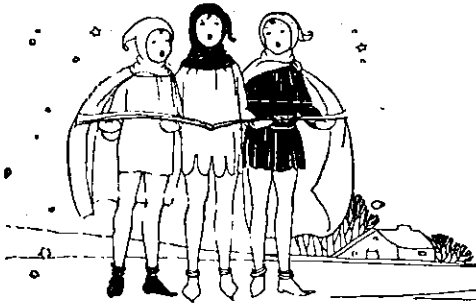


CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES



THE CHRISTMAS STORY

MANY hundreds of years ago God promised His chosen people a Great King, and as they waited for his coming they told stories and sang songs of this King who should rule all the earth and bring love and joy to the world. At last the promise came true, and the Great King did come to all the waiting people, but he did not come in splendour, as the people had imagined.

In those days the Romans ruled over all that part of the land, and they made a law that all the people should be taxed, and that each one should go to his native city to pay these taxes.

Now Joseph was a poor carpenter who lived in a humble little home in Nazareth, but Joseph belonged to the royal family of King David of Bethlehem-Judah; so when the rule went out that each should be taxed in his own city, Joseph was obliged to take his young wife Mary and go to his old home town of Bethlehem.

It was evening when they arrived, and the little city was filled with travellers, so that, when Joseph asked for a room at the inn, the innkeeper was forced to tell him that there was no place for them. Joseph did not know where to go, and the kind-hearted innkeeper felt so sorry that he said: "You may take your young wife to my hillside stable, and there you may find shelter for the night; it is all that I have to offer you."

And there in that humble stable God sent his Gift of Love to all the world, for there the little Christ Child was born, and his mother "wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger."

Now in that part of the country there were shepherds out upon the hillside keeping watch over their flocks by night, when they were startled by a bright light which shone about them, and an angel of the Lord came down to them. The shepherds were very frightened, but the angel spoke to them and said: "Fear not, for I bring to you good tidings which shall be of great joy to all people. For to-day, in the City of David is born a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord; and you will know the babe, for you will find him wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."

And suddenly the heavens opened and there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host who were praising God, saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

When the angels were gone from them into heaven the shepherds said to one another: "Let us go to Bethlehem and see this Child of which the angel has told us." And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. The shepherds knelt before the little Christ Child and worshipped him, and they brought to him their gift of love, the tiniest lamb of the flock, and placed it at his feet. Then they went out and told everyone all that they had seen and heard.

In the distant East, far, far away from Palestine, there lived three wise men in different parts of the land. Each had heard the story of the promised King, and, as they read and studied the stars, they believed in the story and they watched for a star that should be a sign to them that the King had come.

At last one night they saw a brilliant star in the eastern sky. Then they started on their long ride across the desert. It was a hard, wearisome journey, but, as the star guided them, they felt happy, for they knew that the promise of God had come true, and that the "Light of the World" had come to lead them out of darkness.

When they reached the great city of Jerusalem they went at once to the palace of King Herod and asked: "Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship Him."

Now when Herod heard this he was troubled, for he was afraid that this Child might some day be made King in his place. So Herod called some of his scribes to him and he asked them: "Where should the Christ be born?" and the answered him saying: "In the City of Bethlehem-Judah, for thus it has been told by our prophets."

Then Herod questioned the wise men about the star, and he said: "Go to Bethlehem and search for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring me word, so that I may come and worship Him also."

After Herod had talked with them the wise men left Jerusalem and went toward Bethlehem, and the star which they had seen in the east went before them until it came and stood over the place where the young Child was. When they came into the house they found the young Child with Mary his mother, and they bowed down and worshipped Him.

The wise men had expected to see a King dressed all in royal robes of splendour sitting upon a throne in a palace, and the star had led them to a tiny babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, whose throne was his mother's knee, and whose palace was a stable. Yet they never doubted that this little Christ Child was their promised King, and so they gave Him royal gifts—gold and frankincense and myrrh.

