

Discovery



DECEMBER 2009

Christmas

Stories, Puzzles, Jokes, Readers' Response, Serial and more...

Hi There!

Christmas is a wonderful time of year when we Celebrate the birth of Jesus together. Another wonderful aspect of the season is that we tend to look for ways to be nice to each other, but shouldn't we do that ALL year? Start a new habit of treating others like it's Christmas time and I'm sure you'll have an extra special new year!

Merry Christmas

Wendy 



Custard Tart

Pastry

1/4 Cup Sugar
1 Tb Butter or Margarine
1 Egg
1 Tsp Vanilla
Beat till creamy then add 1 Cup Flour and 1 Tsp. Baking Powder.
Line pie dish with pastry.

Filling

1/4 Cup Sugar
2 Eggs
2 Dess. Flour
1 Tsp. Vanilla
Pinch Salt

Mix all ingredients in a bowl excluding the milk. Pour on 2 cups of boiling milk and whisk well, then pour into raw pastry. Sprinkle with nutmeg and bake in a hottish oven.



info@biblediscovery.org.nz
www.biblediscovery.org.nz

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PSSM Bible Discovery, 888 New North Road, Mt Albert, Auckland 1025 Ph: 09 846 1776 Issue 5 Volume 72 December 2009
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"Here - I got two"



Over the sharp horns of the rickshaws and the sound of hundreds of people selling and buying everything from bags, food, shoes and watches, Sandeep heard a different kind of noise.

He waited for a break in the traffic before he dashed across the chaotic road, putting his hand on the boot of the taxi as he dodged between it and a huge truck carrying a mound of coconuts. As the truck chugged past he reached up towards the coconuts, but it was too high. He watched what could have been his lunch merge into the other traffic. He shrugged then jogged down a narrow street, following the noise, until he came to a small building with a huge veranda. Standing in the shade were about 100 children.

He crept as close as he could and hid behind an organised, stack of old bikes. A man and two women were under the veranda, and stacked beside them on a table was a pile of boxes. Each time the man's voice boomed out a name, one of the children would go and get a box. Sandeep watched in amazement as they were opened. The boxes were full of toys, books, stickers and toothbrushes and toothpaste. Unconsciously Sandeep ran his tongue over his stained dirty teeth.

"Soap!" shouted a voice right next to him. He spun around to see a girl holding a box. "A facecloth! Pencils! And a book! Ow! it's about Jesus!" She suddenly sat down in the dust and opened the book, wiping her dusty hand on her tee shirt before she turned each page. Sandeep suddenly realised that while she had been shouting the other voices had gone quiet. Under the veranda the man and women were still there but all the boxes were gone. Where the children had been there were just scatted paper and wrappings. He jumped as the girl touched his arm and handed him a toothbrush. "Here" she said, "I got two". He looked at her. She waved it impatiently at him. As he took it she said, "here, you can read my book, but, make sure your hands are clean".

"I can't read," Sandeep said, shocked into honesty; he had never had someone give him something before.

"That's ok, I'll read it to you. I've been learning," she said rather proudly. She plopped back onto the ground and scrubbed her hands on her tee shirt again. Sandeep looked around then slowly sat down beside her.

Although she had to skip over quite a few words she didn't know, for the first time in his life Sandeep heard of Jesus. As the girl ran her hand over the last page of the book she suddenly turned to him and said, "Do

you know it's His birthday?" Sandeep looked over his shoulder but the man was gone. "Not him! Jesus; it's His birthday soon." Now Sandeep was sure that she was a little crazy. "We learn all about it at school. . . there!" she said pointing with her chin. "Meet me here on Monday and I'll help you learn to read, and learn about Jesus. The people from the Church teach us every afternoon. But I've got to go now. Bye!" She jumped up, tucked the box under her arm and ran down the street.

For five minutes Sandeep sat, just thinking. He was a little confused, but there was one thing he was certain of. He would be waiting here on Monday afternoon. Then he slowly walked over and gathered up the coloured wrappers and paper. He would try and sell them. Maybe he would get enough to buy something for his lunch.

