

The Journal



A SHEPHERDESS INTERNATIONAL RESOURCE FOR MINISTRY SPOUSES

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Editor's Musings

Dear friends,

Psalm 23:3 contains a promise for you and me— “He restores my soul.”

About this time of year most of us yearn for some restoration of our souls. 2004 has been filled with blessings and joys, but it also demonstrated to us the results of living in the land of the enemy.

W. G. Bowen, a New Zealand shepherd, said, “Problems are not the problem, but the problem is in trying to cope with problems on our own and with our own resources and in our own strength, or weakness, without the help of the Shepherd.”

Jesus our Shepherd is ready and waiting to restore you and me. If you have been running with the wrong people, the Shepherd is ready to replace them with people who value you. If you have been running too fast for too long, the Shepherd is ready to revive you with His strength. If you have been running on empty, the Shepherd is ready to refresh you with His Word. If you have been running away, the Shepherd is waiting to retrieve you back to His purpose. And if you are running scared, the Shepherd is ready to refocus you on His love and protection.

This is the season when we reflect on the first Advent. We focus on that fact that Jesus came and paid the ultimate price to restore us. With that in mind, the Fourth Quarter *Journal* is dedicated to inspirational stories that we hope will draw you closer to our Shepherd, Jesus, who longs to restore your soul.

God bless us every one,



The Journal A SHEPHERDESS

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The Thanksgiving Our Family Will Never Forget

Barbara Jurgensen

Barbara Jurgensen chairs her church's evangelism and neighborhood ministry committee and is active in women's work. A retired teacher, she loves when neighborhood kids stop by to share what they're doing in school. She is the author of 15 books and lives in Columbus, Ohio.



In the fall of 1967 the Biafran people of Africa were starving. A terrible drought had ruined their land and killed their crops, then civil war broke out.

Our family was living in North Dakota, nearly half a world away. But every evening as I fixed supper our three children came to the kitchen area to watch the TV news. Night after night they saw little Biafran children with distended bellies and matchstick arms and legs.

One evening as we sat around the table, Janet, 16, looked over the roast, potatoes, brussel sprouts, yams, and tossed salad spread and said, "It's hard to eat after watching all those hungry little kids. Can't we do something to help?"

I nodded. "We don't have a lot, but I'm sure we can give something."

"Listen," 15-year-old Marie said, "Christmas is coming, and we always get new holiday clothes, but don't we have enough already? We could skip that and send the money to the Biafrans" (this from the daughter that loved new outfits).

"And we could eat less expensive foods," Janet suggested. "Beans instead of roast, cabbage instead of

brussel sprouts" (The daughter who loved to eat).

Peter, almost 11, looked up. "And we always buy lots of presents. This year why don't we get just one big present for the whole family? Maybe a Ping-Pong table" (Our family game person).

Janet jumped up. "I've got a spiral notebook in my room. I'll get it and we can begin writing down what we save." In a moment she was back. "OK, how much can we free up by not buying new clothes?" she asked. "I trust that we're all willing to do this." We all agreed and began estimating what we usually spent on new clothes and food items.

"And how much do we spend on presents for each other?" she asked. When she added everything up, subtracted what we thought a Ping-Pong table would cost, and came up with the difference, we were surprised at how much it was.

After that, as we sat down to supper each evening, Janet added up what we'd saved that day and wrote it in her notebook. Back in early October the congregation we belonged to had decided to hold a fund drive for Biafra. The week before Christmas

we were to bring in what we'd collected.

Steadily the numbers in Janet's notebook grew as we found more ways to save, a few dollars here, a few dollars there.

Finally it was the week before Christmas. We looked at the total—more than one fourth of our family's monthly income. And none of us had felt deprived. I wrote a check and sealed it in the special envelope. We all placed it into the offering plate at church.

Six years later

Life moved on. A few years later we moved to Chicago. In the fall of 1973 a friend who was in charge of foreign students at the University of Chicago asked if our family would be willing to take one of her students under our wing. We said yes, and so every Wednesday evening Leonard, an 18-year-old from Nigeria, came to have supper with us.

Leonard's uncle practiced tribal medicine, and Leonard hoped that after college he could go to medical school and learn the ways of Western health care. Before he left Nigeria he'd never ridden in an automobile—or even worn shoes.

Then it was Thanksgiving. We'd invited Leonard to come over midmorning and help us prepare all the good things we'd planned for Thanksgiving dinner. We had potatoes, stuffing, fruit salad, broccoli, butternut squash, cranberry sauce, a turkey, and dessert.

Our best dishes and silverware awaited us on the linen tablecloth, accented by a centerpiece of fruit and nuts. The house smelled of fresh rolls and spices.

When everything was ready we all carried the platters and bowls of food into the dining room. "Wow," Leonard said. "When I was starving I never thought I'd live to see this much food again!"

We looked at him, puzzled. "Starving?" we asked. "When were you starving?"

"I'm a Biafran, you know."

"No," we said, "you're Nigerian. You told us so."

"That's true," he said, as we listened in stunned silence. "My country is Nigeria, but I'm a member of the Biafran tribe. Back in the fall of 1967 we had a terrible famine and everybody ran out of whatever food they had stored. When we had no more food we ate grass and leaves—and even bark—but we were still starving.

"First the old people and babies began dying, then the young children. I was 12 and my brother was 10. Eventually we were so weak that we couldn't walk around. All we could do was sit on the dusty ground, leaning up against a tree. And finally all we could manage was to lie down all day. We hardly had the strength to talk. I was hoping my brother would die first so he wouldn't have to watch me die.

"Then one day when we thought we wouldn't last till nightfall, we heard the honking of a truck horn, and over the hill came the missionaries. Their truck was loaded with bags of food.

"Eating too much would have killed us, so they cooked up some grain into a thin gruel and came around every hour or so with a spoonful for each of us. It took many days before we could really begin to eat." He stood there and surveyed our heavily laden table. "I never thought I'd see this much food ever again!"

We all looked at each other, remembered what we'd done six years earlier. It hadn't hurt us one bit. In fact, it had been more like a game. But, along with the gifts of many others, it had made the difference between death and life.



Thanksgiving

*Lizelia Augusta
Jenkins Moorer*

Let us give thanks to God above,
Thanks for expressions of His
love,
Seen in the book of nature, grand,
Taught by His love on every hand.

Let us be thankful in our hearts,
Thankful for all the truth imparts,
For the religion of our Lord,
All that is taught us in His Word.

Let us be thankful for a land,
That will for such religion stand;
One that protects it by the law,
One that before it stands in awe.

Thankful for all things let us be,
Though there be woes and misery;
Lessons they bring us for our
good—
Later 'twill all be understood.

Thankful for peace o'er land and
sea,
Thankful for signs of liberty,
Thankful for homes, for life and
health,
Pleasure and plenty, fame and
wealth.

Thankful for friends and loved
ones, too,
Thankful for all things, good and
true,
Thankful for harvest in the fall.
Thankful to Him who gave it all.



*This originally appeared in the Arizona
Shepherdess newsletter.*

The Walking Wounded

Andrea Martin

The holiday season can be a traumatic time. When families gather, they often bring a lot of emotional baggage that contains unresolved conflicts and past hurts. Far too many have their balloons burst by unthinking relatives. They need someone who will affirm them and build them up—not tear them down. Proverbs 12:25 reminds us: “Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop; but a good word maketh it glad.”

If a friend comes to our house on crutches, we rush to seat him in the most comfortable chair and ask what we can do for him. Yet how often do we ignore the “walking wounded” with whom we come in contact? They may not be literally incapacitated, with bandages or canes, but they have scars of the psyche and spiritual hurts.

In wartime, we talk of the “walking wounded” to differentiate between those who are bedridden and those who have less severe injuries. Likewise, there are people all around us who can walk but who suffer emotional traumas. They also need our love and attention. Yet they do not always communicate their hurts in words. We must be alert to pick up on their unspoken signals.

With depression and suicide so prevalent today, we need to be quick to compliment and slow to criticize—and especially so during the holiday season.

