

# 'And the Word Became Flesh and Dwelt Among Us'

Editor's Note: The Christmas story is really a love story—or rather, two love stories. It's the love story of Mary and Joseph. And it's the story of God's love for errant man. Here, drawn from the Gospels and the non-canonical New Testament Apocrypha, is an account of how those two love stories became one on that first Christmas 2,000 years ago.

By GEORGE CORNELL  
Associated Press Religion Writer

Love knows no prisons. It recognizes no defeats. It breaks through obstacles, overrides re-buffs. It is sovereign. It prevails. It prevailed in the case of a troubled husband and his young bride of Nazareth. It withstood the slurs and strange travail that beset them. It bound them fast. And it offered to bind up a distraught world.

Men resisted it. They ignored, distrusted and defied it. But love would not forsake them. They lost their own capacities for love. Yet they were loved.

Love sought them, reached for them, bent low for them, so very low.

A lowly she-donkey plodded up the red and rocky road toward Bethlehem, carrying the young Jewess, led by her rough-clad mate. They were tired, dusty. But they bore the lost lustre of life.

Other travelers paid them little heed. The traffic was thick, and strident with yells of camoleers and bluster of litter trains. No one seemed much concerned with anyone. But love was infinitely concerned with everyone.

It is hard to say why. Men had strayed and stumbled. In their willful arrogance, they had fouled, warred, plundered, falsified. They were a hard, harried lot, tortured by dead dreams. The great vision had left them.

But it would not let them go. On the road, the peasant couple paused beside a yew tree, and Joseph looked worriedly up at his wife, fearing she was in pain. Yet, only moments ago, he had seen her smiling with deep satisfaction.

"Mary," he said, "what aileth thee? How happens it that I sometimes see sorrow and sometimes laughter and joy in thy countenance?"

She leaned on her arms, gripping the donkey's mane.

"It is because I behold two people with mine eyes, the one weeping and lamenting and the other laughing and rejoicing."

For there is joy in love, but tragedy in its trampling down. Men would ever misuse, mock and crucify. But love would not surrender.

Augustus ruled the empire, and

Herod wore the crown of Israel, the lords of power and gold, and for these things men craved and clawed.

But scepters fall, and heaped gold narrows the eye. These dazzling goods do not reign. They do not win. They do not nourish the heart, nor fill the void in man.

The truth was much simpler; it knocked at the door.

There was no room in the inn. The place surged with voices, smoke and smells of roasting meat. Distressed, Joseph grabbed the halter rope and started off again. Dogs barked; peddlers babled and drays trundled in the deepening dusk.

He led the donkey down a slope at the rear of the hostelry. In the distant valley he could see the campfires of shepherds. Early stars blinked over the mountains of Moab.

He heard Mary moan, and quickly stepped back beside her.

"Take me down," she urged, "for that which is within me presses to come forth."

"Wither shall I take thee?" His voice was desperate, and his hands closed over hers commiseratingly. They must go on. They could not stop here in the open on this gravel-strewn hill.

She compressed her lips, nodding. He tugged the donkey on down the hill, along a cliff, his eyes straining to find the livestock cave of which the innkeeper had spoken. Night's sharp chill settled over them. He dragged at the rope, and the donkey held back stiff-leggedly, braying.

"Take me down," she gasped again, "for that which is within me mightily presses me."

At that moment, he spied the dark opening in the wall of rock. He rushed back to her, lifting her in his arms and carrying her into the warmer interior, moving slowly in the blackness, hearing the grunts and breathing of animals about him.

He probed with his feet, found an open space and laid her down. Groping, he collected some straw for a mattress and lifted her on it, rolling his cloak for her head.

He rushed back outside, gathered dry grass and wood and struck fire with his flint, blowing until it strengthened into flame. He jerked the waterskin from the stubborn beast's pack, filled a basin and put it on the fire. Then he fashioned an oil torch and jammed it in a crevice on the cavern wall. He knelt beside her stroking her hot brow.