And so each Christmastide we give our gifts of love to the Christ Child. It may be that, like the shepherds, we have only the tiny lamb of the flock to offer, or it may be that we can give gold and the other precious presents of the wise men; but whether our gift is small or great, if it is given in the spirit of love and "In His Name," then it will be found acceptable in His sight.



THE ELVES and the SHOEMAKER

(Retold from Grimm's Fairy Tales)

THERE was a shoemaker, once upon a time, who through no fault of his own had become so poor that he could buy no more leather. At last he had only enough left to make one pair of shoes. That evening he cut out the shoes, laid them on his work-bench and went to bed. In the morning, when he made ready for the work of the day, he was amazed to find the pair of shoes all finished standing upon the table.

"Wife! Wife!" he called loudly. See, the leather that I cut out last evening is now all made up into shoes! How could it have happened? Who could have done this?"

"I don't know, I am sure," answered his good wife. "I can't understand it."

Then they examined the shoes very closely and found that they were beautifully made. Not long after a customer came in, and when he saw the beautiful shoes he was so pleased with them that he paid more than the usual price.

With this money the poor shoemaker was able to buy enough leather to make two pairs of shoes. So that evening he cut them out carefully, and the next day he went to his bench to work, but to his surprise there were the two pairs of shoes standing all finished, and they were as neatly made as the first pair.

And so it went on, day after day, until at last the good man had so many customers and so many pairs of shoes to sell that he was no longer poor.

Now it happened one evening, not long before Christmas, when the cobbler had cut out his shoes as usual, he said to his wife: "Let us sit up late to-night and watch to see who it is that comes and makes up the shoes for me."

"Yes, indeed, we will watch," agreed his wife.

So they hid behind a curtain in a corner of the room. Just as the clock struck twelve two little elves came dancing in, sat down upon the shoemaker's bench, took up all the work that was cut out, and began to pound and stitch. "Rap-tap-tap, rap-tap-tap," went their hammers; and as they worked they sang:

Oh, we are two elves who know well ourselves

How to make shoes so neat, you can wear on your feet.

So we stitch and we sew, and our hammers will go,

A rap-a-tap-tap, and a rap-a-tap-tap.

The elves worked busily through the night until the shoes stood on the table all ready to sell. And at day-break when all was done they ran swiftly away.

The next day the good wife said to the shoemaker: "Husband, those wee little men have made us rich, and we should try in some way to show our gratitude to them."

"You are right, my good wife," answered the man; "but what can we do for those little men?"

"Why, husband, didn't you notice last night that those poor little men ran around without any clothes on; they must be almost frozen with the cold. Now I will make each of them a nice warm shirt, a coat, a little waistcoat and a pair of trousers, and I will knit for each of them a pair of nice warm stockings and a little cap, while you shall make them each a pair of small shoes."

"That is a good plan, wife," said the man, "and we will go to work at once. So they worked busily for some time, and when everything was ready they laid all the presents on the table and then hid behind the curtain to wait and watch for the little men.

It was Christmas Eve, and just as the little elves came dancing in the clock struck twelve. "Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!" they shouted; and, taking hold of hands, they danced round and round. When they went to the table to find the leather to make into shoes they were very much surprised to see the charming little clothes.

"These garments must be meant for us," they said to each other. "Let us try them on and see if they will fit." So they put on the warm shirts and the little trousers, waistcoats and coats, they pulled on the stockings and shoes, and last of all they put on the little caps. They smoothed their new clothes down with great care, then they went skipping and prancing about the room, laughing and giggling with glee. They jumped over chairs and tables and then they rushed out of the door, and as they ran away they sang:

With a rap-a-tap-tap, good luck you'll not lack,

But we'll never come back with a rap-a-tap-tap.

And the happy elves, dressed all in their Christmas clothes, never came again to the home of the shoemaker. But their song came true, for the shoemaker and his wife had good luck ever after.

RIDDLES for the CHILDREN

Why is a gaoler like a musician?
Because he fingers the keys.

Why is a dog biting his tail like a good housewife?
Because he makes both ends meet.

Why are stars the best astronomers?
Because they have studded (studied) the heavens since the Creation.