

UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN

AS TOLD BY PHEBE A. CURTISS AT A "WHITE GIFT" SERVICE

It was in the little town of Bethlehem, with its white walls and narrow streets, that a wonderful thing happened many, many years ago. The whole aspect of the place had been completely transformed, and instead of the quiet which usually existed there, confusion reigned. The little town was crowded full of people. All day long men, women and children had been pouring in companies into it until every available place was full. It had something to do with the payment of taxes, and the people had come from far and near in response to the call of those in authority.

Many of them were staying with relatives and friends, and every door had been opened to receive those who came. There were not many places where the public could go to stay in those days, and the ones that there were had been already filled.

Just as the shadows were closing down around the hill, an interesting little group found its way up the winding path through the orchards, touched as they were by the sunset coloring, and into the gate of the city. The man, seemingly about fifty years of age, walked with slow and measured tread. He had a black beard, lightly sprinkled with gray, and he carried in his hand a staff, which served him in walking and also in persuading the donkey he was leading to move a little more rapidly.

It was plain to see that the errand he had come on was an important one, both from the care with which he was dressed and from the anxious look which now and then spread over his face.

Upon the donkey's back sat a woman, and your attention would have been directed to her at once if you could have been there. She was marvelously beautiful. She was very young—just at that interesting period between girlhood and womanhood, when the charm is so great.

Her eyes were large and blue and they were a prominent feature in the face that was absolutely perfect in contour and coloring.

She wore an outer robe of a dull woolen stuff which covered the blue garment worn underneath—the garment which indicated that she was a virgin. Over her head and around her neck she wore the customary white veil or "wimple."

As the donkey jogged along, stopping now and then to nibble at the bushes on either side, she sat calmly looking out upon the surroundings. Once in a while she would draw aside her veil and her beautiful eyes would lift themselves to heaven with a look of rapture and adoration in them, which was wonderful to see.

As they drew nearer to the town the look of anxiety upon the face of the man deepened, for he began to realize more and more the crowded condition of the place they were approaching. The hurry and bustle and confusion made themselves felt far beyond the bounds of the town itself.

They seemed to be strangers—at least they did not have relatives or friends to whom they could turn; and the man started at once to make his way to the inn or "kahn," as it was called in those days.

This inn was a quadrangular building made of rough stones. It was one story high, with a flat roof, and it had not a single window. All around it was a high wall, built of rocks; and the space between that wall and the building made a safe enclosure for the animals.

The thing about these inns that would surprise you or me today was the way in which the business connected with them was run. There was no charge made for staying there, but safe lodging was freely given. Each company which came brought its own bedding, its own food and everything they needed to

use in cooking. A resting place and safe protection were all that were offered. The inn was in charge of one caretaker. There were no other servants.

As the traveler, whose name was Joseph, drew near he found to his dismay that he could not even make his way through the crowd to the gate keeper, who was guarding the one entrance to the inn.

He decided to leave Mary, his wife, in the company of a family with whom he had been talking while he made an effort to gain entrance.

When at last he reached the man in charge, he found it was just as he had feared. The inn was full—there was no room for them there.

In vain he urged; he told of his own line of ancestors; of the noble line from which his wife descended. The answer was always the same: "There is no room."

At last he pleaded for Mary, his wife. He told the man in charge that she was not strong, that she had come a long, long way and was very tired; and urged that some place be found for her. He feared the results if she should be compelled to stay in the open all night.

So earnestly he pleaded his case that at last the man said, "I have no room and yet I cannot turn you away; come with me and I will find you a place in the stable."

Joseph then found Mary and they and the ones with whom she had been tarrying went together to the stable and there made themselves comfortable for the night.

This was not at all the cross to them that it would seem to you today. It was a very common thing indeed for people to stay in the stables when the inn was full. And then, too, you must remember that they were descended from a long line of shepherds. They naturally loved the animals and did not feel at all badly to sleep where they had been, or even in very close company with them.

We can imagine that it was with very thankful hearts they lay down to rest that night.

There was a company of men, asleep in the pasture lands at some little distance from Bethlehem, on the slope of the hill. They were shepherds. They had cared for their sheep and after that all but one of them had lain down to sleep. It was their custom for all of the number to watch while the others slept. They were wrapped in their great, warm shepherd's cloaks, for the air was chilly at that season. All at once a strange thing happened. It began to grow very light, and the one who was watching could not understand. He spoke to the others and they sprang to their feet.

Brighter and brighter shone the light until it was like the day, and you can imagine that the shepherds were startled. They could not speak, so great was their astonishment; but as they drew closer together they heard a voice coming out of the light. The voice said, "Be not afraid. Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger."

And then there were with this angel, who spoke, many other angels; and they sang, praising God, saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

They sang it again and again until the heavens fairly rang with it.

For a while after the beautiful song had died away and the light had failed, the shepherds stood with bowed heads. Then each one gathered his cloak around him and took his staff in his hand and they started together to find the place and the Child about which they had heard.

Hastening into Bethlehem they came to the inn and found Joseph and Mary, and the babe, lying in the manger, just as the angel said they would. They worshipped the Child and returned to their duties, praising God and glorifying Him.

After that Joseph and Mary went away to another place and took the child Jesus with them, and many others came to worship Him. Among them were three Wise Men who had come from separate places and all from a great distance.

They followed the star which was set in the heavens to guide them and they too found the One they sought.

As they came into the place where He was, each one bowed in worship and they laid before Him the gifts they had brought—gold, frankincense and myrrh.

What a wonderful story it is, and how our hearts swell with love as we think about it! It is fitting that tonight we should dwell upon it, for we, too, have come to worship our King. It is His birthday and we have come together to bring Him our gifts. We have brought "white gifts" because they are the expression of our pure, unselfish love.

The Wise Men brought gold, and we have brought our gifts of *substance*—money and food and clothing and things that will help to make others comfortable and happy.

The Wise Men brought frankincense, and we bring gifts of *service*; for each one of us desires to do some one thing all during the year that will make for good and make us worthy followers of Him.

The Wise Men brought myrrh, and we bring devotion; for we bring the gift of *self*. If we have not already given ourselves to the Master, we want to do so now; and if we have done so, we want to reconsecrate our lives to Him.

THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Luke 2:1 – 20

1 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. **2** (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) **3** And everyone went to their own town to register.

4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. **5** He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. **6** While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, **7** and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. **9** An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. **10** But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. **11** Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. **12** This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

14 “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. **17** When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, **18** and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. **19** But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. **20** The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.