A few years ago I was able to experience a group of children in an Orphanage open Christmas boxes sent from overseas. They were so excited. Long sharpened pencils were able to replace the ones that were so short that there was barely any pencil left to hold. The stickers and paper they used to make cards that they gave away. Soap was a luxury, the underwear something to laugh about (although very needed!), and any books about Jesus were treasured. That night they all went to sleep on their mats with extremely clean teeth.

Be encouraged that the boxes do get to the children and everyone involved gets a lot of joy from them, including those who look after and work with these kids.



Millie hated Christmas.

It was the time of the year she dreaded the most. While her friends bubbled over with excitement as to what they were planning, what they'd be wearing, and what they were expecting for gifts, Millie sat in silence.

It hadn't always been this way. Millie remembered the happy times in the past when family members and friends arrived at their home for Christmas with piles of food and presents and their house echoed with music and laughter. But ever since her parents split up, their family life had changed. Money was scarce and home life had become difficult.

Millie's father still visited them, but he lived with someone else now with a new family. Sometimes he took Millie and her younger brother James to the park or the mall and bought them takeaways. But things were different now, and after the outings, Millie felt miserable, and often sobbed in her bedroom.

The highlight of Millie's school week was the half hour Bible lessons on Fridays taken by Mrs Johnson. She was kind and caring and was always willing to pray for the needs of family members and sick pets.

Mrs Johnson told the children stories from the Bible and they did activities that taught them about God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

"Christmas is coming," she announced one morning, "and it'll soon be time for the giving of gifts to those we love. Today, we're going to think about gifts we can give that are free but costly."

The children looked puzzled. How could a gift be free and yet costly?

"We don't even have to go shopping for these gifts," Mrs Johnson added.

Millie pricked up her ears. With no money to buy gifts, Millie liked that idea.

Mrs Johnson went on to explain that the best gifts of all are often the ones that don't cost money, but take our time, energy and commitment.

"I want you to think of people who are important to you, then think of something you can do for them - not just at Christmas but all year round!"

Millie immediately thought of her two best friends, Amy and Clare. Most of the time they had

FREE BUT COSTLY



fun together, but sometimes there were problems. One would say something unkind, or reveal a confidence and then there'd be a fall out that could last for days.

Millie decided she'd make a special card for them both with the words, I give you the gift of MY LOYAL FRIENDSHIP. In the days ahead she would try hard to be a true friend and not let them down.

What shall I give James, she thought to herself. At times he could be a real nuisance. She knew he missed his dad, and that was probably the reason for some of his behaviour.

"I'll give James the gift of MY PATIENCE AND COMPANIONSHIP, she decided. It won't be easy, but I'll try to be nice to him and spend time doing the things he enjoys.

Millie thought of her mother. She could be difficult to please, and often,

they'd argue and shout at each other.

"I'll give her the gift of MY UNDERSTANDING AND OBEDIENCE, she decided. Each day, I'll do all I can to make her life easier.

Then, there was her dad. While Millie still loved him, she felt angry and bitter in her heart. She couldn't forgive him for what he had done to the family.

At that moment, Millie remembered the lessons Mrs Johnson had given, explaining to the children the necessity for forgiveness.

"If we don't forgive one another," she said, "the Bible tells us that God will not forgive us - and that's serious!"

Millie struggled with this truth. She knew it would be easy to say she forgave him, but much harder to put it into practice.

Finally, she made up her mind. She picked up her pen and wrote on a card, To DAD. This Christmas and always, I give you the gift of MY LOVE AND FORGIVENESS.

A warm wave of emotion crept over her and Millie felt peace in her heart.

Somehow she knew this Christmas was going to be a special one, because, at last, she'd discovered the true spirit of Christmas.

The Christmas Box

Tears fell on Lillian's face

as she looked at the photographs of the people who were missing in her life. Lillian's husband Tom had died last year, and her daughter Annabel was living in Italy. This month, her son John had moved his family to America where there was more work for him. Lillian had tried to be brave but she couldn't stop crying, the tears just came every day.