When one of my sons attempted suicide, I was grateful that he was rescued in time. He recovered without any long-term physical effects. Al was later confined for a week in a psychiatric hospital for protective custody and counseling. Our family visited him daily and took him gifts.

Upon his release, Al promised that he would never again try to take his life. He later told us, “I didn’t realize you all loved me so much.”

How sad that as we grow older, we sometimes tend to ration our affection with an eyedropper rather than with a wheelbarrow!

This experience taught our family that sometimes the people who seem so prickly and unfriendly need attention and love even more than the outgoing ones. As a child, Al had misbehaved to get extra attention. As

he grew older, he withdrew into himself.


Quiet and reclusive as a teen, he had never been able to talk much about his hurts. Now, through counseling, he has learned to do so.

The walking wounded you come in contact with need a listening ear and an understanding heart more than a mouth that spouts platitudes. Pray that you, like Isaiah, might say, “The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak the word in season to him that is weary” (Isaiah 50:4).

At this Christmas season, serve up a heaping dollop of love with the Christmas goodies. Wrap all your Christmas gifts with love. Be generous with your hugs and kisses and heartfelt compliments.

As the scriptures remind us in 1 Corinthians 13 (my paraphrase), “If I send tracts with all my Christmas cards, serve a sumptuous Christmas dinner after saying grace, and surround my Christmas tree with mounds of gifts for everyone, but have not love, it availeth nothing.”

The walking wounded won’t bring wheelchairs or come in ambulances. But they will be just as fragmented. It’s up to us to love them unconditionally. Pour out the love of the Lord to them liberally.

Love is truly the only answer for the hurts of those around us! 

Andrea Martin is the pen name of a freelance writer from Chicago, Illinois.

Christmas Is Nothing but Trouble All 'Round

J. Grant Swank, Jr.

When it comes to Christmas season observances, most believers are into “sweetness and light” with little regard for the actual stark realism of that first nativity scene. In fact, most believers are into a kind of denial at Christmas.

The reason is because we gravitate toward pleasure and so discount pain. It is simply our way in an affluent, luxurious, overfed and overpampered culture.

Therefore, Christmas becomes an overplay of bows and bangles, parties and pleasure, gifts and gaudy.

Our very sanctuaries speak of our indulgences: wreaths upon wreaths, reds and greens sprinkled throughout the church, numberless Christmas cards tacked to bulletin boards, children singing gaily their rehearsals in preparation for the Big Time while adults rush happily about for one religious program or another.

Compare this display with the extremely humble, hard environs of the original barn, cow's trough, chickens and smelly donkeys in the shadows, let alone a scared mother and foster father who feared for their very skins, knowing that centurions sought their child's body for the kill.

Compare also Christmas celebrations in the Third-World societies where there is no chance of a wreath or red bow, let alone a greeting card

and boxes upon boxes of presents under a brightly lighted family room tree.

So it is that the present-day believer needs to remind himself that when God wrote Christmas, He wrote, not only of pleasurable angelic night-time cantatas in the sky, but also of mothers' painful wails into the dark skies due to murdered babes in their cribs.

Now of course God did not write those murders; evil Herod wrote those murders. Nevertheless, God did not slip into denial regarding those murders. He let them stand in the record.

Further, contemporary believers need to remember that Christmas contains the pain of Mary's back and Joseph's feet. It means the shepherds' bittersweet wanderings and wise men's dread that their disobedience to Herod might mean their necks.

In addition, let us keep in mind the awkwardness of that holy family's new adaptations to Egypt's strange culture, language, loneliness and uncertainties upon taking their flight from centurions' swords.

Suspense, intrigue, dread, stinking barn stalls, scratchy straw for an infant's head and bare arms, no room in the tourist home, home-sickness in yearning for familiar environs of Nazareth, embarrassment,

Grant Swank is pastor of the New Hope Church in Windham, Maine.



humbling experiences, confusion, political plots for the child's life, and all the rest equaled pain, pain, pain. Thank God!

Why? For God attached His own personal identity with our agony at that first Christmas . . . and every Christmas since, if we will but recognize it.

Therefore, the Christmas season enthusiast must recall that when the original Christmas was written, God brought our pain into it, too. If that first Christmas had been only a panacea ride garlanded with Pollyanna plush, we would have been left out.

Why? Because life is not all that, though our denial-inclinations would wish it to be.

Because Christmas is both pleasure and pain, those who hurt then can be enveloped into its multi-dimensional reality. For God is reality, not fantasy; likewise are His intricate yet simple stories that spell history.

Consequently, when Christmas comes 'round each year, it envelops the family coping with a recently murdered child, the husband whose wife just left him, the single mother wondering how she is going to pay the month's rent, and the shunted teen who is housed in a downtown shelter where straw is sticky and the basement stinks like a barn.

Such an opportunity for healing is afforded the believer during our advent gatherings! It is that chance to speak particularly to the forlorn, exceptionally lonely, and that lost soul in need of a friendship roof.


Christmas is that time to journey *everyone* to Bethlehem, not just the giddy and happy, but also the suffering and on-the-edge. Christmas, after all, is a holy rugged jaunt to the City of David.

It is then the challenge of every Christian to web all hurting hearers into the redemptive message of the

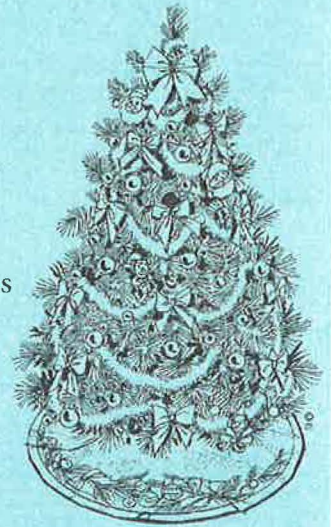
manger. What a dynamic moment it can be to realize that God has sent us to others for such a time of Christmas healing.

In such a lovely setting, each believer can speak the gospel to the those about him by enunciating: "This Christmas, no matter your lot, know that you are with the God who does not deny your state. In fact, because of your state—painful as it may be—He rests there in the straw and dread with you. None of that suffering, in other words, is foreign to Him. He understands it all."

This Christmas—and every Christmas—you are gifted to exercise your God-given right to think truthfully about Christmas. Instead of slipping into denial regarding the pain of the times, let us all be as realistic as the gospel record, welcoming God into the agony for redemption's lessons.

Then the world will hear our Lord of comfort declaring to them personally: "I know what it is like 'out there.' I've been there and done that. And so I can care for you wherever you are at Christmas." 

Although things are not perfect
Because of trial or pain,
Continue in thanksgiving
Do not begin to blame.
Even when the times are hard,
Fierce winds are bound to blow;
God is forever able—
Hold on to what you know.
Imagine life without His love—
Joy would cease to be.
Keep thanking Him for all the things
Love imparts to thee.
Move out of "Camp Complaining"
No weapon that is known
On earth can yield the power
Praise can do alone.
Quit looking at the future,
Redeem the time at hand
Start every day with worship—
To "thank" is a command.
Until we see Him coming
Victorious in the sky,
We'll run the race with gratitude.
Xalting God most high.
Yes, there'll be good times, and yes, some will be bad, but . . .
Zion waits in glory . . . where none are ever sad!



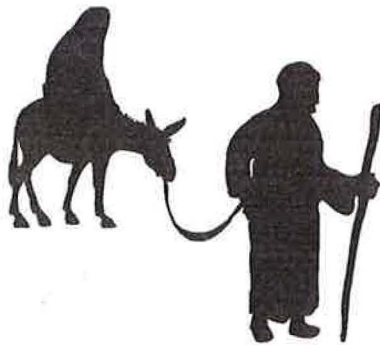
—Anonymous

A Family of Two

Marlo Schalesky

Sonya's Story

"O come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant," sang the children's choir from the front of the church. But I felt anything but joyful or triumphant. Despite the Christmas lights glittering from the sanctuary's ceiling and the candles behind the pulpit, darkness hung over me. Of all the little girls pulling restlessly at their dresses, of all the little boys standing tall and proud behind



Marlo Schalesky lives in Gilroy, California. Used with permission from *Focus on the Family*. This article is adapted from *Empty Wound, Aching Heart*, © December 2001, Bethany House Publishers. All rights reserved.

starched shirts, none were mine. No little eyes searched the crowd looking for me, no little fingers wiggled a wave in my direction, no little voices called me Mommy.

