combs that Della had seen in a shop window and loved for a long time. Beautiful combs, with jewels, perfect for her beautiful hair. She had known they cost too much for her to buy them. She had looked at them without the least hope of owning them. And now they were hers, but her hair was gone.

But she held them to her heart, and at last was able to look up and say: "My hair grows so fast, Jim!"

And then she jumped up and cried, "Oh, oh!"

Jim had not yet seen his beautiful gift. She held it out to him in her open hand. The gold seemed to shine softly as if with her own warm and loving spirit.

"Isn't it perfect, Jim? I hunted all over town to find it. You'll have to look at your watch a hundred times a day now. Give me your watch. I want to see how they look together."

Jim sat down and smiled.

"Della," said he, "let's put our Christmas gifts away and keep them a while. They're too nice to use now. I sold the watch to get the money to buy the combs. And now I think we should have our dinner."

The magi, as you know, were wise men—wonderfully wise men—who brought gifts to the newborn Christ-child. They were the first to give Christmas gifts. Being wise, their gifts were doubtless wise ones. And here I have told you the story of two children who were not wise. Each sold the most valuable thing he owned in order to buy a gift for the other. But let me speak a last word to the wise of these days: Of all who give gifts, these two were the most wise. Of all who give and receive gifts, such as they are the most wise. Everywhere they are the wise ones. They are the magi.



WHY THE CHIMES RANG

by Raymond Mac Donald Alden

There was once, in a far-away country where few people have ever traveled, a wonderful church. It stood on a high hill in the center of a great city; and every Sunday, as well as on sacred days like Christmas, thousands of people climbed the hill to its great archways, looking like lines of ants all moving in the same direction.

When you came to the building itself, you found stone columns and dark passageways, and a grand entrance leading to the main room of the church. This room was so long that one standing at the doorway could scarcely see to the other end, where the choir stood by the large altar. In the farthest corner was the organ, and this organ was so loud that sometimes when it played, the people for miles around would close their shutters and prepare for a great thunderstorm. Altogether, no such church as this was ever seen before, especially when it was lighted up for some festival, and crowded with people, young and old.

But the strangest thing about the old building was the wonderful chime of bells. At one corner of the church was a great grey tower, with ivy growing over it as far as one could see because the tower was quite grand enough to fit the grand church, and it rose so far into the sky that it was only in very fair weather that anyone claimed to be able to see the top. Even then one could not be certain that it was in sight. Up and up climbed the stones and the ivy, and as the men who built the church had been dead for hundreds of years, everyone had forgotten how high the tower was supposed to be.

Now, all people knew that at the top of the tower was a chime of Christmas bells. They had hung there ever since the church had been built and were the most beautiful bells in the world. Some thought it was because a great musician had cast them and arranged them in their place; others said it was because of the great height, which reached up where the air was cleanest and purest. However that might be, no one who had ever heard the chimes denied that they were the sweetest in the world. Some described them as sounding like angels far up in the sky; others, as sounding like strange winds singing through the trees.

But the fact was that no one had heard them for years and years. There was a old man living not far from the church who said that his mother had spoken of hearing them when she was a little girl, and he was the only one who was sure of as much as that. They were Christmas chimes, you see, and were not meant to be played by men or on common days. It was the custom on Christmas Eve for all the people to bring to the church their offerings to the Christ-child; and when the greatest and best offering was laid on the altar, there used to come sounding through the music of the choir the Christmas chimes far up in the tower. Some said that the wind rang them, and others that they were so high that the angels could start them swinging. But for many years they had never been heard.

It was said that people had been growing less careful of their gifts for the Christ-child, and that no offering was brought great enough to deserve the music of the chimes. Every Christmas Eve the rich people still crowded to the altar, each one trying to bring some gift better than any other, without giving anything that he wanted for himself, and the church was crowded with those who thought that perhaps the wonderful bells might be heard again. but although the services were splendid and the offerings plenty, only the roar of the wind could be heard far up in the stone tower.

Now, a number of miles from the city, in a little country village where nothing could be seen of the great church but glimpses of the tower when the weather was fine, lived a boy named Pedro, and his little brother. They knew very little about the Christmas chimes, but they had heard of the service in the church on Christmas Eve, and had a secret plan, which they had often talked over by themselves, to go and see the beautiful celebration.

"Nobody can guess, Little Brother," Pedro would say, "all the fine things there are to see and hear; and I have even heard it said that the Christ-child sometimes comes down to bless the service. What if we could see Him!"

The day before Christmas was bitterly cold, with a few lonely snowflakes flying in air, and a hard white crust on the ground. Sure enough, Pedro and Little Brother were able to slip quietly away, early in the afternoon; and although the walk was hard in the frosty air, before nightfall they had trudged so far, hand in hand, that they saw the lights of the big city just ahead of them. Indeed, they were about to enter one of the great gates in the wall that surrounded it when they saw something dark on the snow near the part, and stepped aside to look at it.

It was a poor woman who had fallen just outside the city, too sick and tired to get in where she might have found shelter. The soft snow made of a drift a sort of pillow for her, and she would soon be so sound asleep in the wintry air that no one could ever waken her again. All this Pedro saw in a moment, and he knelt down beside her and tried to rouse her, even tugging at her arm a little as though he would have tried to carry her away. He turned her face toward him so that he could rub some of the snow on it, and when he had looked at her silently a moment, he stood up again and said:

"It's no good, Little Brother. You will have to go on alone."

"Alone?" cried Little Brother, "And you not see the Christmas Festival?"

"No," said Pedro, and he could not keep back a bit of the choking sound in his throat. "See this poor woman. She will freeze to death if nobody cares for her. Everyone has gone to the church now, but when you come back you can bring someone to help her. I will rub her to keep her from freezing, and perhaps get her to eat the bun that is left in my pocket."

"But I cannot bear to leave you, and go on alone," said Little Brother.

"Both of us need not miss the service," said Pedro, "and it had better be I than you. You can easily find your way to the church; you must see and hear everything twice, Little Brother - one for you and once for me. I am sure the Christ child must know how I should love to come with you and worship him; and oh! if you get a chance, Little Brother, to slip up to the altar without getting in anyone's way, take this little silver piece of mine, and lay it down for my offering when no one is looking. Don't forget where you have left me, and forgive me for not going with you."

In this way he hurried Little Brother off to the city, and winked hard to keep back the tears as he heard the crunching footsteps sounding farther and farther away in the twilight. It was pretty hard to lose the music and splendor of

the Christmas celebration that he had been planning for so long, and spend the time instead in that lonely place in the snow.

The great church was a wonderful place that night. Everyone said that it had never looked so bright and beautiful before. When the organ played and the thousands of people sang, the walls shook with the sound and little Pedro, outside the city wall, felt the earth tremble around him, for the sound was so great.

At the close of the service came the procession with the offerings to be laid on the altar. Rich men and great men marched proudly up to lay down their gifts to the Christ-child. Some brought wonderful jewels, some baskets of gold so heavy that they could scarcely carry them down the aisle. A great writer laid down a book that he had been making for years and years.

And last of all walked the king of the country, hoping with all the rest to win for himself the chime of the Christmas bells. There went a great murmur through the church, as the people saw the king take from his head the royal crown, all set with precious stones, and lay it gleaming on the altar as his offering to the holy Child. "Surely," everyone said, "we shall hear the bells now, for nothing like this has ever happened before."

But still only the cold wind was heard in the tower, and the people shook their heads, and some of them said, as they had before, that they never really believed the story of the chimes, and doubted if they ever rang at all.

The procession was over, and the choir began the closing hymn. Suddenly the organist stopped playing as though he had been shot, and everyone looked at the old minister who was standing by the altar holding up his hand for silence. Not a sound could be heard from anyone in the church, but as all the people strained their ears to listen there came softly, but distinctly swinging through the air, the sound of the chimes in the tower. So far away and yet so clear the music seemed — so much sweeter were the notes than anything that had been heard before, rising and falling away up there in the sky, that the people in the church sat for a moment as still as though something held each of them by the shoulders. Then they all stood up together and stared straight at the altar to see what great gift had awakened the long-silent bells.

But all that the nearest of them saw was the childish figure of Little Brother, who had crept softly down the aisle when no one was looking, and had laid Pedro's little piece of silver on the altar.

Handel's Christmas Masterpiece

The aging composer, bowed by misfortune, wandered the lonely streets of London nightly in hopeless despair. Only memories of his past glory, when the brilliant man was touted by the court society of London and Europe, were left to him and it now seemed his musical genius was gone forever. George Frederick Handel, once the favorite of kings and queens, had been forced into bankruptcy and had become a pauper.

One bitterly cold morning during the winter of 1741 Handel returned to his lodgings to find a thick package on the table. It contained a text made up of scripture verses from the librettist, Charles Jennens. Dazed by cold and hunger, Handel listlessly leafed through the pages.

Comfort ye, comfort ye, My people, saith your God . . . Behold! A virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Emmanuel, God with us . . . The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light . . . For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given . . . and His name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, The Mighty God . . . Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped . . . He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: and He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom . . .

Excitedly, he read on. "He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief . . . He looked for some to have pity on Him, but there was no man; neither found He any to comfort Him . . . But thou didst not leave His soul in hell . . ."