Soon it would be Christmas. Lillian didn't want to think about that, so she kept herself busy by cleaning out cupboards in the bedrooms. One of the boxes contained cardboard, coloured paper, glitter, ribbons and pens. Lillian put it outside with the rubbish and went to lie down. She heard the voices of the children next-door, reminding her of her absent

grandchildren.

Joey and Maria saw Mrs Morris put the box outside. They missed going next-door for afternoon tea, and to play with Mrs Morris's grandchildren. One of the boys had taught Joey and Maria how to climb the fir tree at the bottom of the garden. Joey and Maria's mother had explained about Mrs Morris's sadness, and told the children to wave or smile if they saw her in the garden.

The children knew Mrs Morris was lying down because they saw her close the bedroom curtains. They went over to the rubbish pile to see what was in the box. When they saw all the pretty things, Joey took a pen and wrote on the box, "If

you don't want this stuff, can we have it please, from Joey." The next morning, Lillian put the box through the gate in the fence, hoping the children would have fun with the contents.

For the next two weeks, Joey and Maria spent most of their spare time shut in Joey's room. They told their mother they were making a surprise. She noticed a box under Joey's bed, but she didn't look inside it, in case she spoiled the surprise. Three days before Christmas the children asked to stay up late. "We'll be outside, and you can't look," they instructed their parents.

The next morning Lillian drew back her kitchen curtains and was amazed at what she saw. Angels glittered and stars sparkled in her fir tree. Brightly coloured doves and bells were hanging in the branches, and streamers fluttered in the wind. Lillian walked down the path, hardly able to believe her eyes! There were wrapped boxes under the tree, all with her name on them. She looked up and saw Joey and Maria standing by the gate. They both giggled, and Maria said, "You can't open the presents until Christmas day."

"I won't..." Lillian promised, with a tearful smile.

Two days later, on Christmas morning, Lillian woke with the familiar feeling of tears in her eyes. Then she remembered about the tree.

She put on her dressing gown and her garden shoes, and went outside to open the children's gifts.

Each box contained an invitation. The first one was for


Christmas dinner that night, with Joey and Maria's family. The other invitations were for their school sports day and fancy dress evening, Easter celebrations, Sunday School plays, Summer picnics, and Joey and Maria's birthday parties.

Lillian's heart filled with joy as she walked back up the path to the house. She stood on the porch for a few minutes, looking back at the beautiful tree, and then Lillian Morris stopped crying and went inside to choose a dress to wear for Christmas Dinner.



WORD FIND

B	A	B	Y	J	E	S	C	S
E	N	J	O	S	E	P	H	D
T	G	O	D	L	S	T	A	R
H	E	R	O	D	R	G	N	E
L	L	O	W	E	N	R	O	H
E	D	I	G	I	F	T	S	P
H	F	N	K	M	A	R	Y	E
E	A	N	N	I	G	A	M	H
M	P	I	H	S	R	O	W	S

By Janet Fleming 

Find these words in the wordfind.

God, Son, inn, wife, magi, Baby Jesus, manger, star, shepherds, Mary, angel, gifts, Bethlehem, Joseph, Herod, worship, King

You should have 4 letters over. These letters will tell you who Jesus is. Now fill in the space below.

Jesus Christ is _____.

What Child is this?

1	2	3		4	5	6	7		8	9	10	11		12	13	14	15
				T											A		
16	17	18			20	21	22	23	24	25	26		27	28	29	30	31
						M											
32	33	34	35	36		37	38	39		40	41	42	43		44	45	
						“											”

Mary and Joseph didn't argue about what to name the baby Jesus. God told them what to call the child even before He was born. First figure out the answers to the clues below. Then write each letter in the grid next to the corresponding number. When all the letters are written in, you'll know what Jesus' name means (and part of Matthew 1:23, NIV). We've done the first clue for you.