Barren, the Bible named me, a cold, empty word. I hated it not so much because it described my womb but because it revealed the feelings of my heart—especially at Christmas-time when families gathered, mothers baked sugar cookies and children counted the days until they would tear open gifts from Mom and Dad. *Barren*, the word haunted me now as I sat in the back pew and wished for the hundredth time that Christmas didn't hurt so much. But it did. Christmas, it seemed, was a time for families. And Joe and I, with only our two dogs, did not constitute a real family. At least I didn't think so. And neither, it seemed, did anyone else. "When are you two going to start a family?" we heard all too often.

I sighed and closed my eyes, wishing I could block out the singing voices reminding me of what I longed for but couldn't have. "Joy to the world," they caroled in tones loud enough to pierce my defenses.

Clapping broke out over the sanctuary as the kids finished their final song. With sweeping bows and stifled giggles, the children scampered to a wide box in front of


the pulpit and pulled from it sprigs of mistletoe. My throat closed as the children trotted toward the pews and presented their parents with the mistletoe. I dropped my gaze.

"M-Merry Christmas," a timid voice sounded from beside me a moment later. I looked up to see 8-year-old Caroline holding her piece of mistletoe toward me. "For you," she whispered, then hurried toward the door.

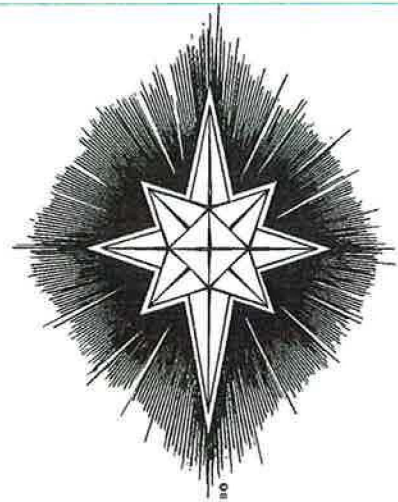
A strange mixture of sorrow and warmth flooded me. "Thank you," I choked, too quiet for her to hear me.

There, in my lap, lay the small piece of mistletoe. It was such a small gift, so simple, so plain. As simple, perhaps, as a baby wrapped in rags, lying in a feeding trough. As plain as the Son of God born in a stable full of animals. A gift announced, not to the movers and shakers of Bethlehem, but to a few Gentiles in the east and a bunch of shepherds working the night shift.

I held the mistletoe close to my heart. If animals and shepherds were remembered on the first Christmas, maybe the childless and the hurting were remembered this Christmas, too.

Perhaps God was telling me that Christ was born for people like me, for "have-nots" who, through the simple gift of Christ, are welcomed into the family of God. 

The Costly Star



Margaret Slattery

Fourth floor please." Mrs. Carson left the elevator, and walked down the broad aisle between toy motor cars, toy rocking horses, dolls, and games. She stopped beside the rope which enclosed the square set apart for the children where attendants helped them into marvelous swings, lifted them to the backs of camels, elephants, or horses on the merry-go-around, or let them sail tiny boats on a miniature sea. The young woman stood fascinated! This would be the third year that she had spent a morning before that rail, for the joyous laughter and those happy faces brought back memories of her own little boy who was just five years old last month.

It seemed cruel that the man who had been her husband should have this child at Christmas. Yet, she could not bear to think of the long summer days by the lake, without his smiling face and the warm caresses of his chubby hands.

Three years it had been since the court had decided that father and mother might live apart, but should share the boy for equal periods of six months. Now he had the boy and it was only a few days before Christmas.

Of course, her boy would not be there in a public play room, but she liked to find the boys who resembled him. Watching them at their play, she

suddenly realized that she was sobbing then crying and laughing at the same time and not able to stop.

A woman led her away to an emergency room where after a long rest, asked if she had a lost child.

The question revived her. These people had no right to know. She said she felt better and ordered a taxi to take her home.

When she had taken off her wraps and thrown herself upon the couch, she told her faithful maid that she had become exhausted in one of the stores and would have a light lunch served there in her room before trying to sleep.

She had only half-heard the words of sympathy, the scolding for "doing too much," but the caresses and careful arrangement of the pillows were a comfort. After the luncheon she tried in vain to sleep. Wandering about the room, her eyes fell on a little red book which she had thrown on the table a week before.

A friend had persuaded her to attend a tabernacle service. At the close of the meeting a young woman with a most attractive face had given her the little book, saying, "Will you not read it sometime, please?" She had smiled and said, "Yes," but had not done it.

Now, she had opened the little book, and lying down again, began to read the verses marked in red.

This article was received from the Wisconsin Conference.

Utterly worn out by the strains of the morning, she did not read long, but closing her eyes, thought over the words. The rain which had been threatening all day, began to fall and the room grew dark. Turning her face to the wall, she finally slept.

In her dreams, she found herself mixed up with a large procession of every sort of people who were rushing along a great highway toward a soft gray curtain of a cloud which hid the sky. Where it touched the earth a man stood—a man with a long robe and a wonderful face.

“Where are you all going?” she asked those by her side. A gray-haired woman responded, “To see the star; it is the Bethlehem star you know. They say that if you can see it, your mind and heart will be at peace and you will be happy the rest of your life.”

The younger woman looked at the unhappy faces about her, then said, “I will walk along with you. We all look as though we need something to make us happy.”

After a long while she found herself by the man with a wonderful face and his keen eyes looked her through.

“Would you see the star?”

“Yes, I want peace of mind and heart. I need it.”

“Will you pay? It is a costly star.”

“What must I pay?” she asked fearfully.

“Will you try to forgive him?” He asked so softly that no one else could hear.

“No, not that!” she cried. “Anything but that!”

“It is the price you must pay to see the star and know its peace.”

But she shook her head and slowly joined the company of disappointed seekers who were going down the hill.

Tears filled her eyes as she stumbled along. On the great plain below, she saw men lying dead in the snow,

hundreds of them. The smoke of burning cities and the blaze of burning shells made her heart ache. A voice seemed to say, “If only those who have brought men to this could see the star, peace would come to earth, but it is a costly star and they will not pay.” Failing to locate the speaker, she walked on, and after a long time, sat down to rest. There at the foot of the hill was a brightly lighted home. Before the fireplace, a man and woman stood facing each other with hate and anger deforming their faces.

“I will walk along with you. We all look as though we need something to make us happy.”

A moment more and the man flung himself furiously into his coat and left the home. Again the mysterious voice remarked, “They need to see the star, but they will not pay. Neither can put himself in the place of the other. See, see the scores of wrecked homes—little children in them suffering the penalty. Selfishness has made both man and woman deaf and blind.” Scorched by the words which seemed to reach her inmost soul, she cried out, “Lead me back; I must see the star.”

“You called; did you want anything? It sounded as if you were in pain.” (The nurse stood at the door anxious and troubled.)

“No,” she answered, “I must have dreamed. I am glad you wakened me. Frank and Louise are coming for dinner, and I’ll have to dress at once.”

Contrary to her usual dread of spending an evening alone, she longed to have her friends leave

soon, that she might be able to think. When at last the “Good nights” had been said, she hurried to her room, undressed quickly, and turned on her bed lamp to read the “Testament,” again. How many times she had read all night, seeking to drown memories that would not let her sleep, but never words like these!

She had never taken religion very seriously. The life of the One who began in that manger, to which the thoughts of millions would turn on Christmas morning, and ended in a day’s agony on the cross, and the glory of an open tomb, had never before impressed her.

But now she closed the book and turned out the light, conscious of an Unseen but Sympathetic Presence.

In the dark she began to think of the days when James Carson had told her that he loved her. Then her wedding. The first year in his father’s house, the misunderstandings—then, the baby. Crowding upon her memory came the things she had said to him the day the child was a year old; of the words of disdain with which he had met storms of anger. “He should have been more patient,” she told herself as she had many, many times before. But now, the words of the dream came hauntingly.

