

Christmas Pilgrims Hear Mass In Bethlehem's Field of Shepherds

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It is our Catholic privilege to go in spirit to that blessed spot where the first Christmas night was celebrated by a chorus of angels singing of peace to men of good will.

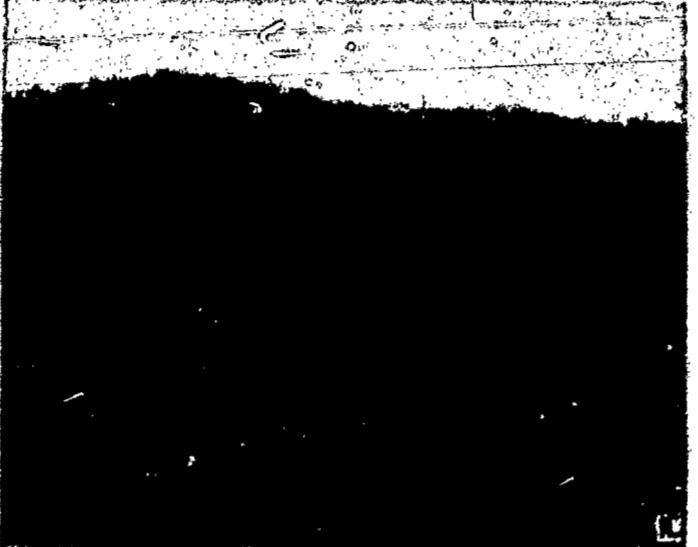
We thank ourselves this Christmas, then, to that Field of the Shepherds near Bethlehem, to thank the Prince of Peace for the blessing of peace and to pray for its continuance in a bleeding world.

Long ago, it was the custom of the faithful of Jerusalem and Jerusalem to make a Christmas pilgrimage to that spot made forever memorable by the angels' hymn, sung to lowly shepherds. A thirteenth-century ritual, called the Jerusalem Office, has this rite for Christmas Eve: "The Feast begins with a procession to the Shepherds' Field, to the east of Bethlehem. . . . Mass is celebrated there, then the return to the Grotto of the Nativity, for Vespers and the Night Office (Matina), together with its Liturgy (Midnight Mass)."

Having spent our Christmas Eve in Bethlehem, we join the little group of Friars and Sisters who, in the early hours of Christmas Day, go to offer the Holy Sacrifice at the Shepherds' Field, some three or four miles from Bethlehem.

Out from Bethlehem, the pageantry of Midnight is over. The moving grandeur of the Pontifical Mass, celebrated by the Patriarch of Jerusalem, has ended. The last note of the last carol, sung by the boys of the Town of Jesus in the procession to the Nativity Grotto, has died away. The last Bethlehemite, in their picturesque Oriental robes, have risen from their knees and walk slowly out of the darkened Basilica that has seen sixteen hundred Christmas Eves.

We step out into the brick night air, and at once begin the descent of the hills, terraced with fig and olive and almond, upon which Bethlehem is built. Down an ever-sloping road we walk perhaps a mile toward the east, until we arrive at the little village of Beit Sahur. In this poor little town there



This photo shows shepherds of today watching their flocks in the fields of Bethlehem where the angels appeared to those shepherds twenty centuries ago on the first Christmas night. Lower photo is a general view of the field.

is a poor little Catholic parish church in which is an altar lovely enough to grace a great cathedral. Carved in deep relief in its very-loned native marble is the whole history of the Nativity and Childhood of Christ. The patient work of carving with cameo-like detail these many figures of the Christ Child, the Holy Family, etc., in the numerous panels decorating this altar was a labor of love, begun some 70 years ago by two Arab Catholics of the town.

Leaving the village of Beit Sahur, we traverse the traditional Field of Ruth, enshrined in the Old Testament narrative of the love of the wealthy and pious Boaz for the daughter of Naomi, the Moabitess from beyond the Jordan. "The Root of Jesse," Isaiah XII; St. Luke III:38.

The story of Ruth has an appeal undimmed by the centuries, and as we traverse these fields and think of the ages-old love-story, come to mind the lovely lines of the poet Keats: "Perhaps the self-same song that found a path through the sad heart of Ruth, She stood in tears amid the alien corn."

As we continue our pilgrimage, we walk over the very fields where the boy David must have watched over his father's flocks. Out here, beneath just such a sky as that under which we now walk, the future Royal Palmist, watching his flocks, looked up at these very stars. These self-same stars shone down a thousand years later, on that first Christmas nearly twenty centuries ago, as they do tonight.