- You step on one at the front door $\frac{\text{M}}{21} \quad \frac{\text{A}}{13} \quad \frac{\text{T}}{4}$
- A bathroom scale measures your $\frac{\quad}{8} \quad \frac{\quad}{6} \quad \frac{\quad}{29} \quad \frac{\quad}{37} \quad \frac{\quad}{16} \quad \frac{\quad}{42}$
- Not big or small but right in the middle $\frac{\quad}{18} \quad \frac{\quad}{25} \quad \frac{\quad}{3} \quad \frac{\quad}{41} \quad \frac{\quad}{44} \quad \frac{\quad}{32}$
- Not deep $\frac{\quad}{45} \quad \frac{\quad}{43} \quad \frac{\quad}{1} \quad \frac{\quad}{10} \quad \frac{\quad}{11} \quad \frac{\quad}{38} \quad \frac{\quad}{40}$
- When a rocket takes off, it's called a $\frac{\quad}{26} \quad \frac{\quad}{34} \quad \frac{\quad}{24} \quad \frac{\quad}{2} \quad \frac{\quad}{12} \quad \frac{\quad}{5}$
- Very little mountains; these are alive with the sound of music $\frac{\quad}{31} \quad \frac{\quad}{17} \quad \frac{\quad}{14} \quad \frac{\quad}{15} \quad \frac{\quad}{36}$
- Put your clothes in the washing $\frac{\quad}{20} \quad \frac{\quad}{22} \quad \frac{\quad}{30} \quad \frac{\quad}{28} \quad \frac{\quad}{19} \quad \frac{\quad}{35} \quad \frac{\quad}{33}$
- When a breeze is blowing $\frac{\quad}{27} \quad \frac{\quad}{9} \quad \frac{\quad}{23} \quad \frac{\quad}{39} \quad \frac{\quad}{7}$

Answers: 1. mat, 2. weight, 3. medium, 4. shallow, 5. launch, 6. hills, 7. machine, 8. windy.
And they will call Him Immanuel which means "God with us."

AWARDS

CONGRATULATIONS

For years completed

1 Vicky Chiu
Ryan Finlayson
Lily Forsyth
Jackie Graham
Levi Horton
Noah Jaunay
Savy Naidoo
Jared Roke
Stephen Turner
Rosalina Wanim

2 Oluwasayo Babalola
Bianca Jago
Elizabeth Martin
Kaiden McCormick
Rhoda Paul
Alix Pene
Chris Olsen Procter
Estella Riley
Michael Stokes

3 Jessica Adams
Oluwaseun Babalola
Ella Brickell
Akio Ho
Imelda Kachau
Nathaniel Macaulay
Nikita Macaulay
Tiva Palako
Hannah Thomas
Naomi Turner
Jordan Wichman

4 Sung Cheong
Tegan Cryer
Zara Lane

5 Sarah Cowan
Liam Hofsteede
Olivia Mould

6 Whitney Harris

7 Cinci Ayam
Jope Jale
Melissa Stewart

8 Daniel Barkley
Mavis Harris
Sally Wahe
Kiniwini Wahe
Angeline Yeoh

9 Roy Pickering
Freya Schaumkel

10 Ruby Hobbs
Jocelyn Smith

11 Patience Svensson

15 Tracey Toth

24 Ravai Mosese
Alewa Wahe



"We can remember to read these."