“Neither can put himself in the other’s place. Selfishness has made both man and woman, deaf and blind!” Memories of the child came rushing o’er her—the last awful scene when the man had begged her to try again, to make one more attempt to understand him. He said he would do anything to save them for the child’s sake, from the publicity of separation, but she had answered that she could never forgive him of both herself and the child.

She had meant then to take her little two-year-old son and go back to her own home, but the court had said, “No!”

All their quarrels had started with

such petty things but how the memories hurt! Forgive him? It was the price of the star! Then she would never see it.

The loneliness and longing would not be banished, for she could not fight it off with hard and bitter thoughts as before.

Finally in the gray light of early morning, she rose and knelt by the bed. After a long time she said slowly and aloud to the "Presence," "Show me the Star—I will pay; I will try to forgive him. Help me!"

It was her first prayer. Into her heart came a sense of peace. Comforted and conscious of a sustaining strength, she went back to bed. The stars were fading; one seemed brighter than the others, and watching it she fell asleep.

While Alma Carson had been dressing for dinner and trying in vain to shake herself free from her dream, the man who had been her partner in what he so often, sarcastically called, "The Disillusionment," sat in his living room with his little son upon his knee. The child had been "saying a piece" which he was to repeat with the other children at a Christmas service. With expression and accuracy that would have done credit to a person much older than "just five," he said the words of the first Christmas story.

His aunt had taught it to him carefully, but she refused to answer any questions about the things which she taught, and this evening, a whole volley of them followed the recital of "the piece." Angels and wise men, shepherds and camel, mangers, gold, frankincense and myrrh, all came in for their share, and the questionnaire ended with the important interrogation—"Did you ever see the star, Daddy? Have you looked for it? Wouldn't you like to see it?"

Negative answers came from the man whose thoughts flew back over

the years to the day when he had, himself, stumbled through the words, "For we have seen His star in the East and are come to worship Him." The child soon changed the subject and shaking his father by the shoulder, demanded, "Tell me, Daddy, am I going to have a Christmas tree? Am I?"

"Sure you are, and a big tree that will touch the ceiling this year since you are such a big boy."

"What will be on it?"

"What do you want on it?"

(The boy did not hesitate for a moment. Evidently he had thought it all out.) When, breathless, the boy had finished, the father exclaimed, "One tree—you will need a forest of Christmas trees!"

"Fine! Who is going to come to see my tree, Daddy? The big cousins who came last year—will they all come?"

"Yes, we'll ask anybody you want."

"Truly, will we, Daddy?"

He snuggled down into his father's arms and played with the fingers of the hand which held him tightly. He was silent for so long that his father asked, "Well, have you decided whom you want?"

"Yes," the child answered. "I want mother. Last Christmas she didn't have any tree. I asked her in the summer. She had only presents—she liked mine the best. But she didn't have any candy—nobody gave her any. Daddy, I wish you and mother lived in the same house. Helen's mother and her daddy live in the same house and so do Allen's." (He sighed.) "I asked her all summer to come and see me and she has never come. She's got lovely sunshine hair, and she can swim fine! She teached me, only I can't do it yet!" He was still for a moment or so, then added, "I guess I'll ask Carl. He's a scout. That'll be enough. She can tell stories better than Auntie and better than you, Daddy. Maybe she'll tell the one—" (His aunt interrupted by

*"I want mother.
Last Christmas she
didn't have any tree.
I asked her in the
summer.
She had only presents—
she liked mine the best."*

saying that it was past time for bed and daddy's dinner was ready.)

The child seldom spoke of his mother for he found that no one answered, and a strange, uncomfortable feeling always followed the mention of her name, but having started talking about her, he found it very hard to stop and protested vigorously as his aunt led him off to bed.

James Carson did not eat very heartily and he was not in a talkative mood. "Sunshine Hair." He had told her that very thing himself. He remembered the day on the lake and the look with which she had answered him. He had taught her to swim. She was so vigorous that she had soon surpassed her teacher.

Immediately after dinner he left for the mid-week service of the church in which he was an officer. When his father died, the whole congregation had mourned the loss of their most prominent member and real friend, and they had pressed him to take his father's place. Of late, he had often tried to give it up, but they would not listen to it.

Usually he did not attend the weekly service, but tonight his presence had been requested, for over a hundred people were to seek membership in the church. The largest number that had ever come before.

James Carson paid little attention to the singing, none whatever to the

He felt for a moment that he would like to go to her and say that he had been unfair, but he had never said that to anyone!

prayers, though his head was bowed. He was lost in his own thoughts during the opening paragraphs of the minister's talk, but was brought back by the words, "Have you seen the star? You men and women of this great city—" And the boy's question, "Have you seen the star, Daddy?"

The minister was certain that not many had seen it. He said that men today found it difficult to seek stars. They loved their own will and way, were filled with pride and steeped in greed and selfishness.

James Carson walked home alone. Ever since the day when the court, at the bidding of his influence, his money, and his demand, had given the boy into his keeping for the half year, holidays had been a source of dread.

As the child grew older the strange arrangement of a mother in the summer and a father in the winter, had never puzzled him; of late, his questions were hard to answer. Someday, the boy would have to be told. What should he tell him? And what poor reinforcement their influence would be when it was his turn to meet life's temptations!

On the way to his own room, the father stopped to look at the boy. He often stood gazing down at the child so like himself; wishing that he might always keep him a boy of five.

Tonight he stood longer than usual, then went to bed to lie staring into the darkness, thinking of things that even his strong will could not

banish. He did not know that within one-half hour's walk, she was struggling to forgive him, that she might see the star.

In spite of all his efforts now he remembered his taunting words when the court had given him his son: remembered the intolerant fashion in which the first years he had dismissed her as "unreasonable" or laughed at her judgments. She was young. She had been an only daughter, unrestrained and petted and he had not given her long to learn new ways.

He felt a deep sense of shame for the first time. He gave up the fight against the memories and let them come—the night their boy was born—how courageous she had been. He felt for a moment that he would like to go to her and say that he had been unfair, but he had never said that to anyone!

He did not see the child the next morning. It was raining and as he stepped out into the chill air, he hated the world!

Business was dull for him at the holidays and that afternoon his work was done at three o'clock. He sat looking out over the roofs of the city, thinking in spite of himself, of the boy's wish that his mother might come to the Christmas tree, of the sunshine hair and the stories.

She would not come, of course, but what should he say to the child by way of explanation?

"Why not send the boy to her for Christmas?" the words darted into his conscience as if they had been spoken aloud. But that, he told himself, he could not do. Still, the words of the minister the night before persistently penetrated his thinking.

His was a perfectly appointed office—his father's position, business, home. Everything he had was his father's and yet he had never measured up as a boy or as a young

man, to that father's expectations and hopes.

His little son and he had his father's name. He looked up at the keen, strong face over the desk. Tears sprang into his eyes and yielding to a sudden impulse, he bowed his head upon the desk and cried aloud, "O, God help me!"

He sat there a long time and then the Miracle came—the Creator touched the soul of a man He had made and finished His creation. The strengthening presence of a brother who had been through a man's Gethsemane stole into the office on the 12th floor so quietly that the great, noisy, bustling city rode on unawares.

It was five when he left his office. He had made his plans. He would send the child to her in the morning for the holidays and the tree should follow.

When the boy was told, a shout of joy filled the house, "Oh, Daddy, couldn't we go now?"

The "we" stung the heart of the man, who could not help the jealous pang that came as the boy clapped his hands and danced about the room.

Putting the child to bed that night was a difficult task for the boy's aunt, but she made no comment. When, hours later, James Carson looked in at his son, the boy stirred in his sleep, opened his eyes and seeing his father, sat up quickly and cried, "Is it morning, Daddy?" The man shook his head, kissed the sleepy little face and told him morning would come soon, and then hurried to his own room.

Despite the wakeful hours and the morning that came too quickly, the man felt a strange quietness of mind that he had never known before.

At eight o'clock they telephoned to see if Mrs. Carson would be at home that morning. She would be there until 11. At half past nine, his

suitcase packed and dressed in the fur coat and cap that made him look in his aunt's words, "perfectable adorable," the boy climbed into the motor car with his father and a maid.

