



## TEACH THE CHILDREN

JUST A WEEK BEFORE CHRISTMAS, I HAD A VISITOR. THIS IS HOW IT HAPPENED. I HAD JUST FINISHED THE HOUSEHOLD CHORES FOR THE NIGHT AND WAS PREPARING TO GO TO BED WHEN I HEARD A NOISE IN THE FRONT ROOM. I OPENED THE DOOR OF THE FRONT ROOM, AND TO MY SURPRISE, SANTA CLAUS HIMSELF STEPPED OUT FROM BEHIND THE CHRISTMAS TREE. HE PLACED HIS FINGERS OVER HIS MOUTH SO I WOULD NOT CRY OUT.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING..." I STARTED TO ASK, BUT THE WORDS CHOKED UP IN MY THROAT AS I SAW HE HAD TEARS IN HIS EYES. HIS USUAL JOLLY MANNER WAS GONE—GONE WAS THE EAGER, BOISTEROUS SOUL WE ALL KNOW.

HE THEN ANSWERED ME WITH A SIMPLE STATEMENT OF "TEACH THE CHILDREN." I WAS PUZZLED. WHAT DID HE MEAN? HE ANTICIPATED MY QUESTION AND WITH ONE QUICK MOVEMENT BROUGHT FORTH A MINIATURE TOY BAG FROM BEHIND THE TREE. AS I STOOD THERE BEWILDERED, SANTA SAID AGAIN, "TEACH THE CHILDREN. TEACH THEM THE OLD MEANING OF CHRISTMAS—THE MEANING THAT CHRISTMAS NOWADAYS HAS FORGOTTEN."

I STARTED TO SAY, "HOW CAN I..." WHEN SANTA REACHED INTO THE TOY BAG AND PULLED OUT A SMALL FIR TREE AND PLACED IT BEFORE THE MANTLE. "TELL THEM THE PURE GREEN COLOR OF THE STately FIR TREE REMAINS GREEN ALL YEAR 'ROUND, THIS DEPICTS THE EVERLASTING HOPE OF MANKIND. GREEN IS THE YOUTHFUL, HOPEFUL, ABUNDANT COLOR OF NATURE. ALL THE NEEDLES POINT HEAVENWARD—SYMBOLS OF MAN'S RETURNING THOUGHTS TOWARD HEAVEN. THE GREAT GREEN TREE HAS BEEN MAN'S BEST FRIEND. IT HAS SHELTERED HIM, WARMED HIM, MADE BEAUTY FOR HIM."

HE AGAIN REACHED INTO HIS BAG AND PULLED OUT A BRILLIANT STAR. "TEACH THE CHILDREN THE STAR WAS THE HEAVENLY SIGN OF A PROMISE LONG AGES AGO. GOD PROMISED A SAVIOR FOR THE WORLD AND THE STAR WAS A SIGN OF THE FULFILLMENT OF THAT PROMISE. THE COUNTLESS SHINING STARS AT NIGHT—ONE FOR EACH MAN—NOW SHOW THE BURNING HOPE OF ALL MANKIND." SANTA GENTLY PLACED THE STAR UPON THE TOP OF THE TREE.

REACHING INTO HIS BAG, HE PULLED OUT A CANDLE. "TEACH THE CHILDREN," WHISPERED SANTA, "THAT THE CANDLE SHOWS MAN'S THANKS FOR THE STAR LONG AGO. ITS SMALL LIGHT IS THE MIRROR OF STARLIGHT. AT FIRST CANDLES WERE PLACED ON THE TREES—THEY WERE LIKE MANY GLOWING STARS SHINING AGAINST THE DARK GREEN. WHEN WE SEE THIS LIGHT, WE ARE REMINDED OF HE WHO DISPLACES THE DARKNESS."

HE REACHED INTO HIS BAG AND BROUGHT FORTH A SMALL WREATH. HE PLACED IT ON THE TREE AND SAID, "PLEASE TEACH THE CHILDREN THE WREATH SYMBOLIZES THE ETERNAL NATURE OF LOVE; IT NEVER CEASES, STOPS OR ENDS. IT IS ONE CONTINUOUS ROUND OF AFFECTION. THE WREATH DOES DOUBLE DUTY. IT IS MADE OF MANY THINGS AND IN MANY COLORS. IT SHOULD REMIND US OF ALL THINGS OF CHRISTMAS" HE THEN PULLED OUT FROM HIS BAG AND ORNAMENTS OF HIMSELF. "TEACH THE CHILDREN THAT I, SANTA CLAUS, SYMBOLIZE THE GENEROSITY AND GOOD WILL WE FEEL DURING THE MONTH OF DECEMBER." HE REACHED IN AGAIN AND PULLED A SINGLE HOLY LEAF. "TEACH THE CHILDREN THAT THE HOLLY PLANT REPRESENTS IMMORTALITY. IT REPRESENTS THE CROWN OF THORNS WORN BY THE SAVIOR. THE RED HOLLY BERRIES REPRESENT THE BLOOD SHED BY HIM."

PICKING UP A GIFT FROM UNDER THE TREE, HE SAID, "TEACH THE CHILDREN THAT GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON. THANKS BE TO GOD FOR THIS UNSPEAKABLE GIFT. TEACH THEN THAT THE WISE MEN BOWED BEFORE THE HOLY BABE AND PRESENTED HIM WITH GOLD,

FRANKINCENSE AND MYRRH. WE SHOULD ALWAYS GIVE GIFTS IN THE SAME SPIRIT AS THE WISE MEN." "TEACH THE CHILDREN THAT THE CANDY CANE REPRESENTS THE SHEPHERD'S CROOK. THE CROOK ON THE STAFF HELPS BRING BACK THE STRAY SHEEP TO THE FLOCK. THE CANDY CANE REPRESENTS THE HELPING HAND WE SHOULD SHOW AT CHRISTMAS TIME. IT IS THE SYMBOL THAT WE ARE OUR BROTHER'S KEEPERS"

HE REACHED IN AGAIN AND PULLED OUT A SMALL ANGEL. "TEACH THE CHILDREN THAT IT WAS THE ANGELS THAT HERALDED IN THE GLORIOUS NEWS OF THE SAVIOR'S BIRTH. THE ANGELS SANG GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, ON EARTH PEACE, AND GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN."

"TEACH THE CHILDREN THAT WE ARE ALL HIS SHEEP. AND AS THE LOST SHEEP ARE FOUND BY THE SOUND OF THE BELL, IT SHOULD RING FOR A MAN TO RETURN TO THE FOLD—IT MEANS GUIDANCE AND RETURN. IT

FURTHER SIGNIFIES THAT ALL ARE PRECIOUS IN THE EYES OF THE LORD." AS THE SOUND OF THE SOFT BELL FADED INTO THE NIGHT, SANTA SLUNG HIS BAG OVER HIS SHOULDER AND LOOKED ABOUT THE ROOM, A FEELING OF SATISFACTION SHONE ON HIS FACE.

THE TWINKLE HAD RETURNED TO HIS EYES, TURNING HE SAID, "REMEMBER, TEACH THE CHILDREN THE TRUE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS, AND NOT PUT ME IN THE CENTER. I AM BUT A HUMBLE SERVANT OF THE ONE THAT IS, AND I BOW DOWN AND WORSHIP HIM, OUR LORD, OUR GOD."