He hurriedly read on. "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth . . . King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, Hallelujah!"

The words burned into his soul and struck a responsive chord within him. He rushed to the piano with pencil in hand and began to write the music to the immortal *Messiah*. For two weeks he labored incessantly.

Handel saw no one and refused food and sleep. At last he finished the great oratorio and a friend was admitted to his room. Tears were streaming down his face. "I did think I did see all Heaven before me, and the great God Himself," he declared at the completion of the glorious "Hallelujah Chorus."

The composition was first heard in Dublin where it was an overwhelming triumph. Several weeks later it was again a tumultuous success in London. During this performance the King, carried away by the glory of the great "Hallelujah Chorus," rose to his feet and the audience followed his example! Today, audiences all over the world still rise and remain standing during this Chorus.

In succeeding years, George Frederick Handel became blind, ill and poor. But the composer of the great masterpiece never again permitted his new fortunes to overcome his spirit.

One evening in April, at the age of seventy-four Handel collapsed during a performance of the *Messiah*.

Handel went to be with his Heavenly Father forever on April 13, 1759.

[From *Ideals* magazine]

*Never did the Savior give in expectation.
I know of no case in his life in which there was an exchange.
He was always the giver, seldom the recipient.
Never did he give shoes, hose, or a vehicle;
Never did he give perfume, a shirt or a fur wrap.
His gifts were of such a nature that the recipient could hardly
Exchange or return the value.*

*His gifts were rare ones:
Eyes to the blind,
Ears to the deaf,
Legs to the lame;
Cleanliness to the unclean, wholeness to the infirm, and
Breath to the lifeless.*

*His gifts were
Opportunity to the downtrodden,
Freedom to the oppressed, light in the darkness,
Forgiveness to the repentant,
Hope to the despairing.*

*His friends gave him shelter, food, and love.
He gave them of himself, his love, his service, his life.
The wise men brought him gold and frankincense.
He gave them and all their fellow mortals resurrection,
Salvation, and eternal life.
We should strive to give as he gave.*

To give of oneself is a holy gift.

[Spencer W. Kimball: *Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, page 246]

I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day...Story

All of us have sung the familiar song, "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day", but perhaps you did not know why it was written. "Christmas Bells" as Henry W. Longfellow entitled it, is a personal and particular poem, from a particular time, for particular reasons. It was written on Christmas Day of 1864, four months before the end of the Civil War, it is a poem of trust---without particular knowledge of how things would actually turn out.

Longfellow lived with his wife, Fanny and their five children, Charles, Ernest, Alice, Edith and Allegra in the Craigie House near Boston. On Christmas Day in 1844, a few months after their first child Charles was born, Fanny wrote: "If our Father in Heaven feels anything like the joy over his children we have over our single one, what an infinity of happiness is his. I can now better understand his long-suffering patience with our infirmities."

The Longfellow family was immensely happy and all seemed to be perfect for them. "But the winds of fate had begun to blow. Longfellow was to see both the tranquility of his family and the tranquility of his country shattered within the three months between April 12, 1861, and July 10, 1861. Consider the following extracts from his journal."

April 12, 1861 he recorded: "News comes that Fort Sumter is attacked. And so the war begins! Who can foresee the end?"

"On Tuesday, July 9, 1861, less than three months after Fort Sumter's fall had destroyed the nation's peace, Fanny and Henry busied themselves as usual in Craigie House. The Cambridge summer heat and humidity were miserable.

That Tuesday Henry was at work in the study next to the library. Fanny, wearing a light summer dress, sat in the late summer afternoon at a small table before an open window in the library. Edith, 7, and Allegra, 5, stood at their mother's side. Earlier Fanny had tried to make Edie a bit more comfortable in the unrelieved summer heat by trimming her hair.

"Fanny took the trimmed curls of Edi's summer-bleached hair and lit a candle to melt a bar of sealing wax. She started to seal a set of the curls in a small paper package. Drops of the burning wax fell unnoticed on her dress. Through the open window gusted the good sea breeze for which they had been longing. Suddenly, the light material of her dress caught fire. In an instant, she was wrapped in a sheet of flame. Trying to protect the two girls, she ran with a piercing cry to the study next door where Henry sat. He sprang up, grabbed a throw rug from the floor, and threw it around her. It was too small. She broke away, flew toward the entry, then turned and rushed back to him. He embraced her, protecting her face and part of her body. Dreadfully burned, she collapsed. She was carried to her room.

"Henry sent first for the family's Cambridge doctor, then for a second Cambridge doctor, and finally for a doctor from Boston. In the hope of reducing the shock, the doctors sedated both Fanny and Henry with ether. The next morning, she woke for a few moments, slipped into a coma and died from the burns before ten o' clock.

Three days later, Saturday, July 13, 1861, on what would have been their 18th wedding anniversary, the family held Fanny's funeral in the Craigie House library, the same room where the tragedy had occurred. Longfellow, too ill from burns and grief to attend, could only listen from a makeshift bed in the adjoining study."

"Longfellow wrote nothing for months, and nothing ever of the ninth and tenth of July 1861. The burns on his face made it impossible for him to shave, and he grew the full beard that people today think he had always worn."

December 25, 1861; The first Christmas after Fanny's death he wrote, "How inexpressibly sad are all holidays."

December 25, 1862 he recorded on the second Christmas after Fanny's death: "A merry Chrsitmas' say the children, but that is no more for me."

During the third Christmas season he received a telegram informing him that Charles, their oldest son who had run away to join the Union army, had been severely wounded." He went to retrieve his son who had had a bullet enter under his left shoulder blade, pass directly through the back and pass out under the right shoulder blade.

Longfellow wrote of the tragedy of war: "I thought in the night of the pale upturned faces of young men dead on the battlefield, and the agonies of the wounded, and my wretchedness was very great. Every shell from the cannon's mouth bursts not only on the battle-field, but in far-away homes, North and South, carrying dismay and death."

Finally the fourth Christmas after Fanny's death, the fourth Christmas of the Civil War, on Christmas Day of 1864, in a burst, Lonfellow wrote the seven stanza "Christmas Bells." In it we see three years of personal and national travail echoed.

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along
The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, Good-will to men!

Till, ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime,
A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to men.

Then from each black, accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the South,
And with the sound
The carols drowned
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,
And made forlorn
The house holds born
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said:
"For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep
"God is not dead: nor doth he sleep!
The wrong shall fail
The right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men."

The first three stanzas of "Christmas Bells" capture the peace that the United States and Longfellow had enjoyed before 1861. The fourth and fifth stanzas are the dramatic break; the disappearance of Eden. The sixth stanza is the natural personal response--despair--a despair that he and the nation had undergone for three years. But today is Christmas: Charley is home from the war; Lincoln has been re-elected, time has healed Henry's hurt heart. In response, stanza seven is a statement of personal grace, a gift of optimism, a personal reflection without details or hints as to how the Wrong will fail, nor how the right will prevail.

"Longfellow published the poem in 1867, two years after the war ended. But about 1872, seven years after the end of the Civil War, the poem appeared as a popular hymn set to music. As had happened with other Longfellow poems, an unknown reviser had converted the poem into a hymn. The conversion to "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day" was done by changing a word of stanza two, deleting the fourth and fifth stanzas, and moving the third stanza to the end. The changes seem small; the effect is immense." BYU Magazine November 1993 (Douglas M. Campbell, author)

May we each individually in our own hearts, regardless of that which rages in the world, find peace within our own hearts, even the peace promised by the Lord: "My peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid...for I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

John 14:27

Story of Silent Night

On Christmas Eve, 1818, in the little Austrian village of Oberndorf, it was snowing very hard. Father Joseph Mohr, a Catholic Priest, had not been able to go to sleep that night. He was deeply worried as he thought of the disappointment he knew was in store for his congregation. He remembered the conversation he had had with his friend, Franz Gruber, the village schoolmaster and church organist. "Father," he said, "do you realize that of all the Christmas songs, none expresses the real story of Christmas?" "You are right, my friend," Father Mohr answered. "Perhaps one day someone will write a song that will tell the simple and beautiful story of that first Christmas night."

"Why should not that someone be you?" asked the schoolmaster. Joseph Mohr had laughed. "And will you write the music if I do?" "Of course," Gruber replied. In the weeks that followed this conversation, Joseph Mohr had tried to write that song; but somehow, try as he would, the words simply didn't come; and now on Christmas Eve he felt a little sad as he thought of the service the next evening with no organ and no new song to sing to his congregation as he had planned. As he stood at his window now, lost in thought, he suddenly realized that someone was struggling through the deep snow toward his house. It was a woman, too breathless to speak for some moments, but at last she was able to tell her story. She had come over the mountain from the cabin of a friend of hers who that night had given birth to her first child, a son. "Father," the woman concluded, "her husband, a young woodcutter, is very anxious that you come and bless the new mother and the babe this very night." "Of course I'll go," Father Mohr answered. Bundling himself up in his warmest clothes the priest started out. It was several miles to the cabin and the heavy snow made it difficult to walk, but when he arrived and opened the door he caught his breath at the scene before him. It was one he would never forget. There was the new mother in her bed smiling happily at her husband, who was kneeling in adoration before a crude wooden crib in which lay his newborn son. It seemed to Joseph Mohr that he was looking at a scene that had taken place in Bethlehem of Judea many ages before.