The man began to give instructions to the half-listening boy as to what he should say and do.

"Tell your mother that your daddy sent you for the holidays because you said you wanted her at your Christmas tree. The tree will come at noon. Tell her you are a Christmas visitor. You can stay until New Year, then Mary will come for you. Now listen, Sonny, be sure to telephone Daddy every day at half-past four. I will be at the office Christmas day, too—don't forget!"

The chauffeur was turning the car—there was the apartment. The man seized his son, held him tightly and kissed him again and again. He suddenly felt that the Divine Will of the heavenly court was wrong to ask him to leave with the lonely woman the child who loved her and wanted her so much. Somehow, it seemed too great!

Not until the maid picked up the suitcase did the boy realize that his father was not going with him. He stood very still on the walk. "Aren't you coming, Daddy?" And in response to his father's "No" the little face clouded. "Is it to be like summer?" he asked sadly. The man could not answer.

"Run along, Laddie," he said, "You're a Christmas visitor. Think how surprised she'll be. I'll send the tree at noon."

He watched them enter the door of the big modern apartment then stepped from the car and walked away, rapidly.

Alma Carson was writing a list of names when the bell rang. The day before had been the first that she had known peace or even approached happiness. Not hearing the doorbell, she was astonished to hear the

exclamations of her maid, and then a child's laugh. A moment later found her in the hall. "The surprise" was almost too much, but she heard it saying, "Daddy sent me. I'm a Christmas visitor, and surprise, and the tree will be here at noon, 'cause I wanted you for my Christmas tree."

Had it not been for a child's evident joy, his insistence that the suitcase be unpacked, his questions about where they should put the tree and what should go on it—a perfect volley of questions which gave her no time to think—she could not have controlled the emotions which surged over her.

*"Oh Mother, aren't
we glad!"
The woman leaning
her head upon her hands
did not know
what to answer.*

At noon, as they sat down for lunch at the little table she always used for him at the lake, he looked over at her, his face beaming and said, "It's nice isn't it, Mother? Just like summer, only it's 'most Christmas."

She could keep back the tears no longer, but fled from the room. He followed her, calling, "Has the tree come? Has it come? Daddy said it would!"

And it had! It must be attended to and there was no time for tears when a Christmas tree had to be looked after.

A box filled with all sorts of decorations came with the tree, and it was nearly four o'clock when the tinsel and gay bulbs, colored chains of every sort and candles that must be lighted, Santa Clauses, big and

little and a wonderful electric star were fastened to the branches to the satisfaction of both the decorators.

The child was tired and content to lie in the arms of his mother, listening to a story.

"Tell me about the 'boat that never got to shore,'" he begged. "Daddy doesn't know it and Auntie doesn't."

Two or three times he asked, "Is it half-past four?" and as the story closed he asked again.

"Why do you want to know dear?" she asked gently.

"'Cause then every day, I telephone Daddy at the office. I mustn't forget!"

"It's half-past four now," she said and he ran to the telephone. He seemed such a baby to her that she listened in astonishment as the clear little voice gave the correct number. (She did not know how often he had interrupted important business interviews since he had learned that number.)

"Hello, Daddy! It's come! Yes, she was very surprised. It's all decorated and it's beautiful, and I like it!"

Then in dismay she heard pleadingly, "Daddy, won't you come and see it 'fore I go to bed? We can light the star when it's dark. Will you come? No, Daddy, tonight! What?" And then—

"He says can he come to see it? He said I must ask you. Can he Mother? Say yes, quick!"

"You can, Daddy. I asked her twice 'n she says yes."

The man at the other end of the wire tried to speak calmly, but the child said, "I can't hear you Daddy. What?" Then, "Oh all right. Goodbye."

"He'll come at half-past six," he announced. "Oh Mother, aren't we glad!"

The woman leaning her head upon her hands did not know what to answer. The child looked at her head upon her hands and did not know what to answer. The child looked at her with misgivings, but she said

cheerily, "My little boy must take a nap right away. I will wake you at six, then we can be ready when Daddy comes."

The small arms clasped tightly about her neck, the warm kisses of the boy who from babyhood had always been an unusually affectionate child, seemed so good to her after the long months that she lay beside him thinking what it would mean if she need never leave him again. The arms relaxed and turned on his side, the child slept.

She watched him. Pressing one soft little hand again and again to her lips, she thought deeply.

She said softly, "I will forgive his father. I will tell him I have paid to see the star. Do you hear me Son?" But the child did not hear.

She did not need to waken him, for in less than an hour he sat up rubbing his eyes.

"Has Daddy come? Can we light the star?"

He sprang out of bed to be made ready.

The bell rang—it was only the last mail, very late. Again, but it was a box of flowers from a friend.

Then a third time, and she heard her maid's cold, dignified, greeting. The boy ran to his father, but the latter scarcely saw him. He looked past the child to her. The first time he had seen her for three years.

He had planned carefully what he should say to her about them being friends, for the sake of the boy; but instead of the carefully chosen words, he cried, "Try to forgive me?" and reached out both hands to her.

She looked into his face and saw there what all the years had never shown her. She could not know that he had only just found his soul, but she knew in a moment that she wanted and longed to forgive and to be forgiven!


"I do forgive," she responded and went to him. Those moments

seemed to blot out the pain of years.

The child stood waiting, puzzled at the scene which did not please him!

Suddenly in a trembling voice he protested, "Come Mother, let's look at the star. It's lighted!"

But the man and woman who

followed their son into the room where the tree glistened, had seen another "Star," in whose light selfishness died. A costly star that brought reconciliation and peace. A star that all men and women the world over may see, if they will only pay the price. 

A Quarter

Email received from Alice Peck

Several years ago, a preacher moved to Houston, Texas. Some weeks after he arrived, he had occasion to ride the bus from his home to the downtown area. When he sat down, he discovered that the driver had accidentally given him a quarter too much. As he considered what to do, he thought to himself, "You better give the quarter back. It would be wrong to keep it." Then he thought, "Oh, forget it, it's only a quarter. Who would worry about this little amount? Anyway, the bus company already gets too much fare; they will never miss it. Accept it as a gift from God and keep quiet."

When his stop came, he paused momentarily at the door, then he handed the quarter to the driver and said, "Here, you gave me too much change." The driver with a smile replied, "Aren't you the new preacher in town? I have been thinking about going to worship somewhere. I just wanted to see what you would do if I gave you too much change."

When my friend stepped off the bus, he literally grabbed the nearest light pole, held on to it, and said, "O God, I almost sold your Son for a quarter."

Our lives are the only Bible some people will ever read.

The Christmas Pageant

Author Unknown



Each December, I vowed to make Christmas a calm and peaceful experience. I had cut back on nonessential obligations—extensive card writing, endless baking, decorating, and even overspending. Yet still, I found myself exhausted, unable to appreciate the precious family moments, and of course, the true meaning of Christmas.

My son, Nicholas, was in kindergarten that year. It was an exciting season for a six-year-old. For weeks, he'd been memorizing songs for his school's "Winter Pageant."

I didn't have the heart to tell him I'd be working the night of the production. Unwilling to miss his shining moment, I spoke with his teacher.

She assured me there'd be a dress rehearsal the morning of the presentation. All parents unable to attend the evening were welcome to come then.

Fortunately, Nicholas seemed happy with the compromise. So, the morning of the dress rehearsal, I filed in ten minutes early, found a spot on the cafeteria floor and sat down.

Around the room, I saw several other parents quietly scampering to their seats. As I waited, the students were led into the room.

Each class, accompanied by their teacher, sat cross-legged on the floor. Then, each group, one by one, rose to perform their song.

Because the public school system had long stopped referring to the holiday as "Christmas," I didn't expect anything other than fun, commercial entertainment—songs of reindeer, Santa Claus, snowflakes and good cheer.

So, when my son's class rose to sing, "Christmas Love," I was slightly taken aback by its bold title.

Nicholas was aglow, as were all of his classmates, adorned in fuzzy mittens, red sweaters, and bright snowcaps upon their heads.