BIBLE READINGS

DECEMBER

DATE	BOOK	REFERENCE	
1	Tue	1:1-7	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Wed	1:8-17	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Thu	1:18-25	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Fri	1:26-32	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Sat	2:1-11	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Sun	2:12-16	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Mon	2:17-24	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	Tue	2:25-29	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	Wed	3:1-8	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	Thu	3:9-20	<input type="checkbox"/>
11	Fri	3:21-26	<input type="checkbox"/>
12	Sat	3:27-31	<input type="checkbox"/>
13	Sun	4:1-8	<input type="checkbox"/>
14	Mon	4:9-12	<input type="checkbox"/>
15	Tue	4:13-17	<input type="checkbox"/>
16	Wed	4:18-25	<input type="checkbox"/>
17	Thu	5:1-11	<input type="checkbox"/>
18	Fri	5:12-17	<input type="checkbox"/>
19	Sat	5:18-21	<input type="checkbox"/>
20	Sun	6:1-7	<input type="checkbox"/>
21	Mon	6:8-14	<input type="checkbox"/>
22	Tue	6:15-23	<input type="checkbox"/>
23	Wed	7:1-6	<input type="checkbox"/>
24	Thu	7:7-13	<input type="checkbox"/>
25	Fri	7:14-25	<input type="checkbox"/>
26	Sat	8:1-8	<input type="checkbox"/>
27	Sun	8:9-17	<input type="checkbox"/>
28	Mon	8:18-21	<input type="checkbox"/>
29	Tue	8:22-27	<input type="checkbox"/>
30	Wed	8:28-30	<input type="checkbox"/>
31	Thu	8:31-39	<input type="checkbox"/>

All from ROMANS



Readers' Response



"Hey kids - this is YOUR page - so send in (original materials) your favourite joke, one of your own poems or prayers, a letter or a question about being a Christian and it might end up here!!"

Email: info@biblediscovery.org.nz
or write to us: 888 New North Road, Mt Albert, Auckland 1025

What can break without you touching it? **A promise**

What is the name of the most dangerous city in the world?

Electricity

I am not human but I wear clothes. What am I? **A hanger**

I am a room but people can't live inside. What am I?

A mushroom

(By Daniel Naanchin, Nigeria)



Here are 4 members of the Tainui Girls Brigade who all do Discovery Lessons. Nice picture girls!

Jehovah ★
Eloi
Shepherd
Unchanging
Son of God


Creator
Healer
Rock
I am
Saviour
Teacher

(sent in by
Grace Whittaker, 9 yrs)

*Seasons
Greetings*

from all of us
at Bible Discovery

What Kind of Christmas?

By Christel Jeffs 

It was the last day of school before the summer holidays began, and Aidan's class could barely contain their excitement. Christmas was just around the corner, and Aidan, like everyone else, just could not wait.

At 3 o'clock Mrs. Wilcox decided to do something fun before the students went home. "Okay everybody! Put away your books and we will have a little talk about the holidays." Aidan quickly did so with a hopeful look on his face. Maybe I'll get a chance to ask my question, he thought to himself.

"Now," Mrs Wilcox began. "I'll go around the room and ask you all what you are doing this Christmas." She pointed first to Aidan's friend Peter.

"My family is going to our holiday house by the beach, and we'll spend the day playing with our presents," Peter said.

Aidan spoke next. "I'm getting a new bike! I'll ride it all day long!"

Mrs. Wilcox smiled. "Very good." She nodded to the next person. "What about you?" She went around the room, getting many different answers.

"My grandma is coming to spend Christmas with us," Drew said.

"We'll have a BIG Christmas dinner with lots of pudding!" Molly exclaimed.

"We're going to Australia, and we'll have Christmas with our cousins," Sean said excitedly.

"Wow! It sounds like you'll all have a fantastic time." Mrs. Wilcox enthused after everyone had shared their plans. "You may go home now...and Merry Christmas!"

The class joyfully ran outside, but Aidan stayed behind. He really wanted to ask the question that had bothered him all day. He went up to the

teacher's desk and sat down in a nearby chair. "Mrs Wilcox, could I please ask you something? What kind of Christmas is the best? We all do different stuff- but what is the best way?"

Mrs. Wilcox thought for a moment. "That is a good question," she replied.

"I know this is the time of year when we celebrate Jesus coming to earth." Aidan continued. "But how can we do that when we want to open our presents and play with our families?"

His teacher nodded. "I see what you mean, Aidan. I think remembering that Christmas is about God sending His Son Jesus is the most important part of the holiday. It is the best way to celebrate Christmas."

"Does that mean that we shouldn't be doing anything else?" Aidan felt a little crestfallen when he thought of all the cool things he had planned.