Finally at home again, he could hardly wait to take off his coat and warm his stiff fingers. Then he sat down at his desk and began to write. It was early morning before he finished. As soon as he had finished writing he hurried out again to the home of his friend Franz Gruber. When Gruber opened his door Father Mohr handed him the manuscript containing the words he had written in the early morning hours.

"My friend," the priest said, "here is a new Christmas song. Will you set it to music?" Franz Gruber's eyes shone as he read the beautiful verses. Grasping the pastor's hand he said, "I shall do my best, and we shall sing it at the Christmas service tonight. My guitar will be our accompaniment." That night, as the people in the little church heard the words, and the beautiful warm melody played by the guitar, they were filled with a reverence they had not felt before. But they couldn't have realized they were having the privilege of hearing for the first time, a song, that in years to come, would be the best loved of Christmas carols.

Silent Night was originally written in German but in not too many years the song was translated in to many languages and loved by people of many lands. One time, during a terrible war, this song brought peace at Christmas time to weary soldiers.

In December of 1914, German and British forces stood facing each other, separated by a strip of flat, burned and barren land intersected with barbed wire. Now and then shadowy figures crept across the waste of "no man's land," but most of the soldiers kept well down below the skyline enduring the mud and water that seeped into the trenches, intent only on avoiding being fired upon from the enemy lines opposite them.

ON Christmas Eve the air was cold and frost filled. Suddenly, amazed British soldiers saw lights come on along the line of enemy trenches. Then came the unbelievable sound of singing---German soldiers singing "Stille Nacht, Heiglela Nacht". Timidly the British soldiers joined in and when the sound died away they began to sing, "The First Noel."

The singing by both sides went on for an hour and was followed by invitations to cross over to enemy lines. One German with great courage began to walk across to the British trenches, followed by other Germans, hands in pockets, to show that they had no weapons.

"I am a Saxon, you are Anglo-Saxons. Why do we fight?" he asked.

When Christmas Day dawned bright and cold, there was no sound of rifles or gunfire. The men had agreed among themselves to declare peace.

"A spirit stronger than war was at work that night," one soldier commented.

Let us sing together this best loved of Christmas carols, the humble offering of a simple Village pastor and his friend, the schoolmaster.



C

is for CHILD

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given."
Isaiah 9:8

H

is for HOLY ONE

"I know thee, who thou art, the Holy One of God."
Mark 1:24

R

is for REDEEMER

"For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth."
Job 19:25

I

is for IMMANUEL

"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."
Isaiah 7:14

S

is for SHEPHERD

"I am the good shepherd and know my sheep, and am known of mine."
John 10:14

T

is for TEACHER

"The same came to Jesus by night and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God."
John 3:2

M

is for MESSIAH

"The woman saith unto him, I know that Messias cometh which is called Christ: when he is come he will tell us all things."
John 4:25

A

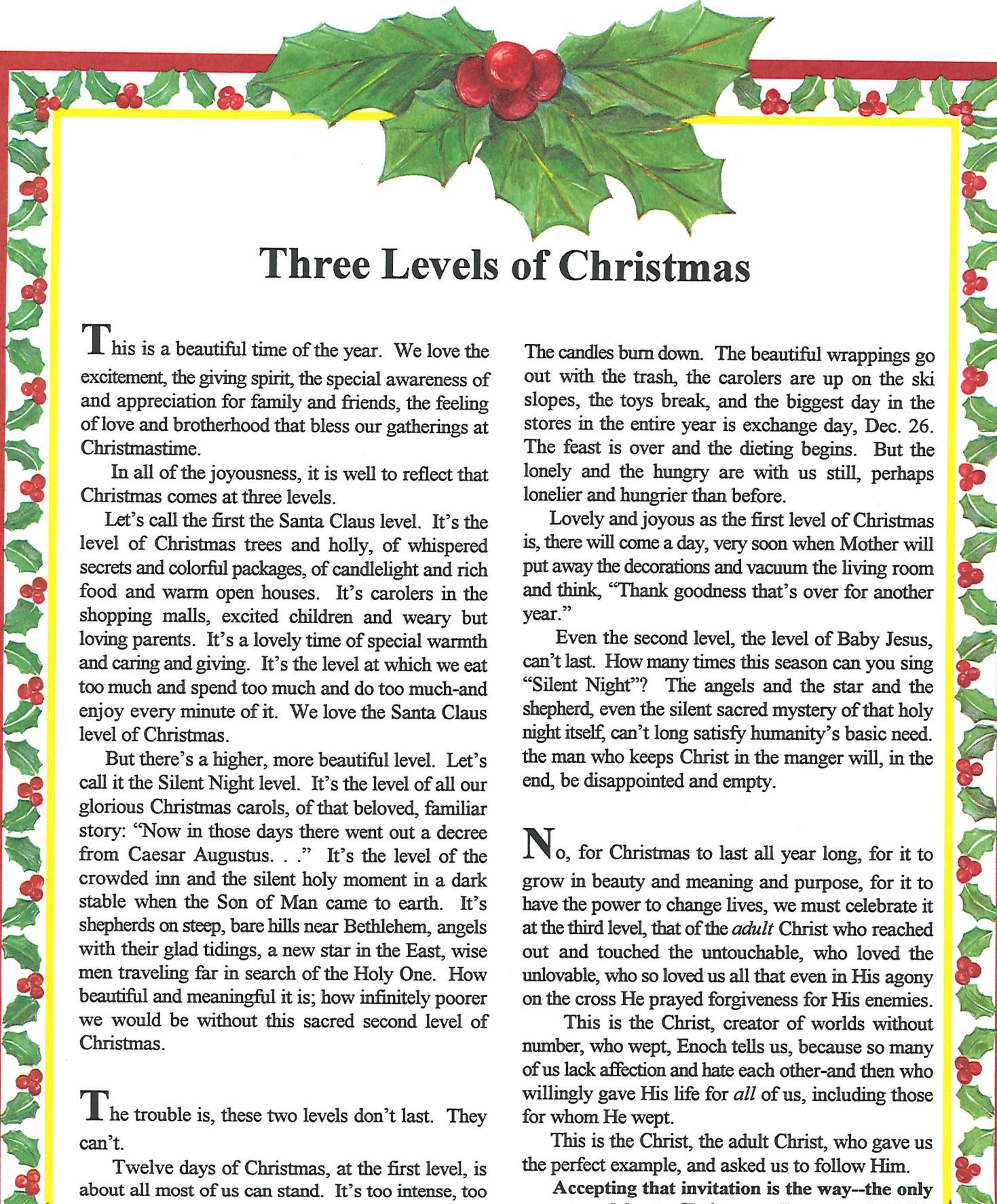
is for ALPHA & OMEGA

"I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last."
Revelation 1:8

S

is for SAVIOR

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a saviour which is Christ, the Lord."
Luke 2:11



Three Levels of Christmas

This is a beautiful time of the year. We love the excitement, the giving spirit, the special awareness of and appreciation for family and friends, the feeling of love and brotherhood that bless our gatherings at Christmastime.

In all of the joyousness, it is well to reflect that Christmas comes at three levels.

Let's call the first the Santa Claus level. It's the level of Christmas trees and holly, of whispered secrets and colorful packages, of candlelight and rich food and warm open houses. It's carolers in the shopping malls, excited children and weary but loving parents. It's a lovely time of special warmth and caring and giving. It's the level at which we eat too much and spend too much and do too much--and enjoy every minute of it. We love the Santa Claus level of Christmas.

But there's a higher, more beautiful level. Let's call it the Silent Night level. It's the level of all our glorious Christmas carols, of that beloved, familiar story: "Now in those days there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus. . ." It's the level of the crowded inn and the silent holy moment in a dark stable when the Son of Man came to earth. It's shepherds on steep, bare hills near Bethlehem, angels with their glad tidings, a new star in the East, wise men traveling far in search of the Holy One. How beautiful and meaningful it is; how infinitely poorer we would be without this sacred second level of Christmas.

The trouble is, these two levels don't last. They can't.

Twelve days of Christmas, at the first level, is about all most of us can stand. It's too intense, too extravagant. The tree dries out and the needles fall.

The candles burn down. The beautiful wrappings go out with the trash, the carolers are up on the ski slopes, the toys break, and the biggest day in the stores in the entire year is exchange day, Dec. 26. The feast is over and the dieting begins. But the lonely and the hungry are with us still, perhaps lonelier and hungrier than before.

Lovely and joyous as the first level of Christmas is, there will come a day, very soon when Mother will put away the decorations and vacuum the living room and think, "Thank goodness that's over for another year."

Even the second level, the level of Baby Jesus, can't last. How many times this season can you sing "Silent Night"? The angels and the star and the shepherd, even the silent sacred mystery of that holy night itself, can't long satisfy humanity's basic need. The man who keeps Christ in the manger will, in the end, be disappointed and empty.

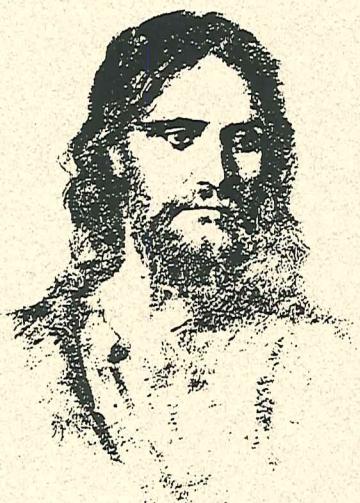
No, for Christmas to last all year long, for it to grow in beauty and meaning and purpose, for it to have the power to change lives, we must celebrate it at the third level, that of the *adult* Christ who reached out and touched the untouchable, who loved the unlovable, who so loved us all that even in His agony on the cross He prayed forgiveness for His enemies.

This is the Christ, creator of worlds without number, who wept, Enoch tells us, because so many of us lack affection and hate each other--and then who willingly gave His life for *all* of us, including those for whom He wept.

This is the Christ, the adult Christ, who gave us the perfect example, and asked us to follow Him.

Accepting that invitation is the way--the only way--to celebrate Christmas all year and all life long.

-Author Unknown



One Solitary Life

he was born in an obscure village.

he worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty.

he then became an itinerant preacher.

he never held an office.

he never had a family or owned a house.

he didn't go to college.

he had no credentials but himself.

nineteen centuries have come and gone,

and today he is the central figure of the human race.

all the armies that ever marched,

and all the navies that ever sailed,

all the parliaments that ever sat,

and all the kings that ever reigned

have not affected the life of man on this earth
as much as that

One Solitary Life

*What can I give Him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb,
If I were a Wise Man
I would do my part.--
Yet what I can I give Him,
Give my heart.*

Christina Rossetti





HENRY LUCIUS STOUT

"I don't believe in Santa Claus,
There ain't no such a man!
It's all a fairy tale, because
I know from cousin Dan."
It was thus spoke Henry Lucius Stout,
A boy aged eight I know.
His mother said, "You'd best watch out
You're standin' near the flue."

Now Santa happened just to be
Upon the roof, right pat
A peekin' down if he could see
Where Lucius Stout was at.
He heard those angry words with angry frown
And up and shook his head,
And took his book and wrote em down
Exactly what he said.

When Christmas morning came around,
And Lucius ran to see
What he had got. Alas, he found
His stocking quite empty.
Except a note that he pulled out
Instead of some fine toy.
"I don't believe in Lucius Stout...
There ain't no such a boy."

William Wallace Whitelock

FOR THE MAN WHO HATED CHRISTMAS

by Nancy W. Gavin

It's just a small white envelope stuck among the branches of our Christmas tree. No name, no inscription, it has peeked through the branches of our tree for the past ten years or so.

It all began because my husband, Mike, hated Christmas. Oh, not the true meaning of Christmas, but the commercial aspects of it--the overspending, the frantic running around at the last minute to get a tie for Uncle Harry and the dusting powder for Grandma, gifts given in desperation because you couldn't think of anything else.

Knowing he felt this way, I decided one year to bypass the usual shirts, sweaters, ties, etc. and reach for something special just for him. The inspiration came in an unusual way.

Our son Kevin, who was twelve that year, was wrestling at the Junior League level at the school he attended, and shortly before Christmas there was a non-league match against a team sponsored by an inner-city church. Mostly black, these youngsters--dressed in uniforms consisting of ill-fitting boxer shorts, hole-punctured T-shirts and sneakers so ragged that the shoestrings seemed to be the only thing holding them together--presented a sharp contrast to our boys in their spiffy blue and gold uniforms and sparkling new wrestling shoes.

As the match began, I was alarmed to see that the other team was wrestling without headgear, a kind of light helmet designed to protect a wrestler's ears. It was a luxury that the rag-tag team obviously could not afford.

Well, we ended up walloping them--took every weight class--and as each of their boys got up from the mat, he swaggered around in his tatters with false bravado, a kind of street pride that could not acknowledge defeat.

Mike, seated beside me, shook his head sadly. "I wish just one of them could have won," he said. "They have a lot of potential, but losing like this could take the heart right out of them." He loved kids--all kids--and he knew them, having coached Little League football, baseball and lacrosse.

That's when the idea for his present came.

That afternoon I went to a local sporting goods store and bought an assortment of wrestling headgear and shoes and sent them anonymously to the inner-city church.

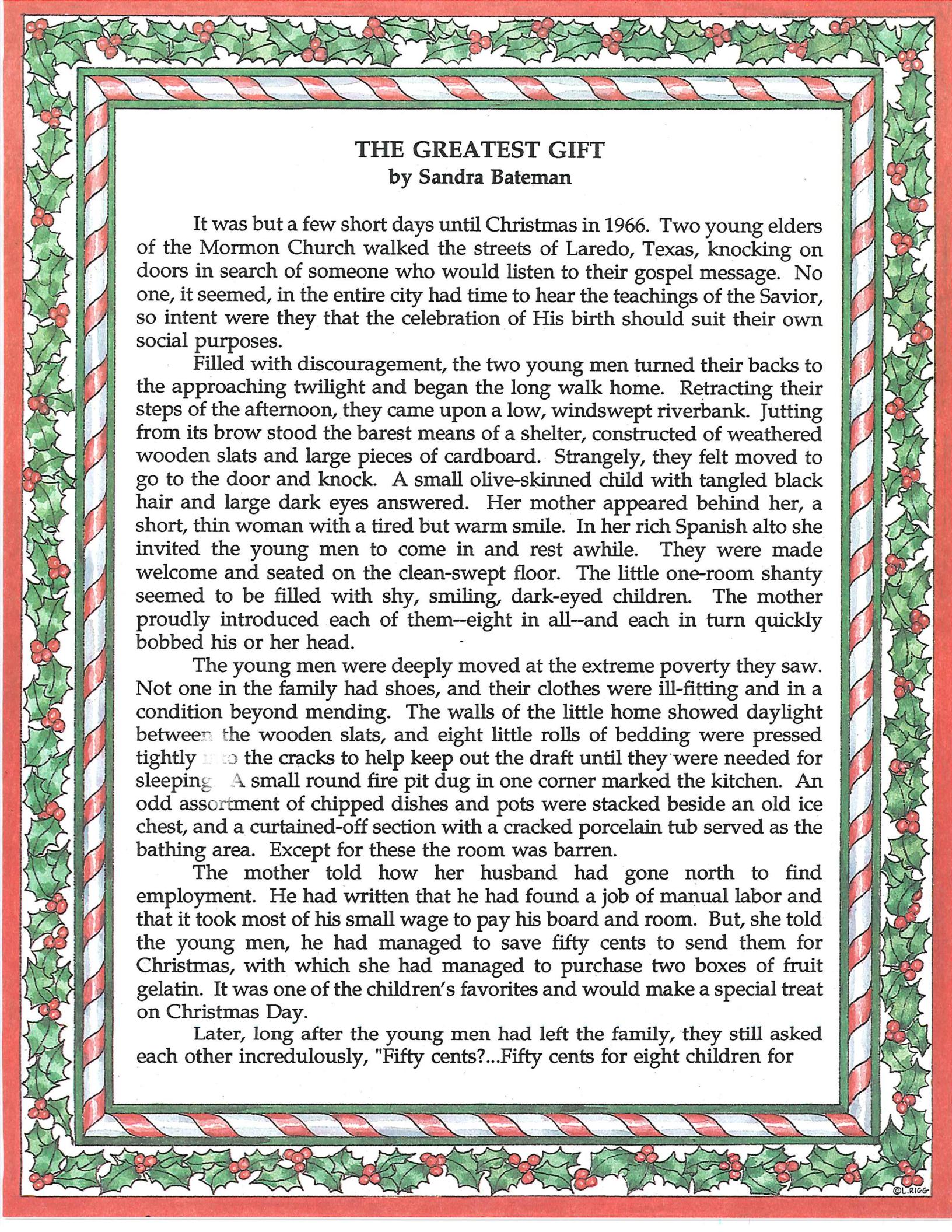
On Christmas Eve I placed the envelope on the tree, the note inside telling Mike what I had done and that this was his gift from me. His smile was the brightest thing about Christmas that year and in succeeding years. For each Christmas I followed the tradition, one year sending a group of retarded youngsters to a hockey game, another a check to a pair of elderly brothers whose home had burned to the ground a week before Christmas.

The envelope became the highlight of our Christmas. It was always the last thing opened on Christmas morning and our children, ignoring their new toys, would stand with wide-eyed anticipation as their dad lifted the envelope from the tree to reveal its contents. As the children grew, the toys gave way to more practical presents, but the envelope never lost its allure.

The story doesn't end there. You see, we lost Mike last year to dreaded cancer, and when Christmas rolled around I was still so wrapped in grief that I barely got the tree up. But Christmas Eve found me placing the envelope on the tree, and in the morning it was joined by three more. Each of our children, unbeknownst to the others, had placed an envelope on the tree for their dad. The tradition had grown and someday will expand even further when our grandchildren, standing around the tree with wide-eyed anticipation, will watch as their fathers take down the envelope.

Mike's spirit, like the Christmas spirit, will always be with us.





THE GREATEST GIFT

by Sandra Bateman

It was but a few short days until Christmas in 1966. Two young elders of the Mormon Church walked the streets of Laredo, Texas, knocking on doors in search of someone who would listen to their gospel message. No one, it seemed, in the entire city had time to hear the teachings of the Savior, so intent were they that the celebration of His birth should suit their own social purposes.

Filled with discouragement, the two young men turned their backs to the approaching twilight and began the long walk home. Retracting their steps of the afternoon, they came upon a low, windswept riverbank. Jutting from its brow stood the barest means of a shelter, constructed of weathered wooden slats and large pieces of cardboard. Strangely, they felt moved to go to the door and knock. A small olive-skinned child with tangled black hair and large dark eyes answered. Her mother appeared behind her, a short, thin woman with a tired but warm smile. In her rich Spanish alto she invited the young men to come in and rest awhile. They were made welcome and seated on the clean-swept floor. The little one-room shanty seemed to be filled with shy, smiling, dark-eyed children. The mother proudly introduced each of them—eight in all—and each in turn quickly bobbed his or her head.

The young men were deeply moved at the extreme poverty they saw. Not one in the family had shoes, and their clothes were ill-fitting and in a condition beyond mending. The walls of the little home showed daylight between the wooden slats, and eight little rolls of bedding were pressed tightly into the cracks to help keep out the draft until they were needed for sleeping. A small round fire pit dug in one corner marked the kitchen. An odd assortment of chipped dishes and pots were stacked beside an old ice chest, and a curtained-off section with a cracked porcelain tub served as the bathing area. Except for these the room was barren.

The mother told how her husband had gone north to find employment. He had written that he had found a job of manual labor and that it took most of his small wage to pay his board and room. But, she told the young men, he had managed to save fifty cents to send them for Christmas, with which she had managed to purchase two boxes of fruit gelatin. It was one of the children's favorites and would make a special treat on Christmas Day.

Later, long after the young men had left the family, they still asked each other incredulously, "Fifty cents?...Fifty cents for eight children for

Christmas?" Surely there must be something they could do to brighten Christmas for such children.

The next morning, as soon as the local shops opened, the young men hurried to the dime store and purchased as many crayons, cars, trucks and little inexpensive toys as they could afford. Each was carefully wrapped in brightly colored paper and all were put in a large grocery bag. That evening the two young men took their gifts to the shanty on the riverbank. When they knocked, the mother swung the door open wide and invited them in. They stepped inside and in halting Spanish explained to the children that they had seen Santa and he had been in such a hurry he'd asked if they would deliver his gifts to the children for him.

With cries of delight the children scrambled for the bag, spilling its contents upon the floor and quickly dividing the treasured packages. Silently the mother's eyes filled with tears of gratitude. She stepped forward to clasp tightly one of each of the young men's hands in hers. For long moments she was unable to speak. Then, with tears in her eyes, she smiled and said, "No one ever has been so kind. You have given us a special gift, the kind love that lights Christmas in the heart. May we also give you a special gift?" From the corner of the room she drew out the two small boxes of fruit gelatin and handed them to the young men. Then all eyes were moist. All knew the true meaning of giving, and none would ever forget that at Christmas the greatest gift of all was given.



Christmas Day in the Morning

By Pearl S. Buck

He woke suddenly and completely. It was four o'clock, the hour at which his father had always called him to get up and help with the milking. Strange how the habits of his youth clung to him still! Fifty years ago, and his father had been dead for thirty years, and yet he waked at four o'clock in the morning. He had trained himself to turn over and go to sleep, but this morning it was Christmas. He did not try to sleep.

Why did he feel so awake tonight? He slipped back in time, as he did so easily nowadays. He was fifteen years old and still on his father's farm. He loved his father. He had not known it until one day a few days before Christmas, when he had overheard what his father was saying to his mother.

"Mary, I hate to call Rob in the mornings. He's growing so fast and he needs his sleep. If you could see how he sleeps when I go in to wake him up! I wish I could manage alone."

"Well, you can't, Adam." His mother's voice was brisk, "Besides, he isn't a child any more. It's time he took his turn."

"Yes," his father said slowly. "But I sure do hate to wake him."

When he heard these words, something in him woke; his father loved him! He had never thought of it before, taking for granted the tie of their blood. Neither his father nor his mother talked about loving their children--they had no time for such things. There was always so much to do on the farm.

Now that he knew his father loved him, there would be no more loitering in the mornings and having to be called again. He got up after that, stumbling blind with sleep, and pulled on his clothes, his eyes shut tight, but he got up.

And then on the night before Christmas, that year when he was fifteen, he lay for a few minutes thinking about the next day. They were poor and most of the excitement was in the turkey they had raised themselves and the mince pies his mother made. His sisters sewed presents and his mother and father always bought something he needed, not only a warm jacket, maybe, but something more, such as a book. And he saved and bought them each something, too.

He wished, that Christmas when he was fifteen, he had a better present for his father. As usual he had gone to the ten-cent store and bought a tie. It had seemed nice enough until he lay thinking the night before Christmas. He looked out of his attic window, the stars were bright.

"Dad," he had once asked when he was a little boy, "What is a stable?"

"It's just a barn," his father had replied, "like ours."

"Then Jesus had been born in a barn, and to a barn the shepherds had come...."

The thought struck him like a silver dagger. Why should he not give his father a special gift too, out there in the barn? He could get up early, earlier than four, and he could creep into the barn and get all the milking done. He'd do it alone, milk and clean up, and then when his father went in to start the milking he'd see it all done. And he would know who had done it. He laughed to himself as he gazed at the stars. It was what he would do, and he mustn't sleep too sound.

He must have waked twenty times, scratching a match each time to look at his old watch--midnight, and half past one, and then two o'clock.

At a quarter to three he got up and put on his clothes. He crept downstairs, careful of the creaky boards, and let himself out. The cows looked at him, sleepy and surprised. It was early for them too.

He had never milked all alone before, but it seemed almost easy. He kept thinking about his father's surprise. His father would come in and get him, saying that he would get things started while Rob was getting dressed. He'd go to the barn, open the door, and then he'd go to get the two big empty milk cans. But they wouldn't be waiting or empty; they'd be standing in the milkhouse, filled.

"What the--," he could hear his father exclaiming.

He smiled and milked steadily, two strong streams rushing into the pail, frothing and fragrant.

The task went more easily than he had ever known it to go before. Milking for once was not a chore. It was something else, a gift to his father who loved him. He finished, the two milk cans were full. He covered them and closed the milkhouse door carefully making sure of the latch.

Back in his room he had only a minute to pull off his clothes in the darkness and jump into bed, for he heard his father up. He put the covers over his head to silence his quick breathing. The door opened.

"Rob!" His father called. "We have to get up, son, even if it is Christmas."

"Aw-right," he said sleepily.

The door closed and he lay still, laughing to himself. In just a few minutes his father would know. His dancing heart was ready to jump from his body.

The minutes were endless--ten, fifteen, he did not know how many--and he heard his father's footsteps again. The door opened and he lay still.

"Rob!"

"Yes, Dad--"

His father was laughing, a queer sobbing sort of laugh.

"Thought you'd fool me, did you?" His father was standing beside his bed, feeling for him, pulling away the cover.

"It's for Christmas, Dad!"

He found his father and clutched him in a great hug. He felt his father's arms go around him. It was dark and they could not see each other's faces.

"Son, I thank you. Nobody ever did a nicer thing--"

"Oh, Dad, I want you to know--I do want to be good!" The words broke from him of their own will. He did not know what to say. His heart was bursting with love.

He got up and pulled on his clothes again and they went down to the Christmas tree. Oh, what a Christmas, and how his heart had nearly burst again with the shyness and pride as his father told his mother and made the three younger children listen about how he, Rob, had got up all by himself.

"The best Christmas gift I ever had, and I'll remember it, son, every year on Christmas morning, so long as I live."

They had both remembered it, and now that his father was dead, he remembered it alone; that blessed Christmas dawn when, alone with the cows in the barn, he had made his first gift of true love.

A CHRISTMAS GIFT FOR SANTA

The jolly man with one wrinkle
shaped like twisted string
buried deep in his forehead
sat quietly . . .
in the middle of the noisy confusion
of the shopping mall,
attracting little children to him
as if he were a magnet
and they tiny iron fillings.

"Santa, please," said one
dressed in blue-denim overalls
and a buttonless shirt,
I want a neat gun –
one that will squirt!"
Scrambling to get his wish in,
another little tot with a foot-wide grin
hopped on his knee
and said oh so soft,
"Don't forget me!
I want a racer car under my tree!"

While pondering the requests,
his chin in his hand,
a yellow-haired girl
with peach-blossom cheeks
walked up to the man
to take a peek
at the long white beard,
soft as snow,
and the bubbling eyes
with the Christmas glow.
"Santa," she said very close to his ear,
"Santa, there's something I want you to hear."

The man dressed in red bent down his head
and listened to the small girl's request.
"I love you," she said.
"Won't you please come to my house
on Christmas Eve night
and tuck me in bed?
My daddy's gone.
That's all I want," she gently said.
With a tear in her eye she left his knee
and with a wave goodbye,
she disappeared as quickly and quietly
as she came.



Santa didn't even get her name.
No noise was heard
As Santa sat . . .
Something in his heart had cracked.
The sacred mood was broken
by the shouts of a passerby.
"What do you want for Christmas, Santa?
We can't leave you out!
After all – that's what Christmas is all about!"

