

The Saviour's First Adorers

By FATHER HENRY ATWELL

The new-born Saviour had few to greet Him when He stepped into our world.

Scripture does record, however, those who were privileged to see the Infant Lord.

History's greatest event — God's birth on earth — was wrapped, like the Holy Eucharist today, in a reverent silence and privacy.

Joseph and Mary were alone in the stable-cave when the days for her to be delivered were fulfilled and she brought forth her firstborn Son and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

The secret was not meant to be long kept.

"There were shepherds in the same district living in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night." To these men, usually ignorant of the current complicated rules of their religion, God's angels announced the "good news of great joy."

The trek from the shepherds' field to the grotto was hardly two miles and we are told "they went with haste, and they found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger."

Later our Lord paid these first adorers at His crib the divine compliment of taking their title to Himself, "I am the good shepherd," He said.

Scripture does not mention it but certainly neighbors, probably relatives and casual passersby also saw the Saviour in His Mother's arms, but apparently like so many others would later do, these saw but did not comprehend the mystery in their midst.

Next to receive the Lord with faith were the elderly couple Simeon and Anna, a prophetess, when Joseph and Mary went to the vast Temple at Jerusalem to fulfill the Jewish law requiring "presentation" of firstborn sons.

Simeon, to whom it had been revealed "by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen this Christ of the Lord," took the Child into his arms, blessed God and saw even then the shadow of the cross looming in the years to come. Anna also gave "praise to the Lord and spoke of Him to all who were awaiting the redemption."

As nightingales are said to sing themselves to death, so Simeon, his aged arms holding the Babe enveloped in an ever-young eternity, spoke his Nunc dimittis, "Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word in peace."

There are still souls like Simeon's and Anna's — those quiet people the world ignores but they have a vision of spiritual truth made keen by long years of patient toil and persevering trial.

Most spectacular of the adorers at the Crib were the "Magi from the East."

The Gospels do not give any further details — who they were, how many, or where they came from.

The word "magi" points to the land of Persia but tradition says one of the wise men was from the dark continent of Africa and the Chinese claim one was from their Land of the Dragon.

Gifts of gold, incense and costly myrrh were an obvious incongruity in the bare, rough surroundings of a cave. Yet the whole exotic story of the coming of these Gentile kings to the Jewish village tells us they left with greater riches than they brought with them.

As our Lord did for the shepherds, so He later would also do for the kings — claiming and honoring their title by choosing it for Himself, "I am a king," He told Pilate.

This and the shepherd's title are the only claims He ever made for Himself, a divine recompense to those who came to His Christmas Crib.

Now in our turn we can take our place in adoration before today's Crib — the tabernacle where Jesus still blesses those who kneel before Him. Whether we rank with the world's rich and powerful, like the Magi, or are aged and feeble, like Simeon and Anna, or shrank to a weary job, like the shepherds, or just a young couple very much in love, like Joseph and Mary — we know we too shall find a welcome from the Lord.

SERMONETTE

LONELY?

By Rev. James D. Moriarty

What is the most devastating disease in the world today is a question which was asked of a famous physician. Without hesitation he came up with the reply.

"Loneliness," he said, "Just plain loneliness." And then he explained, "The longer I practice, the more sure I am that there's no condition so acute, so universal. Everybody, at one time or another, is subject to its ravages. With many the disease becomes chronic. And not a few live constantly under its night, melancholy, bored, forlorn, friendless. Doctors can't cure it. Only you can."

