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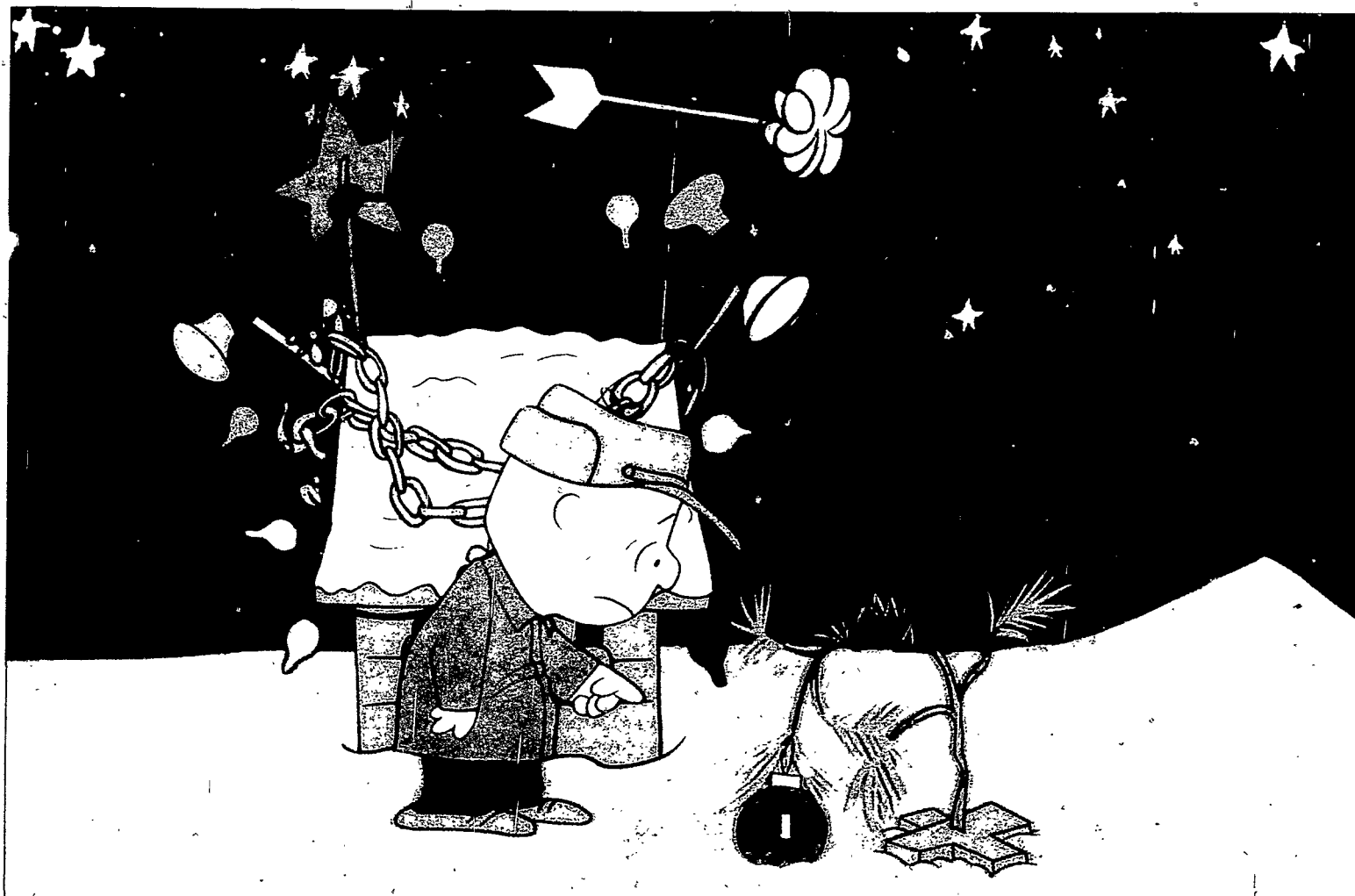
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Faith & Family

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When Charlie Brown complains about the overwhelming materialism he sees at Christmas, Lucy suggests he become director of the school Christmas pageant. Charlie Brown accepts, but when an attempt to restore the proper spirit with a forlorn little Christmas tree fails, he needs Linus' help to learn the real meaning of Christmas.

Getting to the true meaning

Advice offered on getting the most from Christmas

If you're struggling to grasp the true meaning of Christmas, Father Paul Bonacci recommends simply turning on the television — to a cartoon, no less.

"Parents say, 'What can I do with the kids?' Often I encourage them to watch the 'Charlie Brown Christmas' special," Father Bonacci said, citing the segment where Linus walks onto an empty stage and recites the Luke 2:8-14 passage that depicts the birth of Christ.

Much of "A Charlie Brown Christmas" pokes fun at the societal view of Christmas: At one point, Lucy tells Charlie

Brown, "Let's face it; we all know that Christmas is a big commercial racket. It's run by a big Eastern syndicate, you know."

Perhaps this line tickles our funny bones because it's voiced by a child character, but creator Charles Schulz's 1965 classic also makes some strong points about misguided priorities. The struggle continues some four decades later as we contend with Christmas advertising that begins months before the holiday, not to mention long lines at toy stores to purchase the latest fad gifts.

Yet if all the fuss leaves us no time for deep reflection, then Christmas observers have missed the boat, said Father Bonacci, pastor of Schuyler Catholic

Community (St. Mary of the Lake, Watkins Glen, and St. Benedict, Odessa.)

"What am I getting ready to celebrate? Just what is the reason I've been going through all this hecticness? One thing is always trying to remember why we're doing all this," Father Bonacci said.

TELLING THE REAL STORY

Promoting the holiday's true meaning is why actor Frank Runyeon developed his one-man play, "The 3 1/2 Stories of Christmas," which he will bring to St. Jerome's Parish in East Rochester on Dec. 7. His performance, which begins at 7 p.m., is open to the public.

Runyeon, a television soap-opera star

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