

A Christmas Miracle The Angel That Stuttered

The young pastor had only been at the church for a few days and still hadn't met most of the members of his new congregation. It was a stately limestone building in the center part of the city. As the pastor stood at the front door of the church on Sunday morning greeting folks and introducing himself, he noticed the late model cars as they pulled into the parking lot. He also noticed the absence of tracks in the fresh snow that led to the nearby apartment complex. As the young pastor shook hands with the warmly wrapped churchgoers, he heard comments of how their parents or grandparents had been members of the church years before.

One of Pastor Robbins' first duties was to assist in preparing for the Christmas Pageant. He was escorted to the church basement by the Sunday School teacher, where all the children were excitedly waiting, hoping to receive a part. Pastor Robbins smiled as he announced, "Everyone will have a part in the play!"

The Sunday School teacher, Sister Smith, a frail little lady with drawn in cheeks and white hair twisted tightly on her head, brought her lace trimmed handkerchief to her lips and quietly said, "My, my."

Excitement filled the room as Pastor Robbins assigned each part and handed out the lines. "Now for the part of the angel that proclaims the birth of Jesus. It is a very important part. You must learn St. Luke 2:17, For unto you is born this day, in the City of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."

Many of the children were stretching their hands up high, as if reaching to snatch a star from the sky. The pastor's eyes fell on one boy. His hand wasn't raised as high as the others, but his eyes held a special gleam of hope. This boy was Harley Greene. He wasn't wearing polished shoes like the other children. Instead, he wore sneakers that were damp from the melted snow. The dirty shoelaces had knots where he had repaired them when they broke. His hand-me-down clothes were wrinkled and worn. He scratched at his unkempt hair. It was obvious this boy's parents could not afford to give him the nice things the other children took for granted. Even more tragic, this boy's parents didn't give him the love and nurturing every child deserves. He had never met his father and his young mother's lifestyle was not suitable for raising a young son. Yet somehow young Harley Greene found his way to church and was hoping to be an angel in the Christmas play.

As Pastor Robbins handed the paper with St. Luke 2:17 to Harley, Sister Smith pressed her handkerchief against her lips and cleared her throat several times. The children all began to giggle.

When Pastor Robbins flashed a stern look both the children and Sister Smith settled down.

"Go ahead, Son. Read your line," he encouraged.

Pastor Robbins patiently listened as Harley began to read, "F-f-f-f-for unto Y-y-yyou is B-b-b-born..."

Now, he may have understood Sister Smith's concern, but he showed no sign of dismay. He patted the boy on the back and said "That will be fine. You come by the church every day until Christmas, and I'll help you memorize that."

Harley smiled from ear to ear. Sister Smith pressed her lace trimmed handkerchief to her lips and quietly said "My, my."

Harley stopped by the church each day and Pastor Robbins helped him memorize his lines. As Harley became more confident, he said the lines with less stuttering. Then it was Christmas Eve Day. Everyone gathered at the church for a dress rehearsal. There were a number of shepherds and wisemen and angels. Harley was easy to pick out. He was wearing one of the crisp white robes Sister Smith had made. Unlike the other angels with shined white shoes, his feet were adorned with dirty socks and worn sneakers. But his eyes held a glow that must be likened to a real angel.

Everything was going smoothly as each child took his position on the platform and said his line. Then it was time for Harley. He looked at Pastor Robbins and received a reassuring glance, then began his lines "F-f-f-for unto Y-y-you....."

The children started to laugh and Sister Smith's hankey went straight for her lip. Then a big-bellied deacon spoke out. In a gruff voice, he said, "Now this is just ridiculous. That stuttering kid can't be in the play and that's all there is to it! My father came to church here and his father too. Now I'm not going to let some Christmas play make us a laughingstock. I've talked to the others, and everyone agrees."

Before Pastor Robbins could say anything, Harley ran through the church and out the front door with tears streaming down his cheeks. With a look that spoke volumes directed at the deacon the young pastor hurried out the door in search of Harley.

The next morning of course, was Christmas and the day of the play. By now everyone was aware of the events of the day before. The church was filled with an uneasiness and a degree of dismay for their new young pastor and the commotion he had stirred. The service began with the congregation singing a few Christmas carols.

Pastor Robbins approached the pulpit carrying a small white robe. "As you all know," he said, "Harley Newberry was to be an angel in today's Christmas Pageant. Tragically, on the way home from practice yesterday, Harley was struck by a car. I had considered cancelling today's program, but Harley would want us to go on. I would like to dedicate this program to Harley Greene's honor."

A lump was in the throat of most everyone in the congregation. They now realized how precious a child's life is, and felt they had a part in Harley losing his. The mood was somber as each child meticulously performed his part. Then it was time for Harley's lines. Pastor Robbins picked up the small white robe and walked toward the microphone. Before the preacher could say a word, a child's voice filled the auditorium. "F-f-f-for unto Y-y-y-you is B-b-b-born this D-d-d-day in the City of D-d-d-d-david a S-s-s-avior which is Christ the L-l-l-lord."

Tears filled the eyes of everyone as they patiently listened to a voice stutter out a second scripture "Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me."

After a few moments of only the sound of sobs and sniffles Pastor Robbins came to the pulpit and spoke. He talked about Moses, one of Israel's greatest leaders and how he stuttered, yet God used him mightily. The pastor went on to speak of Jesus and his compassion for the lowly and hurting and poor. I believe that was the best sermon any man ever preached. His words weren't fancy, but they were heart felt.

Now in case you think that boy's voice was the Christmas miracle, you're wrong. It was young Harley's voice they heard. Harley Greene did get hit by a car the day before, but it barely scratched him. As a matter of fact, Pastor Robbins rode with him in the ambulance to the hospital. Then he rode home with him on the bus when they said Harley was just shaken up a bit. After Pastor Robbins preached that message Harley walked down the aisle, and everybody hugged him. Harley had never felt so much love in his life. Things really changed at that church too. They started reaching out to the community and started programs for children after school. They helped them with their homework and fed them and encouraged them and most of all, they loved them. That's the Christmas miracle, how one little stuttering angel changed the heart of an entire congregation.

Today in our society it is easy to get caught up in the festivities and pageantry of Christmas. Let us remember that we are celebrating because Jesus, Creator of the universe came to earth not in fame nor fortune, but rather was born in a lowly stable with evil men seeking to destroy Him from His birth.

Every step Jesus took upon this earth was filled with compassion. He healed the sick, strengthened the feeble, comforted the hurting and preached the gospel to the poor, spending most of His time with society's outcasts.

Humble steps led Jesus to Calvary after He had been spat on, mocked and beaten. Nailed to a cross Jesus shed His blood not for any wrong that He did, but rather for the sins of His own creation. Jesus died for the soldiers who nailed Him to the cross, for Pilate who beat Him, for the religious leaders who conspired against Him, for His own disciples, for the rich and affluent, for the poor and lowly, for the fearful and hurting, for the sad and the lonely, for me, for you.