

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

November/December 1994

ISSN 8756-1336

The Lord: Hidden, Weak, Helpless

The coming of the Savior of the world was not announced with ticker tape and balloons. There was the blazing splendor of the Lord and the sudden appearance of a vast host of the armies of heaven with their stunning piece of news—but how many saw? How many heard? No one, it seems, in the little town of Bethlehem—only a group of humble shepherds out on the dewy hillside. They were not thrilled or excited by the heavenly display. They were terror-stricken.

Bethlehem was crowded that night. There was the hustle and bustle of travelers looking for lodging. In the inns, noise, frustration, drunkenness, argument. Hidden from all, in back of one of the inns, knelt a young woman in the agony of giving birth.

The Virgin Mary and her husband Joseph had welcomed with open arms, nine months before, what without faith they would have dreaded and avoided. Each day had brought its further testings. Imagine their receiving news, when her time was near, that a trek to far-off Bethlehem was demanded by law at such a time! Fancy Joseph's finding no room for her, now that she was in labor. Few comforts were theirs that night, but faith sustained them. There was nowhere to lean except the Everlasting Arms. They had God's word, specially delivered by the angel Gabriel. Weak things, lowly things, painful things, silent things—the instinct of their faith told them God was in all of these. They *knew*, because God had given them His word. Therefore they moved trustfully, quietly, through each moment, God being in charge, God being *in* that moment.

And so it may be for us when God's order is the reverse of what we expect. He is *in* each moment, *in* us, *with* us, as He was with the holy couple on their wearisome journey over the dusty roads and in the raw cattle shed. Should we expect to see *how* things

are working together for our good? No, not yet. We see not yet. We only *know*. Joseph and Mary, lacking faith, would surely have felt that things were working strongly against them.

Ah! The poverty, the humility of God reduced to lying on straw in a manger, crying and trembling and breaking Mary's noble heart. Ask the inhabitants of Bethlehem what they think; if that child had been born in a palace in princely surroundings they would worship him. But ask Mary, Joseph, the magi, the priests, and they will tell you that they see in this dire poverty something which makes God more glorious, more adorable. What is deprivation to the senses nourishes and strengthens faith. The less there is for the senses, the more there is for the soul.

— Jean-Pierre de Caussade

In the barren places of my life I can be assured that God is there as He is when life is fruitful, and that the time is coming (give me patience, Lord, to wait!) when He will fulfill His word: "I will put in the desert the cedar and the acacia, the myrtle and the olive. I will set pines in the wasteland, the fir and the cypress together, so that people may see and know, may consider and understand, that the hand of the Lord has done this" (Is 41:19-20, NIV).

Like little children on Christmas Eve, we *know* that lovely surprises are in the making. We can't see them. We have simply been told, and we believe. *Tomorrow we shall see.*

Do You Believe in Santa Claus?

My parents never allowed us to believe that Santa Claus really came in a sleigh with reindeer. The nonsense about dropping down people's chimneys would have meant nothing to us anyway since we had no fireplace. We hung our stockings on the bedposts and easily guessed that our parents were the ones who filled them, though we never managed to stay awake long enough to verify it.

My mother had always believed the tale of Santa Claus until she was eight years old, when a friend shattered her world by telling her it was all rubbish. She wept inconsolably, feeling she had lost a cherished friend. Her own children, she decided, would not have to suffer such disillusionment. She and my father determined to have no part in the deception parents cheerfully inculcate on children at Christmastime. They told us the simple truth—Santa Claus died more than a thousand years ago. He does not drive a sleigh full of presents from the North Pole and land on people's roofs. *The Night Before Christmas* was a poem we loved and memorized, though we knew it was "just pretend."

But there *was* a real Santa Claus. It is doubtful that he had a droll little mouth, or a belly that shook when he laughed like a bowlful of jelly. Nothing is known of his physical appearance, but of his godliness there is little doubt. Why not tell children the true story?

The name "Santa Claus" is derived from the way the Dutch settlers of New York pronounced Sant Niklass (St. Nicholas) a hundred and fifty years ago. He was born in the late third or early fourth century in Asia Minor of wealthy parents who had long prayed for a child. Early in his life they discerned in him great promise, and felt he should be a priest. Soon after his ordination his parents died, leaving him a great fortune. He began at once to give it all away, always contriving to remain anonymous.

