

The Nativity

“Was it a happy birthday, Carina?”

“Oh, yes indeed, Mommy,” the little girl replied, dropping her tired little head against her mother’s shoulder, and sighing happily. “It was so nice, I can’t remember it all. Sometimes, Mommy, when a whole lot of good things come at once, I just have to forget some of them till the next day.”

“That’s a very clever idea—you can make a joyful day last a long while if you think over only a part of it at a time.”

“It’s like keeping candies,” laughed Carina, “and having some for a whole week ‘stead of eating them all up the first chance. I had five boxes, Mommy, and sixteen other presents. Wasn’t everybody good to me?”

“Yes, darling. As this *is* your birthday, do you know which story I think would be best tonight?”

Carina settled herself. “The story of Jesus’ birth-day—that’s Christmas, Mommy.”

“I’m not sure you’ll keep awake long enough,” said Mommy. “You’ve jumped about like a cricket all day.”

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“But, Mommy, I’m six years old. Of course I could keep awake for”—Carina thought a second—“well, for ever so long.” She did not want to say any special length of time, because sometimes little children’s eyelids will go down and stay down at the most unexpected times, no matter how much effort is made to keep wide awake and politely listening.

“Well, as my little girl said, Christmas Day is Jesus’ birthday—the most wonderful, loving day in the whole year, the day God himself came into the world as a tiny infant.”

“And Mary and Joseph went a long, long way,” said Carina, “from where they lived in Nazareth, up to Bethlehem. It was very tiresome, but they had to pay a tax—what for, Mommy?”

“To the Roman government, Carina, that ruled the country of the Jews at that time. Taxes are paid to the government, that is, to those who rule cities or states, or whole countries, in order that the government may have money to pay for all its public works —like roads, and water-pipes, and in our days, schools and hospitals, besides.

“The Roman emperor, or Caesar Augustus as he was called, had sent out an order that everyone must give in his name and pay some money in whichever city he belonged. Now both Mary and Joseph belonged to the family of the Jewish King David, and Bethlehem was the City of David. That’s why they left their little home in Nazareth and made the uncomfortable journey to Bethlehem in the winter time.”

“And I remember,” said Carina eagerly, “that St.

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Joseph had a donkey for Mary to ride, so she wouldn't be too tired, Mommy. You told me that long ago. But St. Joseph walked, and it got awfully late because he could not go very fast over the hills. But Mommy, I'd rather you told it."

Her mother smiled.

"I'm delighted that my little girl knows the story so well. Yes, it grew late and cold, and many travelers passed Mary and Joseph and so reached Bethlehem ahead of them. When the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph arrived, the little city was crowded. Every possible resting place was already taken. There was not a single room left for the mother of Jesus."

"It must have been awful, Mommy. Once when we were traveling, every hotel was full, and we drove all around and it got dark, and I was hungry and oh, so sleepy! Don't you remember?"

"Yes, dear. There is a terribly lonely feeling about having nowhere to go. Mary and Joseph wandered about Bethlehem, looking for shelter and finding none. Neither complained, but St. Joseph's heart grew heavy as he realized that they might have to spend the cold night out in the open air. As he was about to give up the search for a resting-place, someone took pity on him and told him of a cave outside the city, where cattle slept and there were at least a roof and some protection from the chilly night winds. Tired as they were, Mary and Joseph gladly went on to this poor cave, grateful to the man who told them of it."

"And there were mangers in the cave," added Ca-

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rina, "because Baby Jesus was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. And he was a real baby, like all little babies, only he was God besides."

"Exactly, darling. Let me see, how far were we?"

"They went to the cave. It was an awful place to send the Blessed Mother, I think, but she and St. Joseph weren't cross about it, were they, Mommy?"

"No, they were glad that some sort of shelter was possible for them. You see, Jesus chose to come into this world very, very poor, and so he willed to be born in the cave, which was a home only for cattle. No other people ever lived in it, but Mary and Joseph were resting there when Jesus was born.

"Well—Bethlehem lies in a hilly country, Carina, and out on the quiet hills many sheep were pastured. There were shepherds for the day and other shepherds for the night, who watched the flocks so that no harm might come to them."

"The big sheep and the little lambs," said Carina softly. "I think they were nice men, Mommy, because they could not have shepherds who would hurt little lambs."

"No, they were good simple men, living in sweet fresh air under the open sky. Their work was always to guard the flocks at night, so they knew how the sky looked at different seasons of the year. They knew how the stars shone and how the moon shone. They knew how dawn broke and how the sun rose to hide the stars by its own shining being so much stronger. They were not people easily frightened or upset."

"Not nervous people," said Carina, who had heard

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excitable persons excused as being “nervous.”

“No,” smiled her mother, “not the least bit nervous. But in the middle of that night when Jesus was born, the shepherds were astonished to see a great light blazing in the sky, which was not the light of moon, or stars, or sun. It was more beautiful than any light the world had ever seen, and the men stood still, staring in greater and greater wonder.”

