CHILDREN'S STORY HOUR

A crowded night at the inn

By Janaan Manternach
NC News Service

Josiah had a headache. Never had there been so many people in his inn. The tension was getting to him.

People were pushing and shoving to get to the front desk. "I'm sorry, all our rooms are full," Josiah's daughter, Annah, kept saying.

"But we need a place to stay," angry men and women demanded. "We've been on the road since early morning."

"I'm sorry. I wish we could help you. But the inn is full."

Josiah felt sorry for his daughter. But he was proud of how kind she was to the people.

"We're running out of food in the kitchen," the cook told Josiah. "What are we going to do?"

"Send someone to the market. I have to stay here," Josiah answered. "Buy whatever you think we need."

Josiah needed a break. The noise and pressure were too much for him. He walked quickly to his small office. He closed the door and sat down.

"I've never seen so many people in our inn," he groaned to his wife, Leah, when she came in. "Herod's census has brought people here from all over the country. It's good for business. But I can't stand the pressure. We're out of room, out of food and they keep coming."

"Excuse me," Annah broke in. "There's a young couple here. She's pregnant. They've come all the way from Nazareth. She's ready to have her baby. But we just don't have any more rooms. What can we do?"

Josiah gulped down his drink. "Bring them in here," he told his daughter.

Annah returned with the couple. They looked very tired. The man was obviously worried about his wife. She needed a place to have her baby.

"My name is Joseph," the man told Josiah. "This is my wife, Mary. She can't go farther. We need a place to stay."

Josiah looked at the two. He saw how tired and pale Mary looked. Josiah turned to his wife. "Leah, we can't turn them away," he whispered.

Leah thought a moment. She knew Mary could not go on much longer. She had an idea and whispered it into Josiah's ear.

"There is a place," Josiah said. "It's not inside the inn. But it's warm. We can make it a little cleaner. It's for our animals. We usually don't let people stay there. But it's quiet. And the straw in the manger is soft."

"Thank you," Joseph said. "You are very kind." Mary smiled thankfully at the innkeeper and his wife. They went straight to the cave behind the inn.

Early the next morning, as the sun began to rise, Leah nudged her sleeping husband. "Josiah, wake up! Listen! A baby is crying."

(Ms. Manternach is the author of catechetical works, scripture stories and original stories for children.)

Christmas Puzzle

Directions: Unscramble the words below. All the words are in this week's children's story. Another Christmas word is spelled out in the boxes with circles.

1. RAYM ► ► ► ► ► ► ► ○ □ □ □
2. HNATZERA ► ► □ □ □ ○ □ □ □ □
3. SUNSEC ► ► ► □ □ ○ □ □ □
4. GPTNAERN ► ► □ □ □ ○ □ □ □ □
5. SEOJPH ► ► ► □ □ □ ○ □ □
6. DEHOR ► ► ► ► □ □ ○ □ □

Answers: 1. MARY, 2. NAZARETH, 3. CENSUS, 4. PREGNANT, 5. JOSEPH, 6. HEROD.

HOW ABOUT YOU?

☐ How do you think Joseph and Mary felt when it was time for Jesus to be born and they found there was no room at the inn?

Children's Reading Corner

"A Certain Small Shepherd," by Rebecca Caudill is a story children and adults might enjoy reading aloud together. In the story, Jamie, a child who is unable to speak, is bitterly unhappy because he can't sing with his schoolmates in the Christmas pageant. An understanding teacher appreciates Jamie's plight and assigns him the coveted role of shepherd. However, Jamie's pleasure is shattered when the pageant is canceled because of a terrible blizzard. The shepherd's robe and the staff he was going to use lie useless until, unexpectedly, Jamie finds a very special use for them. (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 383 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017. 1965. Hardback, $9.70.)

Warmth

Using split logs in a wood-burning stove to protect against the rigors of a bitter winter, Sister Consiline Flynn brings the warmth of the Gospel message to children from the ranches of the high country surrounding St. John the Apostle Mission in Paisley, Oregon.

Sister Flynn helps children with the basics of Christianity in her religion classes in Paisley and adjacent missions that receive Extension Society aid. She is one member of a team of home missioners who, in partnership with Extension, pursue the vital and urgent task of evangelization here in the United States. But that team is too small to do the job without help. It needs new members. It needs you.

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