He sometimes spent all night studying the Bible. He prayed and fasted and many believed that his prayers had brought them miracles. Twin brothers were said to have been raised from the dead. A nobleman who had sunk into poverty was in great distress, fearing that if he could not provide dowries for his three daughters, they could never marry. Nicholas learned of their plight and one night tossed a bag of gold through the window of their house. It fell at the feet of the eldest girl. Next night, another bag of gold—at the feet of the second sister, and on the third night, one for the youngest. On the first two nights he had slipped away without being discovered, but their father was waiting for him on the third night. He seized Nicholas' robe and, astonished to discover who it was, fell to his knees and asked, "Why do you seek to hide yourself?"

From this incident came the St. Nicholas symbol, three bags or balls of gold which pawnshops now display to show their readiness to help the poor.

Nicholas became the bishop of Myra, a seaport city. He died somewhere around A.D. 342-345 and several hundred years later was canonized (declared a saint) by the Eastern Orthodox Church. By the Middle Ages

more than four hundred churches in England were named for him. He became the patron saint of Russia, Greece, the kingdom of Naples, and of mariners, merchants, and children.

In Germany it was customary for families to exchange small presents on the Eve of St. Nicholas' Day. Coal or switches were put in the shoes of naughty children as they slept, and trinkets such as we might put in Christmas stockings were given to good little boys and girls. Red Santa Claus suits with white ermine trim derive from the bishop's robe. The traditional cap is similar to the bishop's mitre.

Which character is the more worthy of a child's emulation—the jolly man who supposedly fills stockings, or the holy man who loved God and gave away his fortune?

Thanksgiving

The Rettew family of Greer, South Carolina, has eighteen children. Two are their birth children, two-thirds of the adopted ones are handicapped, five are on formulas for life (a 14-year-old microcephalic boy who weighs 28 pounds is one of them), and seven are in diapers for life. In addition to these, the Rettews provide respite care for the children of parents who feel overwhelmed and need a break.

Having seen one of the Rettews' form letters which included a photo of the family, I (incredulous, of course) called Debbie and bombarded her with questions. Loads of laundry per day? Usually eight—more when more than the usual number wet their beds or are sick. Husband's job (he must be enormously wealthy, of course)? Bill is a structural engineer who was fired from his job when he spoke of Christ to his boss ("You need to go to Africa if you're a missionary—we don't need that around here"), so now Bill works alone, has a flexible schedule, helps with everything.

Why do you do this? I wanted to know. "Oh, Elisabeth—these children are a *rainbow* of blessings, all colors and sizes and shapes and problems. I'm praying for more children! I've chosen their names and can't wait to see who God will send to fit those

Up to 100 copies of an article may be made for private distribution but not for resale. Please cite full credit as given below. For permission to make more than 100 copies of an article, please write to the Newsletter.

© Copyright 1994 by Elisabeth Elliot Gren

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter is published six times a year by Servant Publications. The cost is \$7.00 per year. Tax-deductible donations make it possible for those who are unable to pay to receive the letter free. Please send donations to: The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter, P.O. Box 7711, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48107-7711.



names!" How many more do you think you can handle? "As many as the Lord sends. You know, there are so many children out there that others are not willing to take. We *love* to take them. But I know I couldn't do it without the Lord and Bill. We know that when we humanly try to take control, things just backfire, *big time!*" You don't lie awake nights wondering what you'll do if Bill dies? "No, because I *know* the Lord will take care of us."

Debbie does all the cooking—"It's a gift from God. I love to do it! We are *so thankful* for the privilege of having this wonderful family!"

Her joy came through the telephone, full and clear.

When I received written permission to use her testimony, Debbie added, "Things have been real busy. We took care of an eight-month-old little girl and her two-year-old brother. Neither had ever had a schedule or been told 'no.' After a few weeks their unwed teen mom was able to take them home with her new boyfriend, a tale in itself. We do enjoy going and giving our testimonies so that others might hear of Jesus' love.... We were able to witness to 350 motorcycle riders on our yard one Sunday afternoon—another tale!"

