

Berte Harte, a story teller of the early American West, has a story about a mining camp. A poor woman, a woman of questionable repute, the only woman in the campe, died. She left a little baby and the men of the camp had to take care of it. The baby was lying a box, and they felt that the box was not fit for a baby's crib. So they sent one of men 80 miles to Sacramento by mule to get a rosewood cradle. When the cradle came, the rags on which the baby was sleeping seemed out of place, so the man went back to Sacramento to purchase clothes, lacy frilly ones. When the baby was sressed in the new clothes and placed in the cradle, the men noticed that the floor was dirty. So they scrubbed it clean. And then noticed that the walls and ceiling were dirty so they whitwashed them. Soon they fixed the windows and draped them. And because the baby needed to be quiet at times, they remained still and ceased their rough language and rwoody ways. When weather permitted they took the baby out to the mines and decovered that the minig area had to be cleaned and flowers planted to make the surroundings fit for the baby. Finally, the men began to improve in their personal appearance. Thus the coming of a baby transformed the Roaring Mine Camp into a new and attractive place.

The angel says to Joseph, "Fear not to take Mary for ⁽²⁾ your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she shall bring forth a son and you shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins

Can a baby do that? G Ray Jordan once expressed the miracle of Christmas like this: "God walked down the stairs with a baby in his arms". And he can perform a miracle of faith if we will let him.

If we will let him, he can move us from fear to faith, from jealousy to generosity, from resentment to kindness. Or as the Bible puts it: "He can save us from our sin".

Consider what he can do for the feelings of lowness and despair which sometimes grip us.

In 1247, a hospital was built in London called "St Mary of Bethlehem" Two centuries later it was turned into a hospital for the insane. After that it became known for its noise and confusion. In time, the name became Bedlam, a by-word for noisiness. From Bethlehem to Bedlam. Bedlam sometimes seems to be where many spent our lives. Particularly at this time of year with all its business and pressure

Several years ago there was a cartoon that depicted a husband and wife sitting in a gaily decorated living room at Christmas time. The wife has a deep frown on her face. The caption has the husband saying: "Of course, you're depressed

- 'tis the season to be jolly."

Christmas can be such a frantic time. Herbert Davidson (3) once saw a typographical error in a newspaper. A school was purchasing a new copying machine, except that the newspaper article left the 'y' out of the word 'copying'. Therefore the school was purchasing a 'soping' machine. I bet, the teachers could only wish... Davidson says: "That's what I want

See Christmas - a coping machine"

That is what many would like -to be able to cope. Of course the new testament testimony is that in Christ we can not only cope, but we can conquer.

Nearly every Christmas, we have the opportunity to thrill to the glorious music of Handel's "Messiah" with its climatic "Hallelujah Chorus". But there is a story behind that great piece of music.

In 1741, Georg Friedrich Handel was ready to quit. His health was shattered. His right side was paralyzed and he could barely manage to hold pen. His money was gone. He sank so low he contemplated throwing himself into the river.

Handel's faith, however, sustained him. He found reserves he did not know that God could give him. He sat down and wrote the inspiring arias, recitations, and choruses which have enriched the lives of all of us. The next time you hear selections from the "Messiah" remember that this immortal music came from a man who composed it during a time of peril in his personal life when nevertheless God kept him going.

"You shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins..." (4)

He not only helps us cope with life. But even more, he goes right to the heart of our lives and delivers us from our most tragic traits.

There is a paint advertisement which says, "save the surface and you save all". That will not apply to the human soul. Yet we find people who think that if they save the surface of their reputation and position they have saved all. Such are the people who call upon God to save them from the consequences of their sin. A prisoner may ask God to save him from the consequence of his crime. A young girl who is faced with disgrace and social ruin may ask God to save her from that. Jesus, however, nowhere indicates that he came into the world to save people from the consequences of their sin...he came, rather, to save us from sin.

"Save the surface and you save all" does not apply to the human soul.

Sooner or later we are going to need something real - something that goes beneath the surface. Or better yet, Someone who goes beneath the surface.

Many years ago, two land surveyors came from the city to survey the mountains of North Wales. They stayed for a week. ^{Each day} They climbed the steep slopes of Snowdonia, charting ~~the~~ contours, checking landmarks, tracing the mountain streams, then return to an out mountain cottaged where they stayed.

Towards the end of the week, just before they retired an old shepherd came to the door and suggested that he would accompnay them on the mountain the next day. (5)

The men answered: "You don't need to, we can't get lost we have our compasses, charters and maps..." But the shepherd said: "I'd better come with you" Again they said "there is really no need..the charts will bring us back". "But" continued the old shepherd, "I know the mountain like the back of my hand, I know here the deep ravines are, I know where the plants hide the crevices..." But the men interrupted him and said: "Its all on the map, this map will bring us back". Then, there was a pause and the old shepherd spoke once more. "You may have a map, but the mist and fog are not on the map".

Yes, we ought to be able to run our lives..we have the tools of modern technology, the insights of the social sciences. But over our lives there is the fog and mist of our fallen nature. We need an internal guide to lead our steps.

We need the baby to transform us, and he can. He can give us what the whole world has come to know as the Christian spirit — the spirit of kindness, generosity, love and self-giving. By letting him dwell in our hearts, he can light up our lives. He who does not have Christmas in the ~~the~~ heart will not find it under a tree.

Perhaps it is illustrated by the story of a Christmas play involving youngsters. The leader chose a boy of seven to play the role of the inn-keeper at Bethlehem. His family had always practiced hospitality, and he had trouble turning Mary and Joseph away with a curt "there is no room in the inn". But he had his part down pat by the end of the rehearsals. Then came the big night. He boomed out "There is not room in the inn: with great authority...but he couldn't resist adding "but come in anyhow, and have some cookies and milk".

That, of course, wasn't how it was supposed to turn out. That isn't the way life is supposed to turn out.

But it can ,,, if you will let the Lord Jesus into your heart.