"Art thou quiet?" She murmured, opening her eyes to look up at him, and then abruptly wrenched her face away, the cords tightening in her neck. In a moment, she turned back, smiling weakly, and motioned him outside.

The world slept now. It re-

reated and slumbered, unaware, uncomprehending, oblivious. Broken from its moorings, it drifted in vague, loveless discontent, gross, amorphous, without daring or certain destiny.

Where was its meaning? What

was its use? A man is but dust in the march of centuries. He felt no all-surpassing love. To him, his God was distant, grand, obscure and rigidly implacable, beyond the stretch of scrawny human arms.

But on this night, that gloomy still walked, his legs seemed motionless. He lifted a hand to his face, but his arm did not seem to move. The earth held still, and he beheld the heavens in amazement.

The milky way blazed like a highway of silver. A warm tide banished the chill of earth, and loosed the scent of grass and spring and Eden flowers. Veils of light draped the sky. A million birds singing? No. An angel army.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.

A thousand miles away, distinguished wise men studied the stars, and in the valley, wide-eyed shepherds huddled in awe. Joseph whirled and saw the white brilliance filling the cave. It blurred his eyes, and he stumbled toward it.

And the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

He was here. Now! Theophany on earth! He had come. He cared. Was man worth it? That God should take upon himself the form of a helpless babe in a draughty, dung-strewn cave? Yes, man was worth it. He was loved, dearly loved. He was important, in God's sight.

That was the motive, the meaning, the reason for it all, the making, and health of man—the Divine embrace.

Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.

Men were precious, each bumbling, benighted one of them.

And this world was dignified, too, its grime and its flesh and its musty stables. For this is where God came. This is where grace was given. Right in the midst of the shabbiest, dreariest, gash in the earth. Not in some rarefied sanctum. But in the seamy world itself, where man lives and works.

Awake, awake, put on thy strength, shake thyself from the dust.

Joseph, shielding his face, plunged into the argent radiance. It pulsed and shimmered, and then receded, scattering like a jeweled mist. He could see faintly, and then quite well. All was just as before, the dull stone, the littered floor, the torch on the wall.

Except that now she was up and moving about, dark hollows beneath her eyes, but smiling. In her arms, she held her first-born son. Immanuel, "God with us."

So this was He. The unsearchable, the Unknown. So now men knew. This is what He was like. And He had come to show them, to make them see, and know forever, that He was with them, intimately near, intimately concerned.

Despite men's grievous ways, He still was here. Despite their blunted responses, He came. Humbling himself, offering himself, tending in the slums and tribulations of man. This was God. The absolute, the invincible, the power that is constant, enduring, the ultimate. This was the Almighty. This was love.

She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger.



JOSEPH WHIRLED and saw the white brilliance filling the cave.

## Star Of Bethlehem Still Puzzles All Astronomers

By FRANK CAREY

WASHINGTON (AP)—Astronomers still have not pinned down any scientific explanation for the star of Bethlehem which guided the Magi to the crib of the Christ child, a naval astronomer said Wednesday.

Neither have they come up with any new theories beyond the three major alternative speculations which have cropped up since professional stargazers first began to theorize on the subject more than 300 years ago, says Simone Daro Gossner of the U. S. Naval Observatory.

These three possibilities are: 1. A supernova—a star that suddenly flares up much more brilliantly than previously. 2. A comet. 3. The configuration, or apparent close proximity of several planets in the sky.

Mrs. Gossner says the difficulty besetting any real attempt to link the Magi's guiding star with a specific astronomical event is that "neither the year of Christ's birth nor the season of the year when it occurred are known with certainty."

She said in an interview that historians estimate that the earliest possible year was 11 B.C. and the latest, 4 B.C.

"And," she said, "while the time of year when the birth occurred has not been fully established, most probably it occurred in the springtime, rather than in December."

"The Bible story speaks of the shepherds watching their flocks by night—and they'd only do such night watching when the sheep were having lambs. That is, in the springtime."