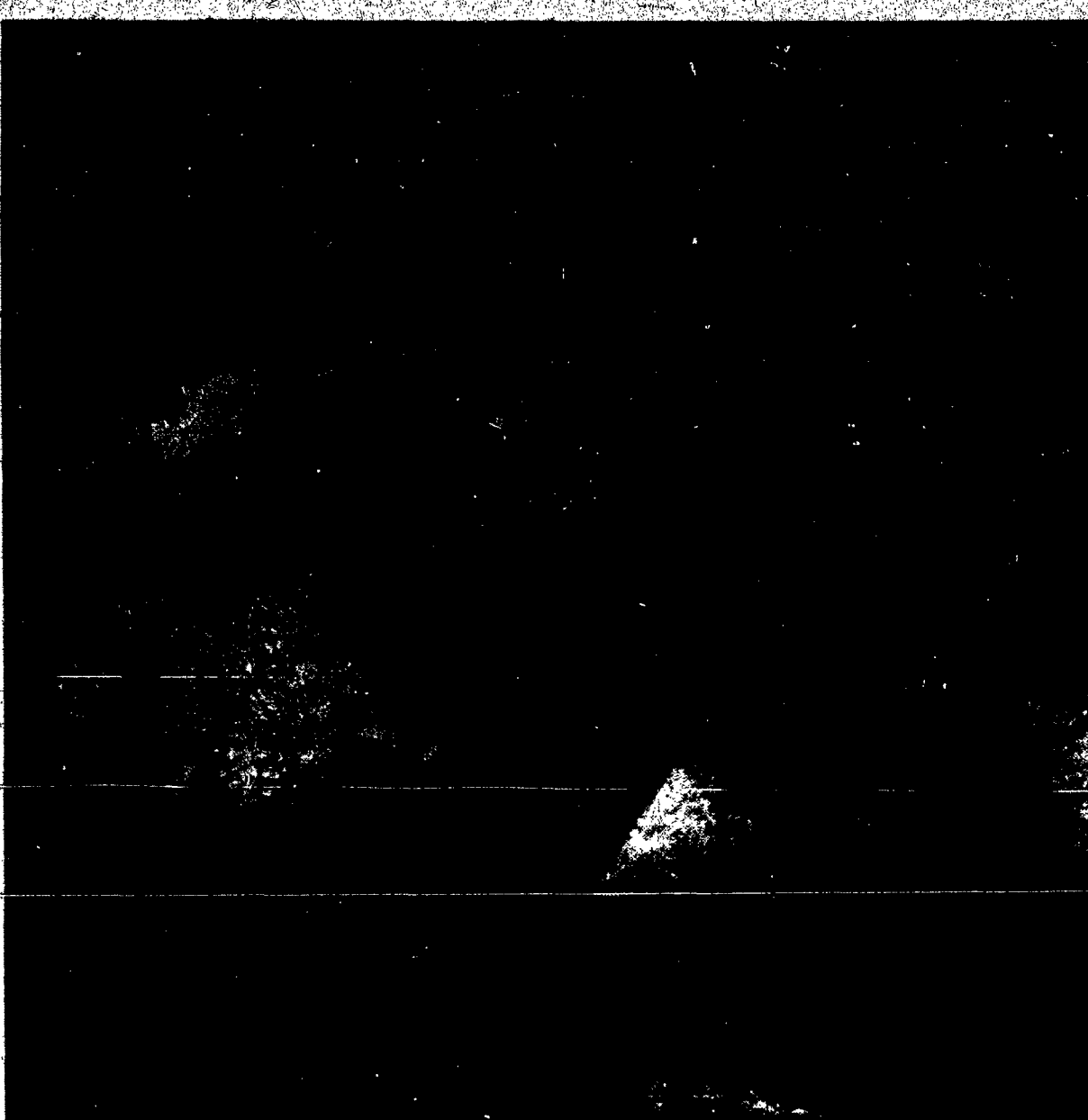
Like bread goes with butter and Santa Claus with Christmas we are inclined to link loneliness with the county old folks home. The picture of the old gent who sits in his rocking chair, withdrawn from those about him, staring off into space or gazing too long at the floor, is typical. He is forgotten by those he knew or perhaps he has outlived all his friends. But loneliness is not confined to the old folks home.

None among us ever conquer loneliness completely until we face the fact that there is an aloneness common to us all. In every heart there remains a room in which no one else can walk. Ask yourself the question, "Who really knows me?" and you are forced to admit that no one except God knows you as you really are.

Loneliness is something which comes from the inside and not from the outside. One may be in the center of great activity . . . have numerous people about him all the day long and still be lonely.

The lover of God is not a lonely person . . . This is reason.

Christ tells us that we show our love for God by showing our love for our fellow men.



The Infant Saviour at Bethlehem.

City Where Christ Was Born

By FATHER PATRICK O'CONNOR
Society of St. Columban

Bethlehem — (NC) — Realities in Bethlehem today help to light up the Gospel record of the first Christmas.

Bethlehem itself is as real and as definite as Brooklyn or Birmingham or Boston, and far older than any of them. To find it, nobody needs to search or study or excavate. From Our Lord's time and one thousand years before that, it has been inhabited and known.

Today you can take Bus 22 near the Damascus Gate of Jerusalem, and 45 minutes later you are in the hillside town of Bethlehem. It is a 10-mile ride on a new concrete road winding among steep, bare hills.

The old road, little more than half a mile and a quarter farther on. A Greek Catholic church stands there. Not far away a beautiful little church has been built in recent times by the Franciscans.

Whether the actual field can be identified today or not, it is certain that in some of these fields near Bethlehem the favored shepherds were "keeping the night watches over their flock."

It is most likely that they were in a semi-fronted cave or grotto, with their sheep clustered around them, when the Angel of the Lord brought them the "good tidings of great joy." Even now, no shepherd would leave his sheep dispersed in an open field at night in this region. The danger from wild animals would be too great.

And the decision to "go over to Bethlehem" that very night was not one to make lightly. Probably one of their number had to stay behind with the sheep. For the others it was a rough, stony journey that they made "with haste" through the darkness.

