

A Christmas Gift from Strangers



As You Were Saying...

LAST CHRISTMAS our daughter and son-in-law took their four children—ages five months to five years—out to dinner in a restaurant. It was a big occasion for the youngsters. Their faces were all bright and shiny and they were on their best behavior.

After the meal, when the young father asked for the check, the waitress told him it was already paid. She said a couple at a corner table had seen them come in, remarked about the happy family scene, then asked to pay their check.

The couple had left the restaurant by then, so the parents had no chance to thank them. It was a pleasant way of saying "Merry Christmas" to an unknown family.—Mrs. L.R., Walla Walla, Wash.

My Christmas Surprise. Everyone, I guess, has memories at Christmastide. This is one of my favorites.

I am a nun and was teaching English in a junior high school in South Carolina. Southern children, as you may know, are quite affectionate. One day, after my lively 14-year-olds had decorated our home room with pines and Christmas tinsel, one of my pet pupils called me to the door and pointed at the opposite wall. I was gullible enough to look. Before I realized what he was up to, he kissed me on the cheek while the whole class, who knew what was going to happen, sang out, "Sister, you're under the mistletoe!"—Sister M. Xavier, St. Mary's High School, Cumberland, Md.

A Talk With Santa. It seems ironic, but those less fortunate are often more generous than those who can afford to be.

Each Christmas, my college sorority gave a party for children from a nearby orphanage. One year it was my good fortune to play Santa Claus. One by one the youngsters confided their simple wishes to me. Just routinely, I asked the next little boy in line what toy he wanted.

He fixed his big, brown eyes on me and said, "I don't want a toy. I just want some money to buy my little brother some shoes."

Such unselfishness in a child, I think, is as close as you can get to the spirit of Christmas giving.—Cynthia Wilson, Jackson, Tenn.

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I Was Just Thinking...

... THE MINISTER looks down from his pulpit on the Christmas congregation and denies himself the bitter right to welcome the faces he will not see again until Easter.

He preaches a sermon of love and joy compounded from the Christmas sermon of last year wreathed in the new words of today, hoping it will not be remembered and knowing it will not and being ashamed for knowing.

Below him the sleepers nod and the youngsters wriggle and the women admire the flowers and their own finery.

When he has finished, he will walk to the door to

accept the murmured haste of words and the insincerity of praise and the furtive handclasps of the backsliders. And then he will go into his study and sit there and fight a battle with himself and pray an empty prayer.

Is it hopeless? Was man given ears which cannot hear? Was he given a self to deny selflessness? A mind to learn but not to believe?

You have been heard, minister. Among those who see are those who listen. Among those who come for duty are those who stay to remember. And, if there are hundreds who see or sit and only one who hears, is that not enough?

The Man whose birth you proclaim today was only a minor prophet in His time. On the shore and in the market place there were those who came to eat and drink and feast themselves in the sun and breeze. They came to meet their friends, to view a curiosity, to laugh and talk and pass the time.

The words you have cherished for us for 2,000 years, minister, might have immortalized them all. But they were asking only miracles they could not believe.

Only a few hear a minister.

Only a few heard the Man.

It was enough.

Patty Johnson