In The Silent Night After an hour's walk, which has taken us over soil sacred from the dawn of sacred history, we reach the goal of our Christmas pilgrimage. Now we stand in awe in the very Shepherds' Field, alone in the silent, solemn stillness of the star-spangled night. All about us are ancient ruins of a once great church, which long centuries ago was built on this site.

These aged, mosaic-adorned ruins around us are those of the first monastery ever founded in the Holy Land, by a French Monk named John Cassian. It was he who, under the guidance of St. Jerome, then Parish-priest of Bethlehem, introduced the monastic life into the Holy Land. In a bare grove within these sacred precincts, long cherished and guarded by the Franciscans of the Holy Land Custody, Mass is once more celebrated as it was here sixteen centuries ago. As we Christmas pilgrims kneel about the rough stone altar, each is thinking his own thoughts of another night like this. "Swain shepherds were watching and keeping the night watches over their flock."

Suddenly hark upon our meditation those words of the Mass, which we have heard said or sung a thousand times since childhood: "Gloria in excelsis Deo, et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis."

The Heavly Back But tonight, for us they have new meaning. It was here, here in this very place that they were first sung—sung by Angels hark to humble shepherds who heard the Gloria for the first time on earth. For us it is no longer the twelfth century—the day of television and of satellites—and of atomic bombs. Instead, the ages have rolled back and we seem to hear again in this blessed place that

glad chorus of angels, which filled the heavens, and the souls of men, and the centuries, and the whole wide universe with "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will." Oh, may there be peace—and men of good will!

The He Mass est brings us back once more to our own day and age, and we step forth into the dawn of Christmas Day. With the lowly shepherds and the pilgrims of other days, we say "Let us go over to Bethlehem and let us see this word that is come to pass, which the Lord hath showed to us." (Mt. Luke III:16)

This became known here today when Walter C. Cox, probate genealogist, 208 S. LaSalle St., Chicago, took over the search. Mr. Cox specializes in tracing missing relatives to settle estates.

Seek Heir To \$3000

Chicago, Ill. — A Christmas present in the form of a \$3,000 estate for which they are unknowingly the heirs, is searching in and around the Niagara Falls peninsula of Ontario and New York state for the children (who would be quite aged if living) and therefore more likely for the grandchildren or great-grandchildren of James and Catherine Davy (or Davey).

"Direct descendants of the couple would have first claim to the estate, if living. If there are no descendants living, then claim reverts to the descendants of brothers and sisters of the couple. Mrs. Davy's maiden name is not yet known."

"Members of the family have been reported to have migrated to different places on the Niagara Peninsula, and the search is being concentrated in the area from and including Toronto and Hamilton on the north to Buffalo and Rochester in the United States."

N. D. Founder's Friend Marks Golden-Jubilee Notre Dame (N.C.)—The Rev. Joseph Maguire, C.S.C., one of the few living members of the congregation of the Holy Cross who knew the Rev. Edward Sorin, C.S.C., founder of the University of Notre Dame, marked the 50th anniversary of his ordination at a celebration here. Father Maguire is superior of the Community House at Notre Dame.

The jubilarian entered Holy Cross Seminary here in October, 1896, and it was during his seminary days that he became a close friend of Father Sorin, who died in 1893. Father Sorin founded the University in 1864 with the assistance of six Holy Cross brothers who had come from their native France for that purpose.

Archbishop Composes Prayer New Orleans—(CNS)—Archbishop Joseph F. Rummel of New Orleans has composed a prayer in honor of St. Francis Xavier Cabrini, whose first feast day, December 22, will be observed with solemnity at St. Louis Cathedral.

STORE HOURS: Today, 10 A. M. to 9 P. M.—Saturday, 9:30 A. M. to 5:30 P. M.

Men's Kid Operas. Fine quality kid, hard soles, rubber heels (Street Floor) \$3.95 to \$5.95

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(D) Children's Bunny Slippers. Pinch 'em, they squeal. Shearling-lined. Sizes 6 to 12 Special \$1.29

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(F) Men's Shearling Slippers. Warm, comfy and smart. Hard soles, rubber heels. \$5.00 to \$5.25

(G) Men's Shearling Booties. Shearling collar and shearling-lined. Felt soles, all-leather vamp. \$2.25

(H) Men's Brown Leather Romsons. Leather soles and rubber heels \$3.99

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