Mrs. Wilcox smiled at Aidan. "No, of course it doesn't! God knows that Christmas is a great time to see family and do lots of other fun things, and I believe He loves watching us. But we need to always remember to thank God for giving us Jesus. With Jesus, God could make a way for us to belong to Him. We can easily take some time to thank Him for that, even when we are enjoying ourselves."

"Like around the dinner table when we say grace?" Aidan asked.

Mrs. Wilcox grinned. "Good thinking. I always like to go to a church service too - it's a great time for remembering and saying thank-you."

Aidan nodded eagerly. "Yes! And I know what else - I'll thank God for my new bike!" He jumped up and headed for the door. "Thanks, Mrs. Wilcox - that kind of Christmas sounds great."



THE CHRISTMAS PLAY



“Who’s the little girl who’s going to be on stage with a baby in her tummy?” Toby suddenly sneered. “Ha-ha! And you’ll be married to Joseph!”

Joss cringed. Why hadn’t she thought to check that her new stepbrother wasn’t nearby when she told her Dad that she had been asked to play Mary in the Christmas play?

Joss was a big girl for only seven, but acting in front of a crowd sounded scary! However, she’d agreed to play the part of Mary when Mrs Stanley had explained that she was the only other girl in the Sunday School class who was big enough to fit the dress made for the part.

“Dad, I’m going to play the part of Mary at the Christmas play on Sunday!” Joss had quietly announced that night. “Andrea can’t do it, so Mrs. Stanley asked me instead.”

“That’s great! We can all come and watch you,” her father replied.

Toby’s mockery now was cruel. “You are horrid!” she cried to Toby, tears welling in her eyes. Toby was a major Meanie!

Ever since he’d shifted in when her father remarried after Mum died, Toby had teased her about everything. He was only a year older, but acted as if he thought he was an adult already.

“Toby, listen to me!” Joss heard her father’s stern command. “That is not how families get on - especially not for a first Christmas together!”

“You may think Christmas is a silly story,” Dad continued, “But that does not give you any excuse to treat your new sister so badly. It’s time you said sorry.”

“What if I don’t want to say sorry?” Dad lifted his eyebrows in surprise. “I will have to find a consequence to suit, in that case.” He looked serious for a while, as he considered it. “I’ve heard the Christmas play needs another actor,

and I know just the person for the job. You won’t need to learn any lines; just come along and get dressed up for the part.”

“Big deal! It can’t be that hard. Christmas is just a story about a dad and mum having a baby, and some angels and stuff, isn’t it?” Toby asked, as he quickly walked away; clearly unwilling to say sorry.

Joss, Toby, Dad and Joss’ step-mum went early to the play. Mrs. Stanley dressed Joss in the pretty gown made with a doll tucked into a special pocket placed over her tummy. ‘Joseph’ and ‘Mary’ rehearsed their lines quickly together. Toby was taken back-stage somewhere.

The play was going really well until suddenly the ‘donkey’ tripped over his padded foot, and everyone heard the muffled “Yeow!” as he banged into the side of the manger, and pulled his head-gear off. “I’m not playing a silly donkey any longer!” Toby yelled, as the audience laughed. Toby stomped off stage in his donkey suit.

After the play Toby came up quietly beside Joss. “I’m sorry for what I said about you playing Mary,” Toby said. “I know what it’s like to be made to feel stupid now Joss.”

Joss smiled. “Thanks Toby. That’s okay. I’m sorry you hurt yourself.”

Just then Dad came backstage. “Now that’s an attitude that fits Christmas! Jesus wants us to be kind to each other - that’s part of why He came. Now, let’s celebrate your acting debuts and your kindness by having icecream.”

M A R Y J O S E P H

There is a story below which has some words missing. See if you can work out what they are, then use them to fill in the spaces above. Matthew 1:18-2:15 and Luke 1:26 - 38 and 2: 1 - 20 may help.

A _____ virgin, Mary, had promised to marry a man called Joseph. One day an _____ came and told Mary that she would have a baby and that He would be a special baby, because He would be God's Son. An angel also told Joseph the same news.