Those in the front row—center stage—held up large letters, one by

one, to spell out the title of the song. As the class would sing "C is for Christmas," a child would hold up the letter C.

Then, "H is for Happy," and on and on, until each child holding up his portion had presented the complete message, "Christmas Love."

The performance was going smoothly, until suddenly, we noticed her; a small, quiet girl in the front row holding the letter "M" upside down—totally unaware her letter "M" appeared as a "W."

The audience of 1st through 6th graders snickered at this little one's mistake. But she had no idea they were laughing at her, so she stood tall, proudly holding her "W."

Although many teachers tried to shush the children, the laughter continued until the last letter was raised, and we all saw it together.

A hush came over the audience and eyes began to widen.

In that instant, we understood the reason we were there, why we celebrated the holiday in the first place, why even in the chaos, there was a purpose for our festivities.

For when the last letter was held high, the message read loud and clear:

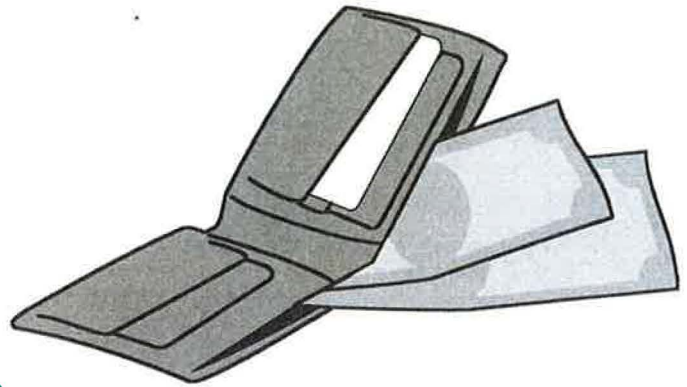
"Christwas Love"

And I believe He still is.



Story from the Internet

The Wallet



As written down by Arnold Fine

As I walked home one freezing day, I stumbled on a wallet someone had lost in the street. I picked it up and looked inside to find some identification so I could call the owner. But the wallet contained only three dollars and a crumpled letter that looked as if it had been in there for years.

The envelope was worn and the only thing that was legible on it was the return address. I started to open the letter, hoping to find some clue. Then I saw the dateline—1924. The letter had been written almost sixty years ago. It was written in beautiful feminine handwriting on powder-blue stationery with a little flower in the left-hand corner. It was a “Dear John” letter that told the recipient, whose name appeared to be Michael, that the writer could not see him anymore because her mother forbade it. Even so, she wrote that she would always love him. It was signed, Hannah.

It was a beautiful letter, but there was no way except for the name Michael, that the owner could be identified. Maybe if I called information, the operator could find

a phone listing for the address on the envelope.

“Operator,” I began, “this is an unusual request. I’m trying to find the owner of a wallet that I found. Is there anyway you can tell me if there is a phone number for an address that was on an envelope in the wallet?”

She suggested I speak with her supervisor, who hesitated for a moment then said, “Well, there is a phone listing at that address, but I can’t give you the number.” She said, as a courtesy, she would call that number, explain my story and would ask them if they wanted her to connect me. I waited a few minutes and then she was back on the line. “I have a party who will speak with you.”

I asked the woman on the other end of the line if she knew anyone by the name of Hannah. She gasped, “Oh! We bought this house from a family who had a daughter named Hannah. But that was 30 years ago!”

“Would you know where that family could be located now?” I asked.

“I remember that Hannah had to place her mother in a nursing home some years ago,” the woman said. “Maybe if you got in touch with them they might be able to track down the daughter.”

She gave me the name of the nursing home and I called the number. They told me the old lady had passed away some years ago but they did have a phone number for where they thought the daughter might be living.

I thanked them and phoned. The woman who answered explained that Hannah herself was now living in a nursing home.

This whole thing was stupid, I thought to myself. Why was I making such a big deal over finding the owner of a wallet that only had three dollars and a letter that was almost 60 years old?

Nevertheless, I called the nursing home in which Hannah was supposed to be living and the man who answered the phone told me, “Yes, Hannah is staying with us.”

Even though it was already 10 p.m., I asked if I could come by to see her.

"Well," he said hesitatingly, "if you want to take a chance, she might be in the day room watching television."

I thanked him and drove over to the nursing home. The night nurse and a guard greeted me at the door. We went up to the third floor of the large building. In the day room, the nurse introduced me to Hannah. She was a sweet, silver-haired old-timer with a warm smile and a twinkle in her eye.

I told her about finding the wallet and showed her the letter. The second she saw the powder-blue envelope with that little flower on the left, she took a deep breath and said, "Young man, this letter was the last contact I ever had with Michael." She looked away for a moment deep in thought and then said softly, "I loved him very much. But I was only 16 at the time and my mother felt I was too young. Oh, he was so handsome. He looked like Sean Connery, the actor."

"Yes," she continued, "Michael Goldstein was a wonderful person. If you should find him, tell him I think of him often. And," she hesitated for a moment, almost biting her lip, "tell him I still love him. You know," she said smiling as tears began to well up in her eyes, "I never did marry. I guess no one ever matched up to Michael."

I thanked Hannah and said good-bye. I took the elevator to the first floor and as I stood by the door, the guard there asked, "Was the old lady able to help you?"

I told him she had given me a lead. "At least I have a last name. But I think I'll let it go for a while. I spent almost the whole day trying to find the owner of this wallet."

I had taken out the wallet, which was a simple brown leather case with red lacing on the side. When the guard saw it, he said, "Hey, wait a minute! That's Mr. Goldstein's

wallet. I'd know it anywhere with that bright red lacing. He's always losing that wallet. I must have found it in the halls at least three times."

"Who's Mr. Goldstein?" I asked as my hand began to shake.

"He's one of the old-timers on the eighth floor. That's Mike Goldstein's wallet for sure. He must have lost it on one of his walks."

I thanked the guard and quickly ran back to the nurse's office. I told her what the guard had said. We went back to the elevator and got on. I prayed that Mr. Goldstein would be up. On the eighth floor, the nurse said, "I think he's still in the day room. He likes to read at night. He's a darling old man."

We went to the only room that had any lights on and there was a man reading a book. The nurse went over to him and asked if he had lost his wallet.

Mr. Goldstein looked up with surprise, put his hand in his back pocket and said, "Oh, it is missing!"

"This kind gentleman found a wallet and we wondered if it could be yours?"

I handed Mr. Goldstein the wallet and the second he saw it, he smiled with relief and said, "Yes, that's it! It must have dropped out of my pocket this afternoon. I want to give you a reward."

"No, thank you," I said. "But I have to tell you something. I read the letter in the hope of finding out who owned the wallet."

The smile on his face suddenly disappeared. "You read that letter?"

"Not only did I read it, I think I know where Hannah is."

He suddenly grew pale. "Hannah? You know where she is? How is she? Is still as pretty as she was? Please, please tell me," he begged.

"She's fine . . . just as pretty as when you knew her," I said softly.

The older man smiled with anticipation and asked, "Could you

tell me where she is? I want to call her tomorrow." He grabbed my hand and said, "You know something, mister, I was so in love with that girl that when that letter came, my life literally ended. I never married. I guess I've always loved her."

"Michael," I said. "Come with me."

We took the elevator down to the third floor. The hallways were darkened and only one or two little night-lights lit our way to the day room where Hannah was sitting alone watching the television. The nurse walked over to her.

"Hannah," she said softly, pointing to Michael, who was waiting with me in the doorway. "Do you know this man?"

She adjusted her glasses, looked for a moment, but didn't say a word.

Michael said softly, almost in a whisper, "Hannah, it's Michael. Do you remember me?"

She gasped, "Michael! I don't believe it! Michael! It's you! My Michael!"

He walked slowly towards her and they embraced. The nurse and I left with tears streaming down our faces.


"See," I said. "See how the Good Lord works! If it's meant to be, it will be."

About three weeks later I got a call at my office from the nursing home.

"Can you break away on Sunday to attend a wedding? Michael and Hannah are going to tie the knot!"

