

# Wealthy feast, but holiday hunger is keen

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated Columnist

This is the season of caroling, partying, shopping, decorating, baking, visiting, and gift giving.

Christmas is a time for good feelings, warm fires, bright lights, delightful aromas, and happy children.

Only an unconverted Scrooge would mutter a "Bah, humbug!" under his breath.

But there is also a downside to the feast. As Charles Dickens reminded us so effectively in *The Christmas Carol*, it is at this

season of the year that want of any kind is most keenly felt. Christmas is a time for family reunions, but not for the homeless.

Christmas is a time for special feasting, but not for the hungry.

Christmas is a time for lavish gift giving, but not for the poor.

Christmas is a time for parents to rejoice in the happiness of their children, but not for those whose child has died or is terminally ill.

As in ordinary human experience, there is also a downside to the church's celebration of Christmas.

At Christmas time the liturgies are more magnificent, the musical arrangements more ornate, the homilies more lofty than usual.

We sing and preach of the innocent child in the manger, of the Prince of Peace, of angels bearing messages of good will to all.

But preachers and churchgoers alike — especially well-fed, well-housed, and financially secure preachers and churchgoers — often forget the innocent children who are abused, homeless, sick with AIDS, or caught up in violent conflicts ini-

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tiated by adults and carried on by adults.

Christmas casts a new and brilliant light on the Prince of Peace, but there is no peace for Christians in Lebanon or El Salvador.

Christmas proclaims a message of good will, but by whom and toward whom? The many of us who are rich have grown so ac-

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# A sleepy little town witnesses the greatest event of all time

By Cindy Bassett  
Courier Columnist

Even at this late hour, the streets of Bethlehem were still clogged with people. Besides the usual caravans of merchant traders who passed through the village en route to Egypt, there were hundreds of others who had come in accordance with Roman law.

Emperor Caesar Augustus had ordered a census of the entire Roman empire. Everyone was required to return to his place of birth to register.

High up in the hills outside of the village, the scene was radically different. It was the time of the night watch for the shepherds.

"It's hard to believe that all of these people began their lives in Bethlehem," Seth commented to his friend who was keeping the watch with him tonight.

"Bethlehem is as good a place as any," Abednego said.

"Nothing of any importance ever hap-

pens here," answered Seth.

The words of his cousin, Boaz, today still stung Seth's pride. Boaz had left Bethlehem nearly three years ago. One day, he just decided to ride off with a group of merchant traders with no place in particular in mind.

Today, Boaz was like a celebrity when he returned. He had fancy clothes and plenty of stories to tell the other cousins who had eagerly gathered around to hear.

Everyone but Seth.

When Boaz finally noticed Seth, he asked him, "Are you still here? When are you going to do something with your life?"

Seth turned to Abednego and said, "Boaz made me feel like a complete failure today."

"I can tell you that these sheep don't think of you that way," Abednego grinned. "They depend on you for life itself."

Their conversation was abruptly stopped by a group of other shepherds who were

shouting as they ran toward them.

"It was an amazing sight! There we were watching our flocks when suddenly it was as bright as day — no much more brilliant! And then we saw him! And what he told us!"

"Will one of you please tell us what this is all about?" Abednego asked.

"First, we heard strange music like we've never heard before," Jethro began.

"We thought it was just the wind. And then, on the hillside, a blinding light."

"While we were still puzzling over this, an angel was suddenly standing before us," another shepherd continued. "This angel said, 'Do not fear. I come with news, which will bring great joy to people everywhere. Tonight in Bethlehem, your Savior, Christ the Lord, has been born! This is how you will know what I have said is the truth. You will find the baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'"

"Come with us," Jethro said. "We go



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now to find the baby and worship him."

Seth stood watching the others leave until Abednego called back to him. "What are you waiting for? The greatest event of all time has happened right here in Bethlehem."

I have nothing at all to give the Savior, Seth thought as he lagged behind the others. No fancy clothes, no stories to tell. I don't even own a sheep to give him.

When Seth finally stood with everyone before the baby, it no longer seemed to matter. He knelt down and a peace filled his heart as he said to the baby, "I love you."

Scripture reference: Luke 2:8-20.

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