The night air is clear and cool in Bethlehem at any time. In winter it is sharply cold. "Once or twice every winter we have a light fall of snow," one of the Franciscans told me.

Bethlehem was formerly a little town of about 10,000 people, nearly all of them Christians. As a result of the war in Palestine and the subsequent partition, some 40,000 Moslems from what is now Israel moved into Bethlehem. The Christians, now numbering about 8,000, half of them Catholics, half Greek Orthodox, are a minority in the town where Christ was born.

But Bethlehem cannot lose the blessedness it holds as the place where the Eternal God chose to come among us, as a newborn infant. As the simple Latin inscription on the floor of the grotto says, "Here Jesus Christ was Born of the Virgin Mary, and Bethlehem continues to bear witness to the historic fact."

It is a place, however, where the dusty road, the stones, the clear sky and the men and women, are essentially no different from what they are elsewhere.

Outwardly, Bethlehem is ordinary, in the main, as it must have been when Christ Our Lord was born . . . in much the same way as the church of our Christmas Mass is ordinary.

three cows. Donkeys are used on mule carts for journeys around the neighborhood. If there were animals actually in the stable with the Holy Family, they were probably a cow or two and a donkey.

Bethlehem is due south of Jerusalem and the hillside that covers the grotto of the Nativity stands on the south side of modern Bethlehem. It is believed that in Our Lord's time most of the town was on the northern slope. Hence the stable-cave would have been on the outskirts of the town, on the side away from Jerusalem.

The traditional "Shepherd's Field" lies about a mile and a quarter farther on. A Greek Catholic church stands there. Not far away a beautiful little church has been built in recent times by the Franciscans.

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Christmas

Birthmarked,
God's Son sleeps
And the light of His star
Touches the oiled curls hair,
The pointed ears tight to the long skull
The olive skin flushed with new-born red.
It lingers the faint look of the tiny nose.
The full-lipped promise of the sweet-curved mouth,
The waiting Power in the small wrinkled hands.

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Helen Bours

Reapings at Random

By GERALD E. SHERRY
Editor, Central California Register

Wake up! It's Christmas morning!
What parent ever had to shout this command to his children? What parent has never heard his children shout this command at him? The excitement of the tree, the toys and the gifts acts as a natural alarm clock for all children on Christmas that holds back morning.

But what about the true Gift of Christmas? Are we adults just so excited about God's Gift to us on Christmas morning?

God's love for us sent His Son to us wrapped in a human flesh. God's love now beats in a human mind. God chooses now with a human will. This is God's gift to us on Christmas. His only begotten Son has become our Elder Brother. Are we awake to this?

What does it mean to have God as our Brother. Since God is our Brother, His Father is our Father. Since God is our Brother, His family treasures have become our family treasures. Since God is our Brother, lives our life, then our humanity has been raised to the level of the Divine.

God wears our flesh. Thus this reveal of clay can no longer be despised; nor need it despair. What is flesh is a source of sin from youth? Christ has worn it. What is the illness and ultimate death of the flesh are so terribly distracting? Christ has not only worn it, He has conquered its death. Wake up! O Human Flesh. It is Christmas morning!

God reacts with human reactions. Divine power now has a human emotional expression. Unchained anger can shatter love as well as plates, but it need not. For it was with a human anger, under control, that Christ cleansed the temple. Unbridled grief can paralyze and prostrate, but it need not. This human grief made God weep tears, when Christ wept over Jerusalem.

Fear and despair can destroy and disintegrate, but they need not, when Christ rode fear and despair to the brink in the blood-spattered agony. Wake up! O Human Flesh! This is Christmas morning!

God loves with a human heart. Love is the wildest power on earth. It challenges us to rise to the heights, but I can lead us to the depths. Wake up! We can refuse to love. We can water down love by sentimentalism. We can water down love by sentimentality. We can water down love by sentimentality. We can water down love by sentimentality.

There was no room at the inn so they

English Prelates Cite Unity Bonds

London — (NC) — Heads of the Catholic Church and the Anglican Church in northern England appealed jointly on television to end religious bigotry and intolerance.

Catholic Archbishop John C. Heenan of Liverpool and Anglican Archbishop Michael Ramsey of York made the plea while discussing implications of the meeting between Pope John XXIII and Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher of Canterbury of December 2.

Archbishop Ramsey said the moral of the Vatican meeting is that people should "never speak about religious differences except in a spirit of love and charity."

He called the visit of Archbishop Fisher to Pope John "a great meeting" that has "given tremendous public expression to something which has already long been warming up in the hearts of Christian people everywhere."

Archbishop Heenan viewed the visit as leading the way to practical cooperation in fields where all Christians could agree. "Instead of waiting a lot of their energy in showing how each other is wrong, there are so many things they can do together," he stated.