She said that in the early days of the Christian era the Christians celebrated the Nativity in the springtime but later changed this several times, finally settling on Dec. 25.

One view, she said, is that the ultimate change was made because Dec. 25 was "the date of the Roman Saturnalia, when all the Romans were whooping it up, and the Christians felt that their own celebration of a religious event could pass undetected at such a time."

Of the three astronomical theories offered to explain the star, Mrs. Gossner said the configuration-of-planets concept conceivably might tie in best.

"The Magi," she said, "were astronomers, but they also were astrologers as well. And the possible appearance of three bright planets—for example, Venus, Jupiter and Saturn—in apparent very close position to each other in the heavens might well have been considered a mystic symbol by the Magi."

Mrs. Gossner said that astronomers have computed that Jupiter, Saturn and Venus formed a close triangle in early March of the year 6 B.C.

"This configuration," she said, "appeared in the constellation of Pisces—the Fishes—which had always been held sacred to the Jews."

## Wiry Peasant Claims He Has Total Insomnia

MADRID, Spain (UPI)—A wiry peasant glanced through picture magazines and chatted with two correspondents today in a wide-awake demonstration of his claim that he has not slept a wink in his life.

Valentin Medina Poves, 61, was still going strong on the second day of his 48-hour sample of permanent insomnia.

"I will sleep the day I die," Medina said simply.

And there appeared to be no reason to doubt he would not sleep before then.

Twenty-four hours after two UPI correspondents set up a watch over him at 8 a.m. Wednesday, Medina showed no signs of fading.

As the newsmen kept watch with bloodshot eyes, Medina had his usual supper consisting of a cheese sandwich and a bottle of wine.

Medina even seemed to gain strength as the time wore on. He helped move a desk from one room of the office to another.

The two correspondents took turns napping but one or the other kept Medina in view at all times.

Medina has been to numerous doctors, most of whom have concluded that he actually has total insomnia. Pills and injections, wine supplied by friends and other home remedies all have failed to put him to sleep.

Dr. Luis Tomas Casamayor, who examined Medina Wednesday, said "apparently the man is not lying and he actually doesn't need to sleep."

But he reserved final judgment until he could "study the case for a period of several weeks."

**THIEVES CUP OF TEA**  
LONDON (UPI)—A truck loaded with \$2,800 worth of liquor and wine was stolen Tuesday while the driver stopped off for a cup of tea.

## Junior RC Sends Chile Gifts

Chilean school children can't assist in the packaging and shipping. An initial Red Cross grant of \$10,000 was made from the Children's Fund at the time the earthquake hit, and the program of rehabilitation is still continuing. Other types of assistance include grants of \$15 per month to Chilean university students to enable them to continue their education.

These projects for Chilean youth are part of a broad disaster relief program, made possible by generous contributions from the American public. Local residents participated in the relief campaign by donations of money and supplies during June.

chapters, including Portland, Ore., assisted in the packaging and shipping. An initial Red Cross grant of \$10,000 was made from the Children's Fund at the time the earthquake hit, and the program of rehabilitation is still continuing. Other types of assistance include grants of \$15 per month to Chilean university students to enable them to continue their education.

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## Licenses Are Running Out

Oregon chauffeurs have only a few more days to renew their licenses for 1961, the Department of Motor Vehicles reminded today.

Applications are available at all branch offices or from license examiners of the department. The fee is \$1.

The state has approximately 42,000 persons licensed as chauffeurs.

Current licenses expire Dec. 31, and the agency said applications are lagging behind the usual number received each year.

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## DEW Line Will Track Santa's Annual Flight

TOPEKA, Kan. (UPI)—Santa Claus has nothing to fear from the nation's defenses when he crosses the Distant Early Warning Line Dec. 24 on his annual journey from the North Pole.

But the Strategic Air Command plans to track him and his reindeer from the time of their departure.

