

...days, that there  
 ...Augustus, that all  
 ...And all went to be  
 ...n city. And Joseph  
 ...out of the city of  
 ...the city of David,  
 ...because he was of the  
 ...to be taxed with  
 ...ng great with child.

...the very year and  
 ...me for... Son of

...rld to live, imagine  
 ...been alive on that  
 ...ved not only at the  
 ...re very town where

...n he will live. You  
 ...vo thousand years  
 ...ay, and had noth-  
 ...e's nothing to stop  
 ...we have been pre-  
 ...ng us in our home  
 ...our guest room.

...ed in a little house  
 ...l your family were  
 ...nts of David who  
 ...to be taxed. You  
 ...yed in our house.

...small inn and that  
 ...travelers to arrive.  
 ...ace to sleep in the  
 ...tables or wherever

...Christmas in Bethle-  
 ...our Christmas to-  
 ...been full of guests  
 ...nd children. But it  
 ...y get-together as it  
 ...y then. Families  
 ...to pay taxes to an  
 ...came in fear and  
 ...ou see, that Christ-

...t have...red you a  
 ...t those days every-  
 ...ng blanket with him.  
 ...ed it about him as  
 ...ply spread it out on  
 ...it. But at least that  
 ...sts. There was no  
 ...sure there were  
 ...A Bethlehem fam-  
 ...pany as it had floor

...no fireplace in our  
 ...n people didn't use  
 ...bly wouldn't have  
 ...d have sat on mats  
 ...meat and bread in  
 ...you children would  
 ...nsible arrangement.  
 ...n't have had oyster  
 ...ny other meal. The  
 ...t oysters.

...children were ex-  
 ...ck. You boys would  
 ...to the wheat fields  
 ...the girls would have  
 ...water jars at the pub-  
 ...We'd have balanced  
 ...nd stepped out cau-  
 ...rowded street.

...ded with travelers  
 ...been hard to move  
 ...ugged and shouted  
 ...women...ried tiny  
 ...lugged...andles of  
 ...streets looked cross  
 ...were heard for the  
 ...oman soldiers were  
 ...bells. Others had just  
 ...were peering anx-  
 ...porways, wondering  
 ...place to spend the

headed for the gate where the north road came into Bethlehem. You would have climbed up onto the sun-warmed stone wall and sat down beside the other children and the old men to watch the latest strangers coming into town.

Alone and in groups the people came, walking rapidly on this last bit of their journey, up the hill to Bethlehem. Some of them, the old men said, were coming from as far away as the town of Nazareth. You could hardly believe it. Almost a hundred miles! That meant three or four nights sleeping beside the road.

The afternoon sun was hot on your back. The wall was warm. For a minute, your eyes closed. When they opened, two people were coming along the dusty road down in the valley, a man walking and a woman riding a donkey. But how slowly these two were coming. The woman had her hand on the man's shoulder and she seemed very weary. The man kept looking at her anxiously.

Two men, walking rapidly with tall staffs, passed the couple and the donkey, climbed the hill, and went in through the town gate. Now the man and woman had reached the hill and you could see that the donkey was covered with dust, as if he had come a long way. The woman turned to look at the man and as she did you saw her face. You saw it and your heart gave a little leap.

For on this young woman's face, so pale and travel-weary, was a smile that made you forget taxes and Roman soldiers and even Caesar Augustus himself. In hot, noisy, crowded Bethlehem, her smile seemed to say that all the joy of heaven had come down to earth.

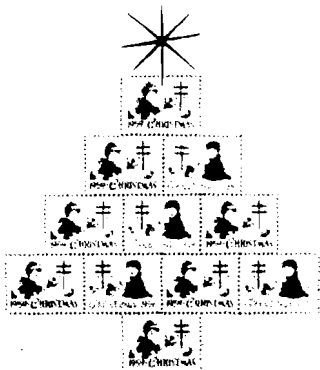
That night, wrapped up in your cloak on the crowded floor of our house, you could not get to sleep for thinking of her smile. Why was she so happy? And why were you so wide awake and excited tonight?

Was it the thought of that smile that made you want to get up and dance and shout and run through the streets? You didn't do it, of course. You lay still, still as a log, so that you wouldn't wake your mother and father who were squeezed up against you on the crowded floor. But a few feet away you saw one of the other children lift his head, and you knew that he was not asleep either. None of the children who had seen Mary were asleep that night.

This was a special night. You didn't know how you knew it, but you knew that something wonderful was about to happen to you. To you and to everyone. Something so wonderful you were almost afraid to breathe for fear of breaking the stillness.

For tonight Bethlehem was very still. On other nights donkeys coughed in their stables and wolves howled from their hilltops. But on this most special of all nights, even the donkeys and the wolves were quiet. The wind itself stopped blowing. The animals and the sky

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Fight TB with Christmas Seals

...looked like ordinary men, sheepherders. What was it they were saying? They had seen an angel!

You looked at them again to make sure they were really shepherds and not lunatics. No, they were not the kind of men who would be imagining things.

They had seen an angel, they repeated. And the angel had told them about a Baby born in Bethlehem and called the Baby "Saviour" and "Lord." They had just seen the Baby with their own eyes—out in the stable behind the inn—and they wanted everyone else to know about it too.

You didn't wait to hear any more. All you children set off down the street as fast as you could run, past houses where sleepy people were stumbling to the doors, asking what the racket was about. To the inn, then around it to the stable, then, slowly, softly, in at the door.

There she was. The young woman with the radiant smile. She was leaning against one of the stalls, and the eyes in the happy face were closed. The man was at her side. And behind them, in the manger where the cows came for their food, was the Baby.

He was a tiny thing, wrapped tightly in a long linen band and sleeping as soundly as any newborn baby. Sleeping as though the world had not waited thousands of years for this moment. As soundly as though your life and my life and the life of everyone on earth were not wrapped up in His birth. As though from this moment on all the sin and sorrow of the world were not His problem.

Should you speak to His mother resting so quietly there? Should you ask her if you might touch the Baby—not to wake Him, but just to touch His hand?

What a moment that would have been! To have reached out your own hand and touched the Son of God!

And yet—do you know—I don't really envy those people, who might have been you and me. I don't envy the people who lived in Bethlehem that night, even though many of them must have seen Jesus and Mary and Joseph with their own eyes. For they couldn't have known all that they were seeing.

They couldn't know all that this Baby was born to do: the words of joy He would speak to an unhappy world, the love He would show to people too used to hatred, the victory He would win over the sin and sorrow of the world.

You and I are greatly blessed to live now, when His work of love is finished. He is as close to us, today, as He was to the children of Bethlehem. Closer, for today we do not even have to reach out our hands to touch Him.

If we are really sorry for our sins, we can come to Him just as truly as those shepherds did in Bethlehem. And He will forgive us and give back to us that joyous fellowship with God—lost so long ago in the Garden of Eden. This is the Christmas gift that God gives to you and to me and to everyone on earth.

And if, on Christmas morning, when the presents are opened and the fire is burning low, we want to go back to Bethlehem, then we have only to open our Bible to the second chapter of the Book of Luke, knowing who this man and this woman are, coming up the hill to Bethlehem. Knowing why they have come and why the angels sing. Knowing the meaning of what we read:

And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

...a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. END

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