“If we’d only been there, Mommy!” said Carina earnestly.

“Suddenly, as the light still grew, a beautiful angel stood beside the shepherds, and they became very much frightened indeed, for they knew not what to think. But the radiant angel spoke softly to them, saying, ‘Do not be afraid,’¹ and immediately all their dread passed away. Then the angel went on to tell them that he brought them glad news: that Christ, the Savior, was born and lying in a manger, where they would find him wrapped in swaddling clothes.”

“The Blessed Mother was very poor,” said Carina sadly, “and there was no pretty nursery for Baby Jesus.”

“But she would not have taken all the riches in the world, darling, for that little Child who was God.”

“And even the ox and the ass that were in the cave knew he was God, didn’t they, Mommy? Because they knelt down before the manger.”

“Yes, darling. There is a story that the beasts knew the Creator of all was lying in their midst, and that they knelt in adoration and warmed the tiny Infant

¹ Luke 2:10

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with their breath. It is a beautiful idea. Meanwhile, the shepherds out upon the hills were listening to the great song of a whole multitude of angels. Do you know what those angels sang, Carina? See if you can tell me?"

"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests,"² answered the child.

"That was the song the shepherds heard until the angels departed again. It was a new song, dear, which put away anger and meanness and revenge—"

"That's getting even, Mommy, isn't it?"

"You might call it that. It's making others suffer at our hands because we suffered at theirs. It's a dreadful thing, Carina. People who try to take revenge are daring to do what only God should do. And people who hate others and wish to make them unhappy, can't receive that beautiful message brought by the angels. They sang of glory to God first, and then of peace to the whole world if it would have good will toward men. The Prince of Peace, our Savior, was born, and his coming was to end all anger and quarrels and unkindness for those who loved him. He came so humble, and little and helpless, Carina, to teach us how ugly pride and self-assurance are in the eyes of God. That tiny Child is to lead us to heaven, and those who follow a child must be gentle and tender. I'm sure the shepherds were peaceful and full of good will because to them the angels first brought their message."

"And the shepherds went and found Baby Jesus,

² Luke 2:14

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like the angels said,” remarked Carina with great satisfaction. “And some of the little lambs went with them, right to the crib where Baby Jesus was.”

“Yes, dear. The simple shepherds went joyfully and in great haste to adore this Child for whom the world had been waiting for thousands of years. And they found him in the manger, with the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph kneeling by him. As soon as the shepherds saw him, they too fell upon their knees and adored him. How still it must have been, Carina!”

“Like you hold your breath,” said Carina, “when you are too glad!”

“You see, darling, that little cave had become the palace of the King of heaven and earth, and the humble, holy Mary of Nazareth was the Mother of God. Herod and Caesar in their grand houses didn’t know what had happened. But the poor shepherds knew, and so they knelt and prayed in great joy and wonder, and thankfulness because God the Father had shown his love for us by sending Jesus his Son as a Child into the world.”

“It’s a lovely story, Mommy.”

“The story of Jesus’ birthday, darling, the day he gave us himself, and asked our love in return.”

“And the three kings? Tell me about them, Mommy.”

“They didn’t come until twelve days after Christmas, sweetheart. The next story shall be about them.”



Discussion Questions

1. Why did Jesus wish to come into the world as a poor infant? Why did he will to be born in a cave? What lessons can this teach us?
2. Imagine what it might have felt like to be a shepherd the night Jesus was born. How might you have felt to see the bright star? The angel? Would you have believed the angel's message? Would you have gone to adore the Christ Child? If so, describe what you would have seen.
3. "Those who follow a child must be gentle and humble." Why is this statement true? Why do you think the shepherds left the manager with hearts full of peace and good will?



Growing In Holiness

Carina's mother describes "revenge" as "getting even" or "making others suffer at our hands because we suffered at theirs." Why is this a "dreadful thing"? Have you ever wanted to see someone else suffer because you had been hurt? What does Jesus ask us to do in this situation? What resolution can you make now to avoiding seeking revenge (or "getting even") next time? Make this a point to consider each night before going to bed: Did I hang onto my anger today or try to get even with anyone? Was I kind and forgiving as Jesus wishes me to be?



Searching Scripture – Luke 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town. And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear. The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying:

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

When the angels went away from them to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.

✓ Checking the Catechism

1. *What are angels?* Angels are bodiless spirits created to adore and enjoy God in heaven.
2. *On what day was Christ born?* Christ was born on Christmas Day in a stable in Bethlehem, over two thousand years ago.

REVIEW Adult Catechism

No. 60. The angels are purely spiritual creatures . . . They ceaselessly contemplate God face-to-face and they glorify him. They serve him and are his messengers. . . (See Nos. 328-333 and 350-351 in the CCC.)