A typical day at the Rettew Home includes physical therapy (exercises and races); occupational therapy (learning to dress, eat, do puzzles, arts and crafts, setting the table); spiritual therapy (daily prayer and Bible stories, learning to be the very best that our Lord would want us to be); family outdoor activities (picnics, camping celebrations, vacations, yard work, caring for animals), "AND MOST OF ALL—lots of love, hugs, and kisses."

Special needs include blindness, deafness, tracheotomies, cerebral palsy, speech impediment, failure to thrive, and abused, battered and neglected children. "Let the Rettew Family hear from you if they can help in any way!" they say. They will be glad to hear and to help. Call (803) 877-9327.

A Favorite Carol

(Is there a lovelier one?)

Once in royal David's city
 Stood a lonely cattle shed
 Where a mother laid her baby
 In a manger for His bed.
 Mary was that mother mild,
 Jesus Christ her little child.

He came down to earth from heaven,
 Who is God and Lord of all,
 And His shelter was a stable,
 And His cradle was a stall;
 With the poor and mean and lowly,
 Lived on earth our Savior holy.

And, through all His wondrous childhood,
 He would honor and obey,
 Love, and watch the lowly maiden
 In whose gentle arms He lay;
 Christian children all must be
 Mild, obedient, good as He.

For He is our childhood's pattern;
 Day by day like us He grew;
 He was little, weak, and helpless,
 Tears and smiles like us He knew;
 and He feeleth for our sadness,
 And He shareth in our gladness.

And our eyes at last shall see Him
 Through His own redeeming love;
 For that child so dear and gentle
 Is our Lord in heaven above;
 And He leads His children on
 To the place where He is gone.

Not in that poor lowly stable,
 With the oxen standing by,
 We shall see Him; but in heaven,
 Set at God's right hand on high;
 When like stars His children crowned,
 All in white shall wait around.

—C.F. Alexander, 1848

Recommended Reading

All the Amy Carmichael books you can get your hands on. Christian Literature Crusade, Ft. Washington PA 19034 is the publisher, in case your bookstore doesn't have them (they *should!*) There are a dozen or so in print, each worth its weight in gold. Try *His Thoughts Said*, *Mimosa*, *If*, or *Toward Jerusalem* (a book of poetry—beautiful).

Prayer

O Lord, give us such a mighty love for Thee as may sweeten all our obedience. Let us not serve Thee with the spirit of bondage as slaves, but with the cheerfulness and gladness of children, delighting ourselves in Thee and rejoicing in Thy work. Amen.

—Benjamin Jenks, 1646-1724

Keep in Touch

Are you moving? Getting married? Leaving school? Don't forget to send us your change of address. The post office DOES NOT FORWARD third class mail like the Newsletter. Please remove your address label below and send it with your new address to: The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter, Post Office Box 7711, Ann Arbor, MI 48107-7711.

Travel Schedule

November 1994 - February 1995

November 1-4 Holland, Evangelical Broadcasting Co.

November 5-6 Brussels, Belgium.

December 15-27 E. to California, L. to Norway (?).

December 17 Aliso Viejo, CA; Pacific Hills Church, (714) 362-7475.

December 29-30 Toronto, Ontario, Canada; Campus Crusade, Michael Woodard, (613) 830-9693.

January 11-12 Naples, FL; Mrs. Edie Rudolph, 719 Willowhead Dr., (813) 262-5826.

January 13 Clearwater FL; Actions Sixties TV, (813) 535-5622.

January 13-14 Tampa, FL; Idlewild Baptist Church, (813) 238-3131.

January 28 Atlanta, GA; Mt. Paran Church of God, (404) 261-0720.

February 2-3 Chicago, IL; Moody Bible Institute, (312) 329-4000.

February 4 Ava, IL; radio station WXAN.

February 9-10 Denver, CO; Christian Ministries Convention, Dennis Williams, (303) 761-8060.

February 14 Nashville, TN; National Religious Broadcasters Convention, David Keith, (703) 330-7000.

February 23 Phoenix, AZ (invitation only).

February 24-25 Mesa, AZ; Church of the Redeemer, Pam Davis, (602) 833-7500.

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

Servant Ministries, Inc.
Post Office Box 7711
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48107-7711

Non-profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 14
Ann Arbor, MI

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED