

*A child shall lead them*



# Children help us see season's joy

## Fill stockings with reading

By Catholic News Service

Looking for some good reading to give to children this Christmas? The following are a few recommended new books, with suggested ages.

**The Young Life of Mother Teresa of Calcutta**, by Claire Jordan Mohan. Young Sparrow Press (Worcester, Pa., 1996). 64 pp., \$7.95 pap., \$14.95 hardback.

In today's world, it is hard to imagine Mother Teresa as a young girl, but this biography brings her early years to life. The author clearly presents the story of Mother Teresa as a child growing up in a loving family environment. Ages 8-12. (MK)

**Far North**, by Will Hobbs. Morrow Junior Books (New York, 1996). 226 pp., \$15.

Fifteen-year-old Gabe Rogers of Texas goes to school in Canada's Northwest Territories to be closer to his father, an oil worker. In an effort to see the wilds, he rides along with a bush pilot taking two natives back to their town along the wild Nahanni River. When the group finds itself stranded, the adventure begins, and Gabe learns lessons not taught at school. Ages 11-14. (BF)

**Rush Hour**, by Christine Loomis, illustrated by Mari Takabayashi. Houghton Mifflin (Boston, 1996). 32 pp., \$15.95.

The sights and sounds of a busy city are always captivating for young children and this book expresses them well in a colorful picture book. The rhythmic narrative explains all of the hubbub surrounding the morning and afternoon rush hours. Simple illustrations appeal to the youngest of children. Ages 2-6. (MK)

The Christmas season is here and my daughter, Teresa, has again arranged all the figures from the creche on our piano. Three ceramic carolers, a wooden nutcracker, Frosty the Snowman and Santa have converged on her manger scene. Teresa then begins an elaborate tale of a pretty angel, three kings on white horses and a magic "geese" who tells the animals in the stable about the Baby Jesus.

I knew my avid storyteller could appreciate the greatest story ever told so I sat next to her and explained what really happened in a Bethlehem almost 2,000 years ago.

"Were there toys in the barn?" she asked. "No, there were only animals," I said.

"Well, I would let Mary and Joseph and Jesus come into my house," she said. "And when Jesus got a little bigger, I would let him play with all my toys."

My son, Bobby, heard our conversation and gave Teresa her daily dose of reality.

"Teresa," he said with all his 5-year-old wisdom, "I'm sorry to tell you this but you can't let Mary and Joseph and Jesus in our house because they're all in heaven."

"Then I will take a rocket ship to heaven," Teresa replied.

Bobby informed her that a rocket ship can only go as far as the moon.

"Well then I'll fly on a plane to Bethlehem," she said.

As I listened to them, I couldn't help but think how open children are to bringing Jesus into their hearts at Christmas. Children are comfortable with Christmas because Jesus comes to them on their level. They know what it's like to be little and sometimes misunderstood, so they take the time to listen to the story of Jesus' birth, to ask questions about shepherds and stars, and to wonder why people would turn away a mommy, a daddy and a baby boy.

As often as we've heard the narrative of Christ's birth, the part that seems to haunt adults and children is that no one could make room for a young mother-to-be and her husband. There was no room at the inn so our Messiah was born in a manger.



BY EILEEN MARX



family matters

It's been almost 2,000 years since the birth of our Lord and, like the shepherds and kings, we are searching for our savior while our savior is seeking us. Today, Mary, Joseph and Jesus aren't knocking on the doors of high rise hotels, but Jesus is knocking on the doors of our hearts, wondering if we have room to bring him into our hurried, hectic lives. And like Mary and Joseph, Jesus will not bang on our door or demand that we make room. He will wait for us patiently until we're ready to let him in.

At times it seems almost impossible to make room for Jesus in our busy lives. There are days when we're barely able to manage our own lives; how can we find the time for prayer, reflection and for working on the most important relationship in our lives?

The Advent themes of patience, preparation and longing seem out of step with our fast-paced world. Today's technologies — computers, laser printers, fax machines, cellular phones, beepers and ATM cards — provide us with up-to-the minute communication and instant services.

We hardly know what it's like to wait anymore, unless, of course, we're taking our children for a holiday portrait at a major department store. After waiting for almost two hours at one of these photo sessions, my son turned turned to me and said, "When we have to wait this long, it makes me feel a little crazy."

I knew what he meant. There was still so much we had to do that day. When a few hours of waiting can frazzle our nerves, it becomes daunting to contemplate spend-

ing an entire lifetime longing for our Lord.

Today, we have more timesaving devices and less time than ever before. We are a weary world that once again needs to become a waiting world. It's so important to be busy, productive and to use the gifts and talents that God has given us. But we have become weary with the pressures, the demands and the stress of life.

During Advent, Jesus asks us, "What are you so busy doing? What are you filling your life with? Can you make room for me? I can bring you peace from your hectic life. I will bring light into your darkest hour. I will give you the strength you need to get through the sorrows of your life."

When we follow Jesus' way and fill our lives with love, forgiveness and service to others, we become refreshed, restored and renewed. Long ago, there was no room for the Holy Family. But today, whenever we serve a homeless family at a shelter, spend a few minutes with a person who is lonely, forgive the unforgivable or speak out against hatred and prejudice, we are saying that this year there is room at the inn.

This Christmas, my children have helped me to rediscover the wonder and joy of the birth of Jesus. The infant is a reminder that we can all begin again. It's never too late to start over.

The real miracle of Christmas is that God sent us the gift of his Son to wash away our sins, bring peace, restore justice, give everlasting love and offer the promise of eternal life to those who follow him.

Christmas is a wonderful time to treasure this gift. We should let Jesus know that now, more than ever, we need him in our lives. We can let him know through prayer, through serving others or by attending Mass more often. Or, like my daughter Teresa, we can take the next plane to Bethlehem and let him know he's welcome in our homes this year.

Merry Christmas!

Marx lives in Lawrenceville, N.J., with her husband and two children.

## COURIER CLASSIFIEDS

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#### Announcements

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