Santa thought of all the children
he had held upon his knee,
and wondered what he would request
given the opportunity.
Then the stores closed
and Santa went home.
"Hi, honey," his wife greeted him at the door
with a kiss,
as the smell of cinnamon bread freshly baked
floated around the room
and settled softly on the tip of his nose.

"Daddy!"" squealed his little boy
as he accidentally stepped on his father's toes
trying to snuggle up close.
With his family around him,
Santa remembered the little girl
with the golden hair
and suddenly was aware
he didn't need a Christmas gift.
He already had what mattered most.

Author Unknown

Glorious Gift

from

Christmas Past

by Per Ola and Emily D'Aulaire

Snow fell softly onto the wooden and stone houses of Oberndorf, an Austrian village near Salzburg. Inside, villagers decorated freshly hewn spruce trees with candles, fruit and nuts as they prepared for the holiest of nights. Soon bells would peal from Oberndorf's modest church to announce midnight Mass, and the faithful would celebrate the birth of Christ with prayer and song.

Within the Church of St. Nicholas, however, the mood was hardly one of joy that Christmas Eve afternoon in 1818. Curate Joseph Mohr, 26, had just discovered that the organ was badly damaged. No matter how hard the pedals were pumped, he could coax only a scratchy wheeze from the ancient instrument. Mohr was desperate. By the time a repairman could reach the parish, Christmas would be long over. To the young curate, a Christmas without music was unthinkable.

Mohr had a natural instinct for music. As a boy, the illegitimate son of a seamstress and a soldier, he had earned money singing and playing the violin and guitar in public. At school, and then at the university, he lived on money he earned as a performer. His hard work and talent caught the attention of a clergyman who persuaded Mohr to enter the seminary. Ordained a priest in 1815, Mohr was posted to Oberndorf in 1817. There, he not only preached the Psalms, but surprised some of his congregation by strumming a guitar, switching easily from folk music to hymns.

Now, faced with a Christmas crisis, the young cleric withdrew to the quiet of his study. Realizing that the traditional Christmas carols would not sound right on a guitar, he decided to produce a new song. Bending over a sheet of blank paper, his quill pen poised, he thought about a parish family he had recently visited to bless their newborn child. The memory of that mother holding her infant wrapped snugly against the winter cold took Mohr's thoughts to another modest birth almost two thousand years earlier.

Tentatively, he began writing. His pen moved as if guided by an invisible hand. A haunting refrain, "*Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht!*" appeared on the paper: "Silent night, holy night." In phrases as simple as a children's poem, the young curate told of the Christmas miracle in six stanzas. It was as if the words flowed directly from heaven.

Time was growing short when he finished. The verses still had to be set to music in time for midnight Mass. Mohr decided to seek out his good friend Franz Xaver Gruber, 31, the schoolmaster at nearby Arnsdorf, and a more skilled composer than he was.

Unlike Mohr, Gruber had had to hide his passion for music. To his strict father, a weaver, music was not a suitable profession for putting bread on the tables. So in the evening, Franz would creep out of the house to take music lessons from the local schoolmaster. He did so well that when his father heard him playing the organ one day, the elder Gruber relented and let his son study music.

Franz decided to become a teacher as well. In those days a schoolmaster was expected to serve as organist and choirmaster at a local church. Sent to Arnsdorf to teach, Gruber had been welcomed at neighboring St. Nicholas.

That Christmas Eve, according to historians who pieced together the story, Mohr visited Gruber and his large family at their



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modest living quarters above the school. Mohr told his friend of his dilemma. Handing over his newly written words, Mohr asked Gruber whether he could compose a tune to fit them, suitable for two voices, chorus and guitar, and in time for midnight Mass.

As Gruber read Father Mohr's words, he was surely struck by their beauty and innocence. He went to his piano to begin work while Mohr returned to his church.

Drawing on three of the most basic harmonies in the musical repertoire, the organist wove a plain, hauntingly evocative melody. Then he took it to Father Mohr late that evening. With barely time for a rehearsal the two men agreed that Mohr would play his guitar and sing tenor while Gruber sang bass. Following each stanza, the church chorus would chime in on the refrain.

At midnight, parishioners filed in, probably expecting the organ to fill the church with the resounding notes of Christmas hymns. Instead, the building was silent as they crowded into the narrow wooden pews.

Father Mohr stepped into the nave and beckoned the schoolmaster to stand by his side. Holding his guitar, the curate must have explained to the assembled flock that, although the organ was broken, the midnight Mass would include music nonetheless: he and Gruber had prepared a special Christmas song for the congregation.

With Mohr strumming the guitar two mellow voices soon filled the church. The choir joined in four-part harmony at each refrain. The parishioners listened in awe to a carol that was as pure and fresh as an Alpine stream. Then Mohr proceeded with the celebration of the Mass, and the congregation knelt in prayer. Christmas Eve at St. Nicholas had been a success.

The story almost ended there. Mohr and Gruber had created their carol as a stopgap for a temporary problem and probably had no thoughts of performing the song again. The following spring, a repairman patched up the organ. Soon Mohr was transferred to a different parish. For a few years, the carol fell as silent as the night it had glorified in 1818.

But luckily for the world, the organ at St. Nicholas remained cantankerous. In 1824 or '25, the parish hired a master organ builder by the name of Carl Mauracher to reconstruct it. During his time in the loft, Mauracher happened upon the song that Mohr and Gruber had composed. Its universal simplicity must have appealed to the old organ master. Overseeing work on the St. Nicholas organ, Gruber gladly gave his consent when Mauracher requested a copy of "Silent Night."

On leaving Oberndorf, Mauracher carried the song with him. People who heard it through him were enchanted with the words and melody. Soon troupes of Tyrolean folk singers, who regularly fanned out over Europe, added "Silent Night" to their repertoires.

Among those who did were the Strasser family. These four brothers and sisters with angelic voices performed at trade fairs while peddling gloves made by the family. In 1831 or '32, the Strassers sang "Silent Night" at a fair in Leipzig, Germany. Audiences loved it. Not long after, a local publisher printed it for the first time, identifying it only as *Tirolerlied*, or a Tyrolean song. There was no mention of Joseph Mohr or Franz Gruber.

The words and tune now spread rapidly. Soon "Silent Night" crossed the Atlantic with the Rainers, a family of folk singers performing and traveling in the United States. In New York City in 1839 or '40, the Rainers introduced the English-speaking world to the song.

Audiences everywhere began to believe that "Silent Night" was more than a simple folk song. Some listeners attributed it to one of the Haydns. But in their villages, Gruber and Mohr remained unaware of the stir their song was creating. Father Mohr died of pneumonia, penniless, in 1848 at the age of 55. He never learned that his song had reached some of Earth's farthest corners.

Gruber heard of the song's success only in 1854, when



the concertmaster for King Frederick William IV of Prussia began searching for its source. When word reached Gruber, then 67, he sent a letter to Berlin telling the origins of the song.

At first, few scholars believed that two humble men could have dreamed up such a popular Christmas carol. When Gruber died in 1863, his authorship was still challenged. That same year, the Rev. John Freeman Young, who later became Episcopal Bishop of Florida, translated three stanzas of the carol into the English verses we still sing today.

There is no longer any controversy over the authorship of the original song. Memorials in Austria pay tribute to Mohr and Gruber, and their legacy has become an essential part of Christmas everywhere. Says William E. Studwell of Northern Illinois University, an expert on Christmas carols, "Silent Night" is *the* musical symbol of Christmas."

Indeed, the carol is now sung on every continent in the world in scores of languages, from the original German to Welsh, from Swahili to Afrikaans, from Japanese to Russian--all expressing the same deep feelings of peace and joy. It has been recorded by singers from Bing Crosby to Elvis Presley.

Over the Years, the simple carol has shown a profound power to create heavenly peace. During the Christmas truce of 1914, for example, German soldiers in the trenches along the Western Front began singing "Silent Night." From the other side of no man's land, British soldiers joined in.

During the same war, at a Siberian prison camp, German, Austrian and Hungarian prisoners broke into a chorus of "Silent Night." With tears in his eyes, the Russian commandant told his prisoners in broken German, "Tonight is the first time in more than a year of war that I have been able to forget you and I are supposed to be enemies."

In Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia in 1944, a German officer visiting an orphanage asked if any of the children knew "Silent Night" in German. A boy and a girl walked hesitatingly forward, then began to sing "*Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht.*" The officer smiled, but then the children stopped singing, as if suddenly remembering something, and looked terrified. In that part of the country, it was primarily Jews who knew German. Seeing their fear, the officer comforted them. "Don't be afraid," he said. He, too, had been touched by the magic of the song.

Seven years later, on a Christmas Eve during the Korean War, a young American soldier named John Thorsness was on guard duty when he thought he heard the enemy approach. Finger on the trigger, he

watched a crowd of Koreans emerge from the darkness. They were smiling. As the young soldier stood in amazement, the group sang "Silent Night"--in Korean--just for him. Then they melted back into the darkness.