It was a beautiful wedding with all the people at the nursing home dressed up to join in the celebration. Hannah wore a light beige dress and looked beautiful. Michael wore a dark blue suit and stood tall. They made me their best man.

The hospital gave them their own room and if you ever wanted to see a 76-year-old bride and a 79-year-old groom acting like two teenagers, you had to see this couple.

A perfect ending for a love affair that had lasted nearly 60 years. 

Christmas Family Traditions



Marlene LeFever

David, Danny and Douglas added a lot of life to our Christmas celebrations, especially when the adults wanted to settle down and listen to the Bible story of the first Christmas before we opened presents. Chairs squeaked, wrapping paper crinkled as little hands squeezed. Our young nephews just couldn't help themselves.

We'd hear whimpers: "When can we open the presents? How much longer?"

"What can we do to make them as interested in the true meaning of Christmas as they are in their gifts?" my husband asked. And then laughing, he answered his own question, "Nothing!"

He's right; they were just young children. But we could do a lot to increase their interest in the Bible story and at the same time begin to grow their understanding of the Christmas message.

So we decided to make them part of the Christmas story, instead of just listeners. These three ideas were answers to a meaningful Christmas tradition. Each year through their childhood, we worked together to make the story of Christmas live for the adults and children in our family. The birth of a tradition is exciting. People hardly realize it's been born until they look back and know how much it means to them and look

forward to next year with new anticipation.

Christmas Story Envelopes

Before the family meets for Christmas present opening, write one question for each person who will be attending. Put that question into an envelope with the person's name on it. Match the questions with the abilities of the person. For the non-reader, draw a little stick figure picture that will illustrate a part of the Christmas story. When you're all together, read the Bible story and stop at the appropriate places for the questions. The non-reader will tell the part of the story that the little picture represents. Here are several examples:

Example one:

Bible Reader: Luke 2:1-7

Envelope 1 for David, a third grader: If Joseph and Mary had come to your door and asked for a room, what would you have said?

Example two:

Bible Reader: Luke 2:8-14

Envelope 2 for David's daddy: Suppose you had been one of the shepherds. How do you think you would have felt when the angels came?

The Christmas Story: A Family Play

An easy way to involve the whole

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family in the reading of the Christmas story is to script it and assign parts.

Joseph: Daddy

Mary: Aunt

Shepherds: Davie

We adjusted the parts to the ages of people at our celebration. Again, a young child got a picture to “read.”

Christmas Tic-Tac-Toe

You’ll need at least 12 people to play Christmas Tic-Tac-Toe, a game involving a review of the Christmas story and praise to our Savior.

Arrange the chairs like a Tic-Tac-Toe game—three rows of three chairs in each row. One person sits in each chair.

Two players stand in front of the chairs. Each player has six construction paper blocks in his or her hands. One person’s block are red and the other’s blocks are green. Players should take turns calling on the people in the chairs to answer questions. They must call on someone *before* the 12th person reads the question. If the person called on knows the right answer, the player gives that person one of his or her cards to hold up. If that person doesn’t know the answer, the next player takes a turn. The object, as in Tic-Tac-Toe, is to get three red or three green cards in a row.

Question samples

Why did Joseph go to Bethlehem?

Who was the ruler at the time of Jesus’ birth?

How many shepherds came to the manger to see Jesus? (Trick question: The Bible doesn’t tell us.)



A New Take on 1 Corinthians 13

If I decorate my house perfectly with lovely plaid bows, strands of twinkling lights, and shiny glass balls, but do not show love to my family, I’m just another decorator.

If I slave away in the kitchen, baking dozens of Christmas cookies, preparing gourmet meals, and arranging a beautifully adorned table at mealtime, but do not show love to my family, I’m just another cook.

If I work at the soup kitchen, carol in the nursing home, and give all that I have to charity, but do not show love to my family, it profits me nothing.

If I trim the spruce with shimmering angels and crocheted snowflakes, attend a myriad of holiday parties, and sing in the choir’s cantata but do not focus on Christ, I have missed the point.

Love stops the cooking to hug the child. Love sets aside the decorating to kiss the husband.

Love is kind, though harried and tired.

Love doesn’t envy another home that has coordinated Christmas china and table linens.

Love doesn’t yell at the kids to get out of your way.

Love doesn’t give only to those who are able to give in return, but rejoices in giving to those who can’t.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.

Love never fails. Video games will break; pearl necklaces will be lost; golf clubs will rust. But giving the gift of love will endure.

Love To All!



—Story from the Internet

Christmas Treasure

Pamela Caldwell

Lord, show me what I can give Jessica for Christmas." This was my prayer as the holiday approached. I knew it would take all my creative energy to find the right gift. Three-year-old Jessica was the handicapped daughter of my good friends Mark and Gail.

Wanting to share Christmas with so many family members and friends made it necessary to budget. I was determined, though, to get an especially nice gift for Jessica, something that could meet her special needs. I knew it might be expensive.

The weeks before Christmas found my mind blank. If Jessica could see, hear, and walk, my choices would be unlimited. But with her various handicaps, regular gift ideas looked shallow.

Knowing how restless Jessica often became, I finally decided on a music

box. Maybe the sound vibrations would be a lullaby for her when she was upset. I began my search.

Music boxes come in all shapes and sizes. Looking from store to store convinced me to pray more specifically: "Show me where to find Jessica's music box, Lord."

As I prayed, I pictured the little fuzzy lamb my son had received ten years before. Its music box played "Jesus Loves Me." As I pondered this long-forgotten toy, now packed away in the attic, a small voice inside me said, "Give it to Jessica." My reaction to this thought was overwhelming. "No!" I couldn't give her a used toy. She might not know the difference, but her mother would. I kept searching the stores.

Days passed. It was Christmas Eve. We would be at church in a few hours exchanging gifts with our friends. "Lord, I don't want to give that toy to this sweet child of Yours. How can I explain a used gift to Gail?"

In desperation I found the lamb. It was clean, slightly matted and needing a new ribbon. But the music box played loudly and clearly. With the lamb's wool brushed and a new pink bow around the neck, it was ready for a box and Christmas paper.

That evening I quickly exchanged gifts with Mark and Gail, leaving no time for unwrapping. I certainly didn't want to be around when the lamb was exposed.


That Saturday after Christmas I was worried. My husband and I were going to dinner at Mark and Gail's, and I was still embarrassed about the used gift.

After dinner Gail invited me upstairs to peek in on Jessica. She was lying peacefully in her crib. On her pillow was the lamb I had given to her. Then I noticed an identical lamb on the shelf. I gasped. Not only was it a used gift but a duplicate gift.

Defending the weeks before Christmas and the desperation I had felt on Christmas Eve, I explained about not being able to find a suitable music box, and so I had pulled the lamb out of the attic. I apologized.

"No, no, you don't understand," Gail replied. "You see, Jessica has had this other lamb since birth. Sometimes it was the only thing that helped her sleep. But the music box is broken, and I couldn't find a replacement."

My heart leaped. I couldn't believe my ears. The Father knew all along. He knew what would be the most treasured gift to Jessica.

As I lay awake that night, I was awed at the magnificence of our all-knowing God. Because of my lack of faith and my pride, I almost missed this blessing. God's faithfulness to His little child was evident. His graciousness to a grown, rebellious daughter was clear. Surely this was a blessed Christmas treasure. 





Shepherdess International News

Euro-Africa Division

✿ Baden-Wuerttemberg Conference Shepherdesses enjoyed their annual Shepherdess convention at the Adventist retreat center in the beautiful city of Freudenstadt. Evelyne Reischach and Reingard Schwenger worked diligently so the pastors' wives could enjoy a long weekend of fellowship, interaction and group discussion. Maeve Maurer, EUD Shepherdess Coordinator, was a featured guest along with Sharon Cress from Shepherdess International. Hannele Ottschowski and Andrea Zollner served as translators.



Shepherdesses enjoy exercise session



Evelyne Reischach and Reingard Schwenger

Euro-Asia Division

✿ Galina Stele, ESD Shepherdess Coordinator, sends the following report: She and her husband, Dr.