He mentioned work for refugees, trade union activity, and politics. "For the first time, you have whole nations united in hatred of God," he said. "It is the time to join together to resist those who would destroy religion."

Archbishop Heenan, whose ecclesiastical province includes the whole of northern England, also said:

"It is important to say that you don't have to pretend to agree with the other man. Dr. Ramsey and I are well aware there are many things which we have opposite views. The Archbishop considers himself a successor of St. Paulinus (seventh-century Bishop of York), but I am certain he is not."

"But that does not alter my respect for him. Consequently he believes that (it) is true and we always respect conscientious beliefs."

Both prelates noted that they already have "a tremendous unity" in having both been baptized Christians.

Archbishop Ramsey expressed his own belief that the church of England is the ancient Catholic Church of this country. He also criticized the Catholic attitude concerning mixed marriages, and denied papal infallibility.

"These are things we must

Why Pay Less?

Hong Kong — A favorite Chinese pastime is bargaining in the marketplace. So newly-ordained Father John J. Sullivan, M.M., of Jackson Heights, N.Y., decided that a trip to the marketplace would kill two birds with one stone. He could do some shopping and test his proficiency in Chinese.

When a brief case in a store window caught his eye, the young Maryknoller began bargaining with the shopkeeper over the price. After much haggling, he came forth the price of \$3.50 for a brief case.

But his proud smile of satisfaction was quickly erased by a veteran missionary companion who usually informed him that the shopkeeper only wanted \$2.50 for the brief case in the beginning.

There were no well-dressed kids chanting carols at the first Christmas. There was no Christmas trees or tinsel. Frankly, there was no snow. We seem to have strayed far from Christmas as it should be and have settled merely for an excuse to celebrate. Alas, we have been blinded by the pleasures of the world and have lost sight of the Kingdom and the King.

It is not too late. We can still go to bed on Christmas evening and have the family wake up and find the real Christmas morning. It won't be the dawn of a new age, or a new beginning. Someone will be present who was, and will always be present for Christmas. He is waiting for our visit, not only on Christmas morning but every day.

So beckon us to Christmas as our Brother and our Father. He asks our potential, our history, our resources. He wants us to really wake up this Christmas morn.

How Mice Made Music

By Jack Heberger

Christmas, the great joyful mystery, is a season of music — songs and carols everyone enjoys singing.

Music stores are filled with records, tapes and sheet music so we can hear our favorite selections as often as we wish.

One of the world's best loved carols is "Silent Night." Its fame can be traced to some hungry mice who chewed a hole in the bellows of the parish organ at Oberdorf, Austria, in 1818.

The church, appropriately, was dedicated to St. Nicholas.

To solve the problem of a silent organ, Father Joseph Mohr and his organist, Franz Gruber, improvised music for a poem the priest had written.

While the priest sang, the organist strummed a guitar and the now famous carol was born.

Daily Mass Calendar

Sunday, Dec. 25 — Christmas, feast of our Lord's Birth (white). The Catholic Masses as in missal 1955.

Monday, Dec. 26 — St. Stephen, first martyr (red). Gloria, 2nd prayer of Christmas, Creed, Preface and a n o n prayers of Christmas (as in all Masses through this week), 1950.

Tuesday, Dec. 27 — St. John, apostle (white). Wednesday, Dec. 28 — Holy Innocents (purple 1955).

Thursday, Dec. 29 — St. Thomas Becket, martyr (red). Friday, Dec. 30 — Mass of "Sunday within Octave" (white) 1954 — Rev. John Brennan.

Saturday, Dec. 31 — St. Sylvester (white). Priests listed above died on the date indicated. Please pray for them.

Editorial Office — 117 Robinson Road, Singapore 11. Tel. 2441.

Subscription Office — 117 Robinson Road, Singapore 11. Tel. 2441.

Official Newspaper of the ROCHESTER DIOCESE

Friday, Dec. 23, 1960
Vol. 72 No. 12

MOST REV. JAMES E. KEARNEY, D.D.,
Bishop

Member of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati
Published every Friday by the Rochester Catholic Press Association.
MAIN OFFICE — 117 Robinson Road, Singapore 11. Tel. 2441.

EDITORIAL OFFICE — 117 Robinson Road, Singapore 11. Tel. 2441.

ADVERTISING OFFICE — 117 Robinson Road, Singapore 11. Tel. 2441.

Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Send address changes to THE ROCHESTER CATHOLIC, 117 Robinson Road, Singapore 11.

Subscription price: \$5.00 per year in advance. Single copies: 10 cents.

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Printed at the Rochester Catholic Press Association, 117 Robinson Road, Singapore 11.

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BOTTLED GUARANTY 4/5 QUART PINT

50 Proof 40-50 F.V.S.