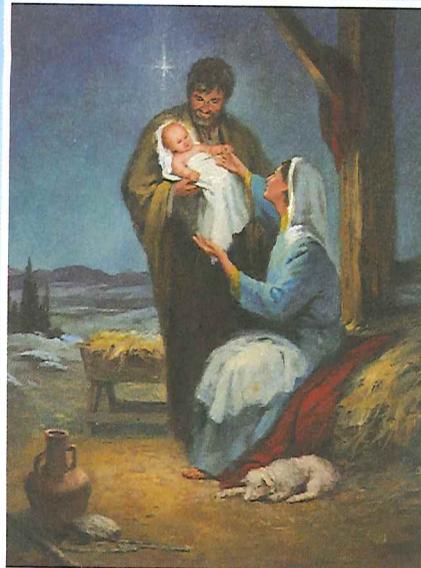
We have our own "Silent Night" memory, dating back to the first Christmas Eve we celebrated in our Congregational church in Redding, Conn. When we entered, a deacon handed us each a small white candle.

At the end of an hour of carols and Bible readings, the church lights were dimmed. The minister lit a taper from an altar candle, and walked to two people in the front pew. They, in turn, lit the candles next to them.

Seated in the rear, we watched as a wave of flickering light spread from pew to pew. Then the organ began to play, and the congregation joined in the song born Christmas Eve so many miles and so many years ago: "Silent night, holy night, All is calm, all is bright..."

When the last verse had ended, everyone stood absolutely still in the glow of candlelight. The haunting words and simple melody lingered in our hearts, just as they have lingered in the hearts of people throughout the world since a young priest and his schoolmaster friend first sang it 175 years ago. □





Let Us Adore Him, CHRIST THE LORD

T'WAS THE NIGHT BEFORE OUR SAVIOR CAME

T'was the night before Our Savior came and all through the house
Not a person was praying, not one in the house.
Our scriptures we laid on the shelf without care,
Thinking surely Our Savior would never come here.

The children were dressing to crawl into bed,
Not once ever kneeling or bowing a head;
And Mom in her rocker, with Baby on her lap
Was watching the late show, while I took a nap.

When out of the East there arose such a clatter,
I sprang to my feet to see what was the matter.
Away to the window I flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters and raised up the sash.

When what to my wondering eyes should appear,
But angles proclaiming that Our Savior was here.
Like a light from the sun sending forth a bright ray,
I knew in a moment it must be "The Day."

The glory of His face made me cover my head.
It was Our Savior returning just like He had said.
And though I possessed worldly wisdom and wealth,
I cried when I saw Him in spite of myself.

In the Book of Life which he held out in His hand
Was written the name of every saved man.
He spoke not a word as He searched for my name,
Then He said, "It's not here," and my head hung in shame.

The people whose names had been written with love
He gathered to take to His Father above.
With those who were ready, He rose without sound,
While the rest were all left, just standing around.

I fell to my knees, but the prayer was too late.
I had waited too long, and thus sealed my own fate.
I stood, and I cried, as they rose out of sight,
"Oh, if only, if only I'd been ready tonight!"

In the words of this poem, the meaning is clear;
The coming of Our Savior is drawing so near.
There is only one life and when comes the Last Call,
We will find that the scriptures were true after all!



Teach The Children The True Meaning of Christmas

Sherry Dillehay

Just a week before Christmas, I had a visitor. This is how it happened. I had just finished the household chores for the night and was preparing to go to bed when I heard a noise in the front of the house. I opened the door of the front room, and to my surprise, Santa Claus himself stepped out from behind the Christmas Tree. He placed his fingers over his mouth so I would not cry out.

"What are you doing..." I started to ask but the words choked in my throat as I saw he had tears in his eyes. His usual jolly manner was gone—gone was the eager, boisterous soul we all know.

He then answered me with a simple statement of "teach the children." I was puzzled.

What did he mean? He anticipated my question and with one quick movement brought forth a miniature toy boy from behind the tree. As I stood there bewildered, Santa said again,

"teach the children. Teach them the old meaning of Christmas—The meaning that Christmas now has forgotten."

I started to say, "How can I..." when Santa reached into the toy bag and pulled out a brilliant shiny star.

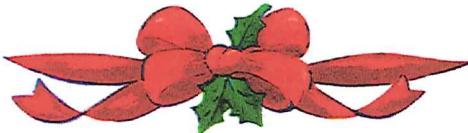
"Teach the children the star was the heavenly sign of promise ages ago. God promised a savior for the world and the star was a sign of the fulfillment of that promise. The countless shining stars at night—one for each man—now show the burning hope of all mankind." Santa gently laid the star upon the fireplace mantle and drew forth from the bag a glittering red Christmas tree ornament.

"Teach the children red is the first color of Christmas. It was first used by the faithful people to remind them of the blood which was shed for all the people by the Savior. Christ gave His life and shed His blood that every man might have God's gift of Eternal Life. Red is deep, intense, vivid—it is the greatest color of all. It is the symbol of the gift of God."

"Teach the children," he said as he dislodged a small Christmas tree from the depths of the toy bag. He placed it before the mantle and gently hung the red ornament on it. The deep green of the fir tree was a perfect background for the ornament. Here was the second color of Christmas.

"The pure green color of the stately fir tree remains green all your round," he said. "This depicts the everlasting hope of mankind. Green is the youthful, hopeful, abundant color of nature. All the needles point heavenward—symbols of Man's returning thoughts toward heaven. The great green tree has been man's best friend. It has sheltered him, warmed him, made beauty for him." Suddenly I heard a soft tinkling sound.

"Teach the children that as the lost sheep are found by the sound of the bell, it should ring for man to return to the fold—it means guidance and return, it further signifies that all are precious in



Teach The Children

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the eyes of the Lord. As the soft sound of the bell faded into the night, Santa drew forth a candle. He placed it on the mantle and the soft glow from its tiny flame cast a glow about the darkened room. Odd shapes in shadows slowly danced and weaved themselves upon the walls.

“Teach the children,” whispered, Santa, “that the candle shows man’s thanks for the star of long ago. Its small light is the mirror of starlight. At first candles were placed on the trees—they were like many glowing stars shining against the dark green. The colored lights have now taken over in remembrance.”

Santa turned the small Christmas tree lights on and picked up a gift from under the tree. He pointed to the large bow and said, “A bow is placed on a present to remind us of the spirit of the brotherhood of man. We should remember that the bow is tied as men should be tied, all of us together, with the bonds of good will toward each other. Good will forever is the message of the bow.”

Santa slung his bag over his shoulder and began to reach for the candy cane placed high on the tree. He unfastened it and reached out toward me with it.

“Teach the children that the candy cane represents the shepherd’s crook. The crook on the staff helps bring back the strayed sheep to the flock. The candy cane represents the helping hand we should show at Christmas Time. The candy cane is the symbol that we are our brothers’ keepers.”

As Santa looked about the room a feeling of satisfaction shone on his face. He read wonderment in my eyes, and I am sure he sensed my admiration for this night.

He reached into his bag and brought forth a large holly wreath. He placed it on the door and said, “Please teach the children the wreath symbolizes the eternal nature of love; it never ceases, stops, or ends. It is one continuous round of affection. The wreath does double duty. It is made from many things and in many colors. It should remind us of all the things of Christmas. Please teach the children.”

I pondered and wondered and thrilled at all those symbols. To give, to help, to love, and to serve. And Santa, He’s the sign of giving, that jolly old elf, and yes, I shall teach the children.

The Christmas Train

In about my tenth year, as Christmas approached, I yearned as only a boy can yearn for an electric train. My desire was not to receive the economical and everywhere-to-be-found wind-up model train, but rather one that operated through the miracle of electricity.

The times were those of economic depression, yet Mother and Dad, through some sacrifice, I am sure, presented to me on Christmas morning a beautiful electric train. For hours I operated the transformer, watching the engine first pull its cars forward, then push them backward around the track.

Mother entered the living room and said to me that she had purchased a wind-up train for Widow Hansen's boy, Mark, who lived down the lane. I asked if I could see the train. The engine was short and blocky—not long and sleek like the expensive model I had received.

However, I did take notice of an oil tanker car which was part of his inexpensive set. My train had no such car, and pangs of envy began to be felt. I put up such a fuss that Mother succumbed to my pleadings and handed me the oil tanker car. She said, "If you need it more than Mark, you take it." I put it with my train set and felt pleased with the result.

Mother and I took the remaining cars and the engine down to Mark Hansen. The young boy was a year or two older than I. He had never anticipated such a gift and was thrilled beyond words. He wound the key in his engine, it not being electric like mine, and was overjoyed as the engine and two cars, plus a caboose, went around the track.

Mother wisely asked, "What do you think of Mark's train, Tommy?"

I felt a keen sense of guilt and became very much aware of my selfishness. I said to Mother, "Wait just a moment—I'll be right back."

As swiftly as my legs could carry me, I ran to our home, picked up the oil tanker car plus an additional car of my own, ran back down the lane to the Hansen home, and said joyfully to Mark, "We forgot to bring two cars which belong to your train."

Mark coupled the two extra cars to his set. I watched the engine make its labored way around the track and felt a supreme joy difficult to describe and impossible to forget.

Mother and I left the Hansen home and slowly walked up the street. She, who with her hand in God's had entered into the valley of the shadow of death to bring me, her son, across the bridge of life, now took me by the hand and together we returned homeward.

(Thomas S. Monson, "Your Jericho Road," General Conference, April 1977)

A Christmas Miracle

By Ryan Campbell, December 2008, New Era

Winter is a cold time of year in the Russia Moscow Mission. To a missionary this sometimes seems true of not only the weather but also the people. They become introverted. Everybody seems to be rushing home after work. People are ill, the roads are terribly slick, and the cold ruthlessly bites every exposed piece of skin. Smiles are rare.