A while later a census was taken of the _____ world. Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem to register. While they were there _____ was born.

They put Him in a _____ .

_____ in the fields near Bethlehem shepherds were caring for their _____ .

An angel said to them, "glory to God in the highest and on earth _____ to men."

Later when the magi were looking for the Baby Jesus, King _____ became jealous and wanted to kill the baby. God told Joseph to take Mary and Baby Jesus to _____ so they would be safe.



Saint Nicholas and Christmas

Sarah opened the piano to start her piano practice. She always like doing it straight after her music lesson because there would be a new piece, and even though she couldn't manage it very well, it was something different to work on. This new piece was called "Jolly Old Saint Nicholas" and by looking at the pictures around it, she thought it must be something to do with Christmas.

"Do you know anything about who St. Nicholas was?" she asked her mother later on when she had finished. "What makes you ask that?" Mum wanted to know.

"Well, it's the name of my new music piece, and I just wondered." Sarah said.

"Well, I'm not sure", said Mum, "but I think it's something to do with Christmas. Let's look it up on the internet, and see what we can find out."

She walked to the computer and found the page she wanted. "Here you are, Sarah," she said. "Just look at how many sites there are! I think this one will tell us what we want to know".

Sarah looked over Mum's shoulder, and started reading.....

Nicholas was born during the third century in the village of Patara, which is now part of modern Turkey. His parents were wealthy and raised him to be a devout Christian, but they died in an epidemic while Nicholas was still young. He grew up determined to obey Jesus' words to "sell what you own and give the money to the poor." He used his whole inheritance to help the poor, the sick, and the suffering. He dedicated his life to serving God and was made a bishop while he was still a young man. Bishop Nicholas became known throughout the land for his generosity to those in need, his love for children, and his concern for sailors. He was particularly known for giving presents to the poor people around him at Christmas time, and helping them all he could.

"Well, there you are Sarah," said Mum, as she shut the computer down.

"Thanks Mum," said Sarah, "At least it's nice to know he was a real person and not just make believe like so much of Christmas is!"

"That's right", said Dad who had just walked in and heard Sarah's last remark, "It's good to know that the birth of Jesus is true, even if half the world doesn't believe it."

"Yes, and I'm pleased St Nicholas was a real person, and such a nice man" said Sarah, "I'll really enjoy practicing that new piece now!"

She started humming the words as she walked away.....

"Jolly old Saint Nicholas, Lean your ear this way! Don't you tell a single soul, What I'm going to say....."

The Mystery of GAL

Jo-Jo dashed into the lounge ahead of me and leaped onto the couch. His ears were pricked and his tail wagged as if to say, 'Sit beside me Bill.' I gathered him in my arms as I sat across from Grandad in his rocker.

"What's next with Jean?" I asked. "Where did the chain gang go?" I couldn't get Jean out of my mind, wondering what I'd have done if that'd been me.

"They walked almost the length of France," Grandad said. On the map of France on the coffee table he traced his finger from Paris to Marseille on the Mediterranean coast. "It was a hard journey. Listen to what Jean says."

"I was near the back of the one hundred and eighty six pairs of convicts. I wondered why a covered, horse-drawn wagon rumbled close behind but I soon found out. At the end of the first day we were striped, searched and our Bibles snatched away. After a terrible beating, eighteen men lay still on the ground. Their bodies were tossed onto that wagon. I shivered as I lay in a stable hungry, bruised and bleeding, still chained to the gang. What lay ahead?"

I learned to keep step with my partner and the swinging chain to stop the yanking of the collar on my bleeding neck. Those heavy chains weighed us down like bricks. By night time I could hardly drag one foot in front of the other.

"Bill, how would you like to travel like that in rain, hail and snow?"

"Not me. Not followed by the death wagon," I said.

"Jean says fifty four men died on that journey," said Grandad.

I shuddered at the thought of seeing the gang getting smaller and smaller. "And not in bare feet either," I said. "Does his story get worse?"

"Yes," said Grandad. "Listen to this," and he continued.

