

# The Christmas Blessing

*As told by Kathleen Elmer*

There is a legend that the Christ Child comes to earth each Christmas Eve and whoever shows him true kindness receives a Christmas blessing.

This is the story of one Christmas Eve when the city was bustling with last minute shoppers, fresh snow was falling. The children's eyes were sparkling. It all seemed like a magic moment, but the hearts of men, only God knows, for suddenly a car screeched around a corner.

"Ho, ho, ho," came the drunken voices of three men. "Hey! Watch-out kid! Don't you know streets are made for cars?"

Too late, the slim figure of a lad was swept to the ground. The boy and his newspapers slowly emerged from the slushy gutter soaking wet. His nose was running, whether from a cold or the cold of the evening, one could not tell because he wore neither warm shoes nor mittens. His coat was a thin, cheap thing, blue the few places where it was not patched. His breeches had holes, and his hair had not seen a comb in a long time. His hands were red, rough, and bleeding. Carefully, he tried to gather up what newspapers he could that were not soaked through.

"Hey, mister!" He bounded up to the corner, forgetting his fall. "Want to buy a newspaper?" The polished gentleman turned and looked first at the boy and then at the soggy newspaper.

"You kids are never going to make anything of yourselves unless you dress nicely and get your hair cut. I don't need a muddy newspaper." The walk sign flashed, and he was gone into the crowd. He crossed the street bumped into two thin brothers with mops of untidy red hair. "Kids" he muttered to himself.

Cars honked and people walked by the boy, while his voice cried out in desperation, "News, news! Anyone care to buy a paper?"

Slowly, the snow began to turn into an icy rain.

An old woman approached him and said, "I'll buy a paper," and then "Oh my!" She gasped at seeing his weary face. "Why don't you go home and get dry?"

He tried to choke out, "But I have no home," for her face seemed kind and understanding.

But then she said, "I'm really sorry. I can't seem to find a nickel in this awful rain."

Gently, he put the paper under her arm and said, "That's ok. You can have it. It's all muddy anyway. Merry Christmas." She smiled gratefully, and then suddenly cried, "Oh, my roast!" and was gone.

The boy sighed and stumbled on.

Bakery smells reminded him that he had not eaten. Forgetting he was penniless, he found himself looking in the bakery window at a tray heaped full of the most delightful cinnamon buns just stuffed with raisins and with creamy pink icing dripping down their crusty sides.

The boy's eyes just popped. Before he knew what he was doing, he shuffled in among the customers. There were rich, fur-clad ladies carefully holding large boxes of decadent cakes. There were harried mothers with babies in one hand and warm loaves of fresh bread in the other. There were also those two poor, red-haired brothers, who held stale, day-old bread carefully as they walked past the boy and left the shop discussing if they'd have enough to bring their mother a Christmas orange.

The boy pressed up against the counter.

"And what will it be for you, young man?" boomed a loud woman's voice from behind the counter.

"I'll...I'll have one of those cinnamon buns, the one with the pink icing," he said.

"That'll be five cents," she smiled falsely while reaching out a fat fist for the nickel.

"But..." the boy quaked, a tear coming into his eye, "I have no money...please?...I'll do the dishes?"

The smiling face turned into a frown. "Beggars! Tramps! Always wanting something for nothing! Get on with you. There are customers who pay waiting behind you."

Filled with shame, he pushed his way out and ran down an alley.

It was dark now, and the boy had not sold any newspapers. A hot tear rolled down his face. He was afraid, lonely, cold, and starving. The minutes turned into

hours as he sought shelter but found not a doorway or even a shed to shield himself from the cold rain.

The icy fingers of death slowly took hold of his frail body. Would no one care if he died?

But then, a tiny light tucked among the buildings brought fresh hope. He gave his feet one last desperate try as he made his way to the door of a tiny metal shack. Next to the door, a candle sat in a window with a child's hand-written note below saying "Happy Birthday Jesus. Love, Josh, Ted, Molly, Mother and Baby Jenny." The boy tried to knock on the door, but fell in a heap at the door, unable to ask even if he could come in.

Inside the cold and drafty house, four red-haired children lay against their mother. She shook from coughing, trying to hold on to life herself. Softly her children sang encouraging songs to lift her spirits.

Each held in their thoughts Christ's birthday and wonderful Christmas blessings. With their last money they had bought an orange for their mother and stale day-old bread for their Christmas feast. And using what they had on hand, they had made as best they could a few lovely gifts to exchange. The older brother Josh looked out the window and cried, "Someone is at the door." His older sister Molly lit the lantern and pushed the door gently open.

Three little ginger heads bobbed beside her.

"It's a boy!"

"A guest!"

"We saw him selling papers and going into the bakery!"

"Mother! Someone has come to visit us!"

Josh and his little brother Ted ran to support his thin cold arms while Molly held open the door feeling the cold rain on her face.

Forgotten was their poverty, as each member clambered to bring the poor boy some piece of dry clothing from their own drawers.

They set him by their meager fire, tucking him in next to their mother. "Poor dear," their mother said softly between her own fits of coughing.

"He shall join us this Christmas Eve. We can celebrate by sharing our orange!" Little Ted declared.

Anxious faces tried to look hopeful, as merry voices encouraged the drooping eyelids of the boy to open and see. Their treasured Christmas orange was brought out and peeled carefully, little spirits of juice and fragrant citrus scent filling the air. Tender hands lifted his head to feed him the delicate precious wedges. Molly carefully brought a cup of warm tea to his lips to warm his empty stomach.

He smiled back at the hungry faces.

Baby Jenny toddled up, reaching her sticky little hands out to the boy.

With a gentle hand, he brought baby Jenny close and hugged her. Molly, Ted, and Josh knelt with their mother close to the tiny form.

Joy came to each heart, warming them body and soul in that cold little room.

Ted put his little hands together and started to pray. In turn, each head bowed in humble thanks to God for friendship, love, and the peace that filled their hearts.

But when they lifted their heads, the boy was gone.

The room was filled with light, and then God spoke to them, "On this Christmas Eve, you showed both kindness and concern, sharing what you have with my Son." Suddenly the boy's voice was heard, "When I was hungry, you fed me. When I was naked, you clothed me. When I was sick, you comforted me. I will gather you together in my heart and there you will know love and understanding."

And from that moment forward their mother grew stronger instead of weaker, until by the spring all her sickness melted away with the last of the year's snow.

The four children always remembered that Christmas and from that time on, they always left a seat by the fire and an orange on the mantle for a guest on Christmas Eve. As they grew into adulthood, they found that the more they gave away, the more was given to them. Each grew to be generous and kind always seeing the poor and welcoming the needy into homes and hearts, knowing that what they did for the least of least they did for the King of Kings.