

# War-time Christmas leaves powerful memories

By Father Paul Cuddy  
Courier Columnist

The happiest Christmases I ever had were during our days at St. Bernard's Seminary from 1929-1934. We seminarians did not go home for Christmas, but stayed in to observe an utterly spiritual celebration of the birth of Christ.

Classes ended three days before Christmas. The seminary went into retreat with conferences by the spiritual director, rehearsals for the Christmas liturgy, prayer time and confessions. The hubbub of the secular world — with its commercial and social pressures — remained outside.

At Midnight Mass, 220 seminarians in cassock and surplice — and also in biretta — formed to make a procession into the beautiful chapel. The organ pealed while 220 male voices sang the glory of Christmas accompanied by the music of the centuries.

The liturgy was meticulously performed, creating a sense of the reason for Christmas. The Body of Christ was prepared on the altar-Bethlehem, a reality at



## ON THE RIGHT SIDE

the Mass with the Eucharistic Lord present and proclaimed.

After Christmas, we had the following day off. Then we returned to the books and the dreaded examinations. And about the middle of January, we returned home for three weeks of vacation.

As beautiful as these Christmases were, however, by contrast the most memorable Christmas of my life occurred in France in 1944.

I was a chaplain with the 9th Air Force in Bretigny, Oise, France, about 20 miles south of Paris. I had made arrangements with Monsieur le Cure Alphonse Krijn (rhymes with "fine"), the young Dutch

pastor of Morelles sur-Oise, to use his church for our soldiers' Midnight Mass.

We had also made arrangements with the 409th bomb group headquarters to transport our men in trucks to the Christmas Midnight Mass.

Then the famous Battle of the Bulge began. German spies began to infiltrate the Paris area, including where we were located. Dressed in American officers' uniforms, they spoke perfect English and were thoroughly trained in American ways and information.

Our military intelligence began to panic — and rightly so. All movements from the base were canceled, and on the morning of December 24, we had orders to switch all Christmas preparations on to the base, which had no chapel.

Instead of the lovely, ancient French church, we used a huge room in the headquarters building. Instead of a majestic High Mass sung by a trained village choir, we had a Low Mass with the responses well made by the congregation of soldiers. (We anticipated Vatican II by 20 years).

Instead of a long, rhythmic procession of soldier-altar servers, we had two acolytes, two servers, a cross bearer, and myself. Instead of sitting in pews, the men stood jammed together like matches in a match box. Instead of the church altar with a beautiful tapestry background, we used a makeshift table.

Greater, I think, than the obvious devotion of our seminarians of 10 years before at St. Bernard's Seminary, was the rough, easy, unaffected piety of our soldiers at the Christmas Mass under these conditions. Even to this day, an occasional letter comes from men who shared that Christmas 45 years ago.

So when Christmas rolls around, my memory of so many years in so many different places under so many different conditions is like a wonderful kaleidoscope. These memories give cause to praise God who gave us Jesus Christ, through the Virgin Mother, and to thank Him for so many good men and women who have shared Christmas day and many others over a long past.

# Christ child is world's greatest need and hope

By Father Albert Shamon  
Courier Columnist

Sunday's readings: (R3) Matthew 1:18-24; (R1) Isaiah 7:10-14; (R2) Romans 1:1-7.

The last Sunday of Advent is followed immediately by Christmas. The Gospel is a charming story of how Mary became a mother. The reference to "his mother Mary" has a "bad news-good news" quality.

The bad news is that when engaged to Joseph "she was found with child." The good news is that it was "through the power of the Holy Spirit." Thus she fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah, who said "the virgin shall be with child" (R1). St. Paul links the birth of Jesus with His resurrection, for His birth will bring about a rebirth of creation (R2).

Christmas celebrates the birth of a baby who is Emmanuel, God with us! The stable must not mislead us.

When the world's largest diamond was found, it was the size of a lemon. To get it

safely to the company's London office, the miner who discovered the diamond sent the stone in a small steel box, entrusting it to four men.

When the package was opened in the London office, it contained no diamond, only a lump of coal.

Three days later, the diamond arrived by ordinary parcel post in a plain package. The miner assumed correctly that no one would pay attention to an ordinary cardboard box.

Similarly, who would ever have thought to look for Emmanuel in a stable? Only a few shepherds and astrologers took note. The rest of the world saw only a cardboard box.

Mary's Son is Emmanuel, God with us. We venerate her because of her Son. And her Son, the Son of God, came to earth to teach us two loves.

First, to teach is to love one another. That is why so many of us are weary at this time of the year; we're trying to find the right gift to say, "I love you." Hopefully,

our love will extend beyond family and friends to the needs of other people less fortunate.

Years ago, a baby was left at the doorstep of a widow in Georgetown, Pa. She took the baby and loved it like her own. In the evenings, she read great books to her children. The adopted baby developed a great love for literature.

He went on to become America's most prolific writer — James Michener. His life is a tribute to the unselfish love of a widow mother. That is one of the kinds of love that Christmas calls us to celebrate.

The other is love for the Christ child. A young family was going home for Christmas. The car was all packed. Deliveries had been stopped. A neighbor had promised to keep an eye on the house.

All the gifts for parents, grandparents, aunts and uncle were crammed into the trunk of the car, and the luggage was safely stowed away. As the car started out of the driveway, the young wife gasped, "Honey, we've forgotten the baby."



## A WORD FOR SUNDAY

It was true. In all the excitement of grabbing the gifts and packing the luggage, they had forgotten their most precious cargo — their baby.

At this time of the year, it is easy to forget the Baby Jesus. But He is the reason for the season.

The cynics might imagine the world does not need one more baby. But that Baby, Jesus, is the world's and our greatest need and hope. For He comes to fill us with love for each other and for God. And when such glory is given to God, there will be peace on earth; the peace no man can give.

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