"On good nights we slept in barns or stables but mostly outside in all weather. We were given food once a day but sometimes kind people pressed food into our hands or poured water into our bowls as we trudged by. Guards

whipped anyone who was sick and the death wagon was always waiting. On sunny days someone started singing a Psalm and everyone joined in. My spirits rose when I sang God's praises even though my body ached. We seemed to struggle forever along stony, muddy roads. I

heard terrible whispers about would happen at Marseille but I didn't believe them.

At the port of Le Havre, Marseille, our heads and faces were shaved. Still chained together our filthy clothes were stripped off. We were given a prickly-cloth shirt, a pair of socks, a red jersey, a cap and an over coat. My heart sank as I put the convict clothes on. The chained pairs slowly filed past a burly blacksmith and his fire. He grabbed my left arm, pushed back my sleeve and pressed down his red-hot iron. I screamed as my flesh sizzled. When he lifted the iron off,

"...I was branded like a calf with the letters GAL, an ugly, gaping wound."

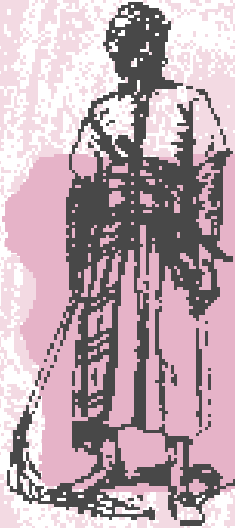
I was branded like a calf with the letters GAL, an ugly, gaping wound. So, the whispers were true. I was a slave, a---

I jumped up and Jo-Jo barked. "I've got it Grandad," I shouted. "Convict, GAL, galley. Jean was a galley-slave, wasn't he?"

Grandad nodded, and I sat down as he read on. "Jean writes 'I wanted to die like my friend Paul. I knew no one returned from the galleys. On board I was chained to a long bench. This bench was now my home. On this spot I'd work, sleep under the sky and eat from the wooden bowl at my waist. I looked at the ragged convicts who'd been on the galley for years and at the rats and mice running everywhere. Beside me were six men. On each side of the galley were rows of benches with seven men on each. It took seven of us to work one of the sixteen-metre long wooden oars. Four metres were inside the galley and twelve metres outside.

At the foreman's whistle we strained with all our might to raise and lower the oars. Guards whipped us to make us work harder.

I soon learned to fear the vicious beatings most of all. My red jersey was torn off and I was thrown face down over the gangplank. A Turkish guard beat me with a bull-whip until I was unconscious then he rubbed salt and vinegar into the wounds on my back to revive me. I was chained to the bench again to work. Galley slaves who died



were heaved overboard."

I wriggled on the couch. "Grandad, how did God look after Jean?"

"God saved his life many times," Grandad said. "Once was at the Battle of Tamise in 1708 against the British. An English frigate came close to the galley with one of its cannons pointing at Jean. Jean thought he'd die and prayed to God. The cannon fired and ---"

"What then?" I cried, clutching Jo-Jo tight.

"Jean was knocked down by the blast but when he opened his eyes, the eighteen men around him were cut to pieces, parts of their bodies scattered everywhere."

"And---"

"Jean's leg was badly injured. He recovered but limped for the rest of his life."

We were both quiet for a long time.

"Grandad, if Jean had known he was going to be a galley slave, do you think he'd

"..Guards whipped us to make us work harder."

have recanted?"

"No, I don't think so Bill. It cost Jean a lot to follow God, more than it's cost me or you."

"I've solved the mystery of GAL," I said "but how did Jean escape? He couldn't be in that painting if he'd died on the galley."

"Tomorrow we'll have the best part of Jean's story," said Grandad, his eyes twinkling.

Blow! I wanted to know now, but Grandad wouldn't change his mind.

*“For unto us a child is born,
unto us a son is given,
and the government shall be
upon His shoulders and
His name shall be called wonderful,
counsellor the mighty God.
The Everlasting Father
and the Prince of Peace is He.”*

Isaiah 9:6