Artur Stele, ESD president, conducted three revival sessions—St. Petersburg, Kishinev, and Bishkek. At the Kisinev, Moldova meetings, they also conducted three days of meetings for the pastors and their wives. In Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan they presented seminars for the pastors during the day while their revival meetings filled the evenings.

The Southern Union has also conducted meetings for their pastors' wives and Shepherdess coordinators. In March, Galina taught an extensive course at Zaosky Seminary and conducted meetings for professors and students' wives.

✿ In May, a congress for PKs was organized by the Ukrainian Union Shepherdesses and took place in the capital of Kiev.

Inter-American Division

✿ Evelyn Omana, SIEMA Coordinator for IAD, sends pictures taken at the Continuing Education Program for the pastors' wives.



Pastor Ivan and Mrs. Evelyn Omana, director of the continuing education course

North American Division

✿ Kansas-Nebraska Conference: April 23-25, 2004 found the pastors'



IAD pastors' wives with their continuing education certificates of completion

wives of the Kansas-Nebraska Conference all together in Grand Island, Nebraska. Roxy Hoehn, Shepherdess Coordinator, planned a fantastic weekend of seminars, fellowship, and pampering for the ladies. Elder Jim Hoehn, the conference president, honored the group with his presence on opening night and affirmed their importance to the work of the church.

South American Division

✿ Evelyn Nagel, AFAM coordinator for SAD, reports that many pastors' wives around the division are conducting evangelistic meetings, and the Lord is blessing their success. Maria Do Carmo Vilas Boas, accompanied her husband, Pr. Joel Vilas Boas Pereira, in the Primavera Community, in the city of Frederico Westphalen. Maria presented evangelism for children.

✿ Rosemilda Da Silva Grellert worked with her husband Pr. Armando Grellert in Palmeira das Misstes. Pr. Grellert presented the Stop Smoking Clinic and immediately following, Rosemilda presented Bible topics to approximately 75 individuals. As of June 13, three people were baptized.

✿ Mirian Jacinto held evangelistic meetings in the city of Passo Fundo. The program began March 28 with a Stop Smoking Course and 30 individuals continue to study Bible topics with her.

✿ Sonia Rigoli Santos began her evangelistic effort in the city of Iju in a neighborhood without an Adventist church present. During the first week her Stop Smoking Course was attended by 80 individuals. After the Stop Smoking Course a special holy week program was held and followed up by a Bible course study. At the closing program 66 people received certificates for completion. The first baptism of five individuals was held on May 29 and on June 13 two more people were baptized. Another group of approximately 10 people will be baptized this month.



Sonia Santos' meetings

✿ Mrs. Vivian Moraga Carvajal, Shepherdess Coordinator for Chile Union Mission, reports that on April 16-18, AFAM meetings were conducted in Aria City, for a full weekend. Attendees included pastors' wives, administrators' wives, college teachers' wives, and chaplains' wives. Guest speakers included Dr. Luis



*Vivian Moraga Carvajal,
Shepherdess Coordinator*



Chili Union Mission AFAM meeting attendees

Garrido and Mr. Soledad Alvarez. A marvelous time was had by all of the attendees.

✿ February 2-8 found pastoral couples from the Austral Union Conference meeting together for their retreat. Pastor Ruy Nagel presented the topic of pastoral ethics to the pastors and their wives. The afternoons were occupied with various seminars. Pr. Alejandro Bullon served as chaplain for the event. Dr. Millie Youngberg, Evelyn Nagel and Susan de Peto conducted special seminars just for the ladies.



Austral Union pastors' wives at the ministerial council

South Pacific Division

✿ Debora Kent, Partners in Ministry Coordinator for SPD, sends the following report: Each week a group of pastors' wives throughout Australia and New Zealand pray for each other and their families. During one week of the year each specific family will be the focus of many prayers.

✿ Papua New Guinea Mission: Mrs. Tiono Davai, PNGUM Coordinator, implemented a union-wide Shepherdess retreat where nearly 400

pastors' wives were in attendance. Each day the women experienced seminars with their husbands, and also attended specialized features just for them as pastors' wives. Debora Kent presented a gluten cooking demonstration, Dr. Percy Harrold focused on women's health and Sharon Cress talked on the life of the pastor's wife.



Pastor Davai, the union president, and his wife, Tiono, PIM Coordinator



Papua New Guinea pastors and their wives enjoy the seminars



Joel Sarli, director of Elder's Digest; Sharon Cress, Director Shepherdess International; Jim Cress, GC Ministerial Secretary; Laurie Evans, SPD President; Pastor Davai, union president; Tiono Davai, union PIM Coordinator; Beatriz Kemo; Debora Kent, SPD PIM Coordinator; Anthony Kent, SPD Ministerial Secretary

Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division



Gertrude Mfune, Malawi Union Shepherdess Coordinator (second from left) with the Coordinators from the three fields in Malawi



Shepherdess Singing Group performing during the Shepherdess Meetings in Malawi Union



Mrs. Nonceba Mathema, SID Shepherdess Coordinator (middle) with the Shepherdess Coordinators for the Malawi Union and its fields



At the SDA Youth Campgrounds known as "Ana-A-Malawi," Child of Malawi, 131 Shepherdesses came together beside beautiful Mount Chradzulu



Mrs. Z. Kunene, guest speaker (blue dress); Mrs. Ntshangase; Mrs. Wakaba, SAUC Shepherdess sponsor; Mrs. Nzimande, Kwa-Zulu Natal Free State Shepherdess Coordinator; Mrs. Ntshali, Shepherdess



Nineteen Shepherdess ladies pose for a picture during the Kwa-Zulu Natal Free State Shepherdess Conference

Southern Asia Division

✿ Hepzibah Kore, SUD Shepherdess Coordinator, along with Pastor and Mrs. Padmaraj co-hosted a Shepherdess retreat for the entire South-Central India Union. The group met in the beautiful conference facilities of the Bangalore Adventist Hospital. Featured guests were Dorothy Watts and Sharon Cress.



Mrs. Eileen Padmaraj, South-Central India Union Shepherdess Coordinator; Hepzibah Kore, SUD Shepherdess Coordinator; Pastor Daniel Padmaraj, South-Central India Union President



Mrs. Dorothy Watts



Pastors' wives enjoy small group discussion

West-Central Africa Division

✿ Babcock University has officially inaugurated a Shepherdess program with a total membership of 29 women. They are instigating a newsletter and planning activities that range from spiritual to intellectual to social. Shepherdesses are paired together forming a sister-of-support prayer partner who visit, pray and encourage each other. The members, together with their families, had a social excursion at Eleko Beach in Lagos, Nigeria.



Elected officers of Shepherdess, Babcock University Chapter



Members pose with their food at Eleko Beach



Sunyani (Mid-West Ghana Conference) Shepherdesses' and Pastors' Council

If you are planning to attend the GC Session and would be willing to voluntarily do translation (French, Spanish, Portuguese, or Russian), please contact Ardis Stenbakken (stenbakkena@gc.adventist.org) or Sharon Cress (74532.471@compuserve.com).



The Welfare Committee Members of Shepherdess, Babcock University Chapter

meetings of nurturing fellowship 365 revivals were conducted in the conference with the Shepherdesses all deeply involved. Over 2,000 people are expected to be baptized as a result of these campaigns.

✿ Chad Mission: Pastors' and Shepherdesses' Council were held in the Chad and Togo Missions.



Pastors and Shepherdesses of the Togo Mission in Lome

✿ Mrs. Elizabeth Ewoo, WAD Shepherdess Coordinator, sends the following report: Sixty-five pastors and their spouses met in Sunyani, Ghana, for a special program. Mrs. Rose Asante, the local Shepherdess leader, presided over the program. Special prayer sessions were conducted by the Shepherdesses. There were testimonies of joy and sadness. A great revival took place among the women. They left encouraged and many personal conflicts were resolved. After these



Pastors' and Shepherdesses' Council held in NiDjamena, Chad



Sunyani (Mid-West Ghana Conference) Shepherdesses' and Pastors' Council



Ordination ceremony in Takoradi. Pictured are the division coordinator (first row at right), union coordinator (first row at left)