My companion and I found ourselves in these conditions during the winter of 2005. We wanted to cheer people up by sharing our message of faith, hope, and love, but nobody wanted to listen. And to be honest, my mood wasn't all that great. I couldn't help but feel discouraged. Day after day we walked the cold streets in search of people to teach, freezing our feet to the bone. In spite of the discouraging circumstances, we didn't want to give up. Christmas was getting close, and we wanted to help people feel the Christmas spirit. But how?

One evening as we were on the train returning home, a small group of musicians walked into the railcar. They played wonderfully, but to my surprise, their performance didn't have an effect on anybody. Maybe a person or two gave them some pocket change, but the rest just stared out the frosty windows. I felt bad for the performers and gave them a few coins.

Soon we arrived at the station near our apartment and ran home. As soon as I closed the apartment door, the phone rang. I picked it up and recognized the voice of our district leader. That day we were supposed to have thought of ideas for celebrating the Christmas season as missionaries. I had totally forgotten, but I didn't want him to know that. Straining for an idea, I remembered the group of musicians and suggested that our district could sing Christmas hymns on the trains. I could accompany them on the violin. To my surprise and perhaps dismay, our district leader loved the idea. We decided on a day. "What was I thinking!" I said to myself, remembering that three of the missionaries in our district were tone-deaf.

The day came and the missionaries met on the platform. The sun had set long ago, and it was terribly cold. My feet were already numb. We rehearsed for about five minutes until the train crept slowly up to the platform. We gladly entered its open doors, getting out of the cold wind and snow. I took my violin out of its case and silently prayed that God would touch the hearts of the listeners.

As we boarded the train, most of the people didn't pay any attention to us. My fingers hadn't warmed up yet, so when I started to play, the tone of the violin sounded very simple but very piercing. Suddenly the mood in the railcar changed. It was almost as if something could be felt in the air. The passengers seemed to hold their breath. The other missionaries joined with me, singing the words to "Silent Night":

*Silent night! Holy night!
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and Child.
Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace;
Sleep in heavenly peace.*

While I played and the other missionaries sang, nobody in the railcar spoke a single word. When we finished the hymn, I looked around at people's faces. Everybody was looking attentively at us. Tears were flowing down the cheeks of several women. It was silent for a minute as nobody wanted to interrupt the moment. Finally, a man standing in the back of the railcar exclaimed, "They are Saints, genuine Saints!" Everyone began to applaud.

As we walked down the aisle, many people wanted to give us money. When we didn't accept it, they became all the more surprised. I heard somebody saying under his breath, "This just doesn't happen." One man even tried to give us a thousand rubles and was shocked when we refused the money. Instead, we offered him a pass-along card, which he gladly took. Soon other passengers began asking for pass-along cards. They also asked about the Church and us. It seemed like wherever we looked, our eyes were met with smiling faces and warm greetings. At the end of the railcar, we wished the passengers a merry Christmas and waved good-bye to our new friends.

On the other side of the door, we looked at each other in disbelief. "What just happened?" we asked. Then, with twice as much energy, we entered the next door. At first the passengers didn't pay any attention to us, but after we performed the hymn, they had the same miraculous reaction. For the rest of the evening, we made our way through the railcars, experiencing the same thing in each one. Never before had I seen such acceptance and love.

Returning home that night, I realized that I had experienced a miracle wrought by music, a message about the Savior, and the spirit of Christmas. Even in the coldest times of our lives, we can be comforted by the Lord's presence. How blessed I was to have seen how drastically people can change under the influence of the Spirit. I will always remember that evening and treasure it in my heart. May the Spirit forever work such miracles.

He Took a Lickin' For Me

(Folk Tale—Author Unknown)

Many years ago there was a school which no teacher could control. The boys were very rough. A young teacher applied, and the old director said, "Young feller, do you know what you are doing? Every teacher we have had for years has had to take a beating." He replied, "I will risk it."

When the new teacher started. One big student, Tom, looked at the him and said, "I can lick him myself." The teacher said, "Good morning, boys, we have come to conduct school, now, I want a good school, but I need your help. Suppose we have a few rules. You tell me and I will write them on the blackboard." One fellow yelled, "No stealing!" Another yelled, "On time." Finally ten rules appeared. "Now," said the teacher, "a law is no good unless there is a penalty. What shall we do if someone breaks the rules?" "Beat him across the back ten times without his coat on." "Are you sure, boys. Are you ready to stand by it?" They all agreed to the new rules. Then school started.

In a day or so Big Tom found his dinner was stolen. Upon inquiry the thief was located a little hungry boy, about ten. Then next morning the teacher announced, "We have found the thief and he must be punished according to your rule ten stripes across the back. Jim, come up here!" The little fellow, trembling, came up slowly with a big coat fastened up to the neck and pleaded, "Teacher, you can lick me as hard as you like, but please don't make me take my coat off!" "Take that coat off; you helped make the rules!" "O teacher, don't make me!" He began to unbutton, and what did the teacher see? The lad had no shirt on and a very bony body. "How can I whip this child?" thought the teacher. Everything was quiet as death. "How come you to be without a shirt, Jim?" He replied, "My father died and mother is very poor. I have only one shirt to my name, and she is washing that today, and I wore my brother's big coat to keep warm." Just then Big Tom jumped to his feet and said, "Teacher, I will take Jim's lickin for him." "Very well, there is a certain law that one can become a substitute for another. Are you all agreed?" Off came Tom's coat, and after 5 hard strokes the rod broke! The teacher thought, "How can I finish this awful task?"

Then he heard the entire school sobbing, and what did he see? Little Jim had reached up and caught Tom with both arms around the neck. "Tom, I am sorry I stole your dinner, but I was awful hungry. Tom, I'll love you till I die for taking my licking for me! Yes, I'll love you forever."

Jesus Christ took our whipping for us and died in your place. We should be as Jim and say to the Lord, "I'll love you forever for taking my licking for me."

Christmas Symbols

Candy Cane

Red striped to represent the blood of the Savior shed during the atonement. Three stripes-one wider than the other two. The shape of the candy cane represents the shepherd staff-Christ is the good shepherd-He is the staff of life for us. Turned upside down it makes a "J" which stand for "Jesus".

The shepherd that the angels came to were those tending the flocks of sheep that were used for the sacrifices in the temple. This event, the birth of the Savior, happened during the Passover time. These shepherds knew each of the sheep and which of the lambs were the first born and without blemish. Bethlehem for many years had been the place where this special flock of sheep were kept to be used in the temple. Significant that those who were chosen to receive the message of "Peace on Earth, Good will toward men" were those who were preparing the lamb for the sacrifice.

Bethlehem means "house of bread" in Hebrew. John 6: 35: "I am the Bread of Life. He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." It is significant that the Savior used that term as applied to himself in Chapter 1. It is five miles south of Jerusalem the place of Ruth and Boaz-the great grandparents of David-and where David was anointed King by Samuel the Prophet.

The Colors of Christmas

Red: the atoning sacrifice of our Savior. We too have been asked to sacrifice by offering to God a broken heart (which is also red) and a contrite spirit that we might be purified like our Savior.

White: the purity of our Savior. His perfection and cleanliness. We are promised that we may be "purified even as He is pure," by keeping the Covenants we have made to Him.

Green: Life eternal. It is the red atoning blood of our Savior which allows us to have Eternal Life. He too is the life and the light of the world.

The Wreath

It symbolizes eternity and that which has no end. When Gabriel came to Mary he told her that this Jesus would be the "First and the Last" and that of His Kingdom there would be no end. We too are promised Kingdoms of no end with Him in Eternal life if we remain faithful and come unto Him. Our Eternal families bonded by the Sealing Ordinances provided in the House of the Lord are also symbolized in the wreath.

The Bow

Usually red in color, the bow symbolized Eternal love and brotherhood which is made possible by the Atoning Sacrifice of our Lord. He has taken the two ends which are far apart and made them beautiful by tying them together. We should be tied together by His love in our marriages, in our families, in our wards and in every other union which He makes. He also promises to Unite Himself with us in order to change our hearts and purify us.

Light

Light as symbolized in candles, the star, and the Christmas lights. He is the Light of the World. D&C 88: Literally the Light of Christ is that which lights everything in our physical as well as spiritual world.

The Evergreen Tree

Green in color, it reminds us of the opportunity for Eternal Life provided by our Redeemer. Further, the needles on the tree point Heavenward reminding us of the source of Life. Green is also the most abundant color in our world.

The Bell

It is the bell which rings out to tell us that "Christ is born." It symbolizes the call to all of us to come unto Christ and worship Him. The bell tells the "Good News" or Gospel that Christ is born, that He has come into the world to take upon Himself our Sins that we might be redeemed from sin and death. We must heed the bell and listen to it. The bell is also that which hangs around the neck of the lamb to help the Shepherd know where to find the lost sheep. He hears us.

The Gift

His life was a gift from our Heavenly Father to us. How could the Father tell the world...? By the gift of His Only Begotten Son. We too are reminded of the many gifts which are given to us by our Savior. (The list of these gifts is endless). What gift can we offer to the Christ child at this season.