

# Adoptions Reflect Changing Scene

By BONITA BALDWIN

Bobby is an eight-year-old with what Miss Catherine Wobus, casework director at Catholic Family Center, grins at and slowly terms an "infectious smile." He is all-boy, slightly hyperactive, black, and legally surrendered for adoption.

Bobby is not unusual. Half of the children up for adoption are past infancy. Many are black, Puerto Rican, or racially mixed. This year the Catholic Family Center has succeeded in placing

35 such youngsters in adoptive homes, nearly half of their total placement.

The high percentage of hard-to-place older children available for adoption reflects the changing scene. According to Mrs. Pat Dunham, supervisor of the Adoption Department at the Catholic Family Center, there is now a marked shortage of healthy white babies. Couples seeking such children are usually young, childless, and necessarily patient, since their wait is often as long as three years.

Miss Wobus says that she is not aware of any black market efforts — the outright selling of a child for profit — as a result of the baby shortage. There is, however, a sizeable "gray market." Gray market adoptions are usually privately arranged and include a high fee. Many private agencies also charge exorbitant fees.

The Catholic Family Center is a Community Chest organization. Fees are charged according to the couple's ability to pay.

The wait for an older child can be as brief as six months. Parents who open their homes to hard-to-place children tend to be older with children of their own. Occasionally an older child is adopted by a single parent. Center policy in such a case is to match the parent with a child of the same sex.

Adopting a child is both a social and a legal process. When prospective parents come to the center, they are extensively interviewed. No one is looking for perfect parents, but caseworkers are concerned that a couple should be able to provide a stable home environment. Finances are examined, not to determine the wealth of a couple, but to ascertain how well they budget what income they do have. If a couple is quite poor, but would make good parents, or if a couple adopts a handicapped child, they are eligible for subsidy from the Department of Social Services.

Interviews are often conducted with groups of prospective parents. This is a new procedure designed to enable the parents to share ideas and to gain support from one another.

If a couple wishes to adopt an older child a search for the child is begun immediately. Background sketches and photos of available children are studied. Computer matching is sometimes used. Other agencies may be contacted.

When the right child is found, a series of pre-placement visits commences, to help the child adjust to his future home environment. Even after the youngster comes to stay the legal process goes on for six months. This interim allows the family and agency to continue their close working relationship during the adjustment period.

Although the center attempts to recruit black and Puerto Rican adoptive parents, many such children are necessarily placed with white parents. There has been no need as yet to place a white child in a minority home, since adoptive parents are still predominantly white. Vietnamese children are also placed in American homes through the Catholic Family Center.

Asked if any follow-up studies have been made on black, Puerto Rican or Vietnamese children growing up in white homes, Mrs. Dunham remarked that she had read a complaint that the "cream of the crop" of black babies was being placed in white homes. "I would assume," she said, "That really indicates they are doing very well."

expected in adoption stories. Often they are true. Take for example a cute pair of siblings, an infant brother and his three year old sister adopted together. The little girl now enthusiastically attends nursery school and goes fishing, swimming, and boating

with her new family. Her little brother is a happy gurgler.

A ten-year-old Puerto Rican boy will join his family sometime before Christmas. His new daddy is a doctor, and he will have a little brother just one and a half years old to love.

Bethlehem was the birthplace of David.

Matthew went even further and begins his gospel by tracing the ancestors of Jesus to David. How he did this underscores even more the Davidic sonship of Jesus. Matthew artificially constructed the genealogy of Jesus into three groups of fourteen names each (Mt. 1). The number fourteen is what the letters of David's name (D V D) add up to. (D is the fourth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and V is the sixth.)

The presence of shepherds on the first Christmas morning is certainly historical. But more important is the meaning attached to their presence by Luke. The Christmas story takes pains to emphasize everything that shows Jesus as the Messiah descended from David. David was a shepherd. By showing that Jesus was born among the shepherds in Bethlehem and by showing the shepherds of Bethlehem as coming to Him, Luke suggests that Jesus is the new David come to shepherd all men.

The angelic announcement to the shepherds hints that the Child in the manger is divine; and their song proclaims the spiritual significance of His birth.

In Matthew, the Wise Men declare, "We observed his star at its rising." The Wise Men were probably astrologers from Babylonia or Arabia, who had cast a horoscope of the Messiah-King and who were convinced that He had been born. Matthew took this tradition and embellished it with miraculous elements, such as the moving star. The star was quite incidental, since the astrologers knew where to go anyway. Matthew, like any rabbi, developed the story in terms of Old Testament passages (Num. 24:17) to project on to Jesus' childhood the gospel theme of Jesus' acceptance by the Gentiles (represented by the astrologers) and His rejection by the Jews.

It is so easy to miss the message of the Christmas story if we focus only on the cave, the animals there, the dress of the shepherds, the names, number, nationality and gifts of the Wise Men, the miracle of the moving star, and nothing more!

The Christmas story must each year deepen one's appreciation of God's love, care, and forgiveness. Jesus is the Face of God. His birth shows God's love is no easy business. "Love consists in this: God has loved us, and has sent his Son as an offering for our sins" (1 Jn. 4:10).

A merry Christmas to you all! Happy endings are always

## WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) 1k. 2-1-14. (R1) Is. 9:1-6. (R2) Ti. 2:11-14.

So often we view the Christmas story in Matthew and Luke as merely the source of answers to questions about the time, place, visitors and circumstances of the birth of Jesus.

(When a Westerner hears a story, his first question is, "Did it really happen?" When a Semite hears a story, he asks, "What does it mean?")

Matthew and Luke are interested more in the meaning of the Christmas story than in the accuracy of historical details.

The Christmas story is history, but history written in the light of faith. What was first preached was the Gospel. All four evangelists begin our Lord's public life with John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus. Only Matthew and Luke preface His public life with the infancy narratives. Their purpose was to deepen the faith of readers in the meaning of His work. Matthew and Luke wanted to show that coming events cast their shadows beforehand, that Jesus was, even in His infancy, what His public life showed Him to be — the fulfillment of Old Testament hopes.

Matthew's and Luke's narratives concur only in two elements, both basic ones: the virgin conception of Mary and Bethlehem as the birthplace of Jesus. Luke does not mention the Wise Men, Herod, or the flight into Egypt. Matthew misses out on both annunciations, the nativity itself and the circumcision. Matthew wished to show that Jesus was one like Moses, but even greater, that in Him, the Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled. Luke, on the contrary, wanted to show that salvation comes to men, not from man's own efforts or his striving for it, but from God's initiative, graciousness, and loving kindness.

Obviously, both writers considered the fact that Jesus was born in Bethlehem to be of extreme importance. For both mention Bethlehem. Long ago, Nathan the prophet had promised David that the Messiah would spring from his line (2 Sm. 7:12-16). Every devout Jew expected this. Hence the emphasis that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, for

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