Col. William D. Kyle, commander of the 5th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing at Forbes Air Force Base here, announced Wednesday the wing's daily weather flight to the North Pole region would be specially equipped Dec. 24 to alert defense forces to allow the kindly old gent to pass, and to let children know he was on his way.

## Little Orphan Girl To Spend Yule At Home

SALEM (AP)—The little Greek girl had never eaten meat, never drank orange juice, never spent Christmas outside an orphanage.

All that is changed now. Leah, 4, has a new home here, a new mother, Mrs. Robert Leonard, and two new brothers. However, she still has no father. Leonard was killed in a plane crash near Missoula, Mont., Oct. 26 as he was en route to New York to get the newly-adopted child.

That accident delayed, but did not cancel, Leah's arrival here. She arrived in Salem Tuesday night, and Mrs. Leonard said today:

"They told us we should expect that the child might be quite shy and withdrawn for some time. But not her. She fits in as if she had always been here. She's a tremendous help in filling the void caused by Bob's death. We just wanted her so much."

During an interview, Leah danced around the room and laughed while Mrs. Leonard said the child never had eaten meat prior to her arrival in this country, and had never heard of orange juice.

Leah, who was born in Crete and came to this country from Athens, had spent every Christmas until this year in an orphanage. Mrs. Leonard said Leah has a partially paralyzed arm.

Mrs. Leonard said that she someday plans to work with handicapped children, after Leah and her adopted sons, Casey, 6, and Tony, 3, are in school.

Until then, she said, there are her own three children. Then she turned to Leah and whispered: "S'gappo (— love you)." The child replied: "S'gappo."

## Little Girl Enlists Aid Of Cops In Finding Santa

NEW YORK (AP)—If there is a real Santa Claus, a little farm girl from the Arkansas Ozarks is out to find him. She has enlisted the aid of the New York City cops.

Coleta Burns, 11, has decided Santa either doesn't know where she lives, or he's dead. He hasn't called on her in a long time.

"Is there a real Santa in New York?" Coleta wrote in a letter to the Police Department. "You see, if there is a real Santa, he doesn't know where we live. I thought I would write a letter to him, and if he doesn't come this time, I know he must of died."

"You know," she went on chattily, "he hasn't been to our house for a long time. He must have been dead for a lot of years. If he is alive, I hope you will read this letter to him."

Then Coleta systematically listed the things her family needs from Santa.

"I hope you have some encyclopedias for my big brothers. . . . I have two sisters. They are 13 years old. They are twins. They want a old piano so they can learn to play at church."

"I want a pair of cowboy boots and some blue jeans and a cowboy hat."

"I have a little brother and sister. . . . They want a little car that they can ride in."

"I sure hope you are still alive, for I hope we can have Christmas at our house this year."

Coleta added that she lives "five miles southwest of Viola, Ark."

"If Santa is dead," she concluded, "will you write and tell me?"

Viola is a town of 196 persons, nestled in the foothills of the Ozarks. Wednesday night most of

the town was in church singing Christmas carols. School Supt. Max Harber was there, and he said, sure, he knows Coleta.

"She's in the sixth grade," he said, "and she makes mostly A's and B's. Her family's not very well off, but they're good people, well thought of."

Postmaster Jim Feltz was at church, too, and he knows Coleta. "Her father is a farmer and a carpenter, and he works when he can," he said, "and I doubt if Santa has been there lately. Things haven't been so good here lately."

Fulton County, Ark., is a cattle-growing area with a little corn and hay on the side. Most of the people depend on the rocky land for their living.

Coleta's letter was turned over to the Police Athletic League, which plays Santa to many New York kids, and deputy Police Commissioner Walter Arm answered the child's letter promptly.

"I am sure there is a real Santa," wrote Arm, "not only in New York but everywhere."

"However, he has been very busy and, somehow, he must have overlooked you and your brothers and sisters. . . ."

"I hope he gets to Viola by Christmas day. If not, please be patient—he has a lot of territory to cover."

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