

AWAY IN A MANGER

*Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head.
The stars in the sky looked down where He lay,
The little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.*

*The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
But little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes.
I love Thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky,
And stay by my cradle till morning is nigh.*

AWAY IN THE MANGER

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NEW WINDSOR, Md. — The beloved carol, written anonymously, evokes images of the circumstances of the birth of Christ, that today, almost two thousand years later, make Christmas on the farm very special.

"Away in a manger..." Of all the nooks and spaces in the barn, the manger seems most worthy of cradling our Lord. At feeding time, all our bovine friends routinely line the troughs, in eager anticipation of grain laced with aromatic molasses. Furry-headed beasts, sporting thick, curly winter coats, lick clean their savory grain. An extra scoop is given for good measure here and there to those deemed most in need of an extra helping. Heads bob up and down and side to side in order to reach every morsel. The countless strokes of sandpaper tongues leave the oaken trough as smooth as glass with a patina that any connoisseur of fine furniture would appreciate. The manger yields no splinters to the bare hand that runs along its richly grained lumber.

When the graining is done, the manger is then heaped full of the finest alfalfa and timothy hay from the mow. The bales nearly touch the rafters at Christmastime. The best bales are sought out on the coldest nights.

All long-lashed cow eyes are trained on the ladder which leads to the mow. They watch with expectation as each bale is tossed down to their level. Just placing the bales in the manger won't suffice. As the twine is cut, each flake of hay is fluffed and equally distributed for the clientele.

The manger of smooth oak boards and filled with fluffy grasses reminiscent of the summer past make a bed like the one our Lord slept in that starry night.

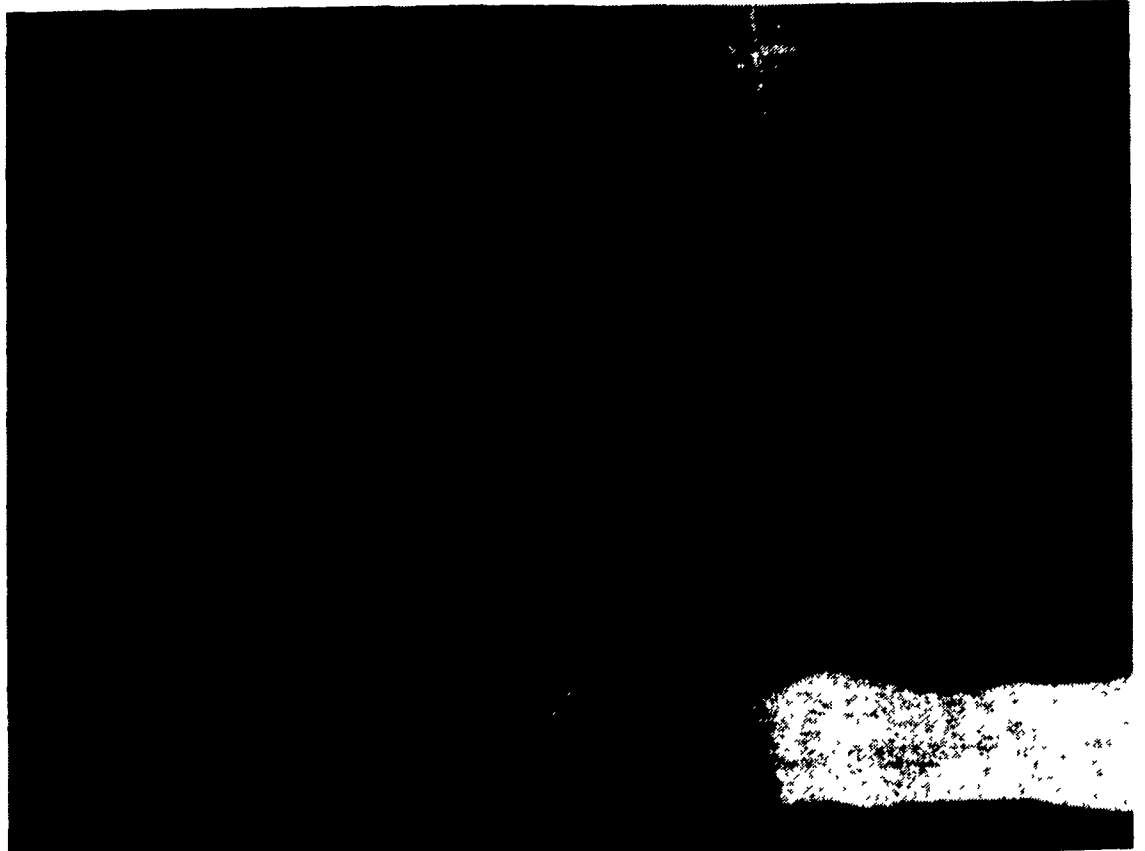
"The stars in the sky looked down where he lay..." December skies are traditionally dramatic and full of paintbrush-like strokes of fiery oranges and celestial blues. Those hues give way to shortened days and the early onset of evening. The payoff comes with the twinkling of stars and a bright full moon hung low in a crisp mid-night sky.

Nestled in a valley, away from the orange glow of city lights, the farm is the perfect setting for admiring the stars in the sky. The farming way of life lends itself to many opportunities to be out under the night sky. Whether it is a night trek to the barn to run water, to check on a cow about to calve, or a quick dash out to the woodpile for another log for the fire, the stars are out. They must have looked just as brilliant two thousand years ago when they beamed down on the face of the newborn King as He lay in the manger.

"The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes..." The gentle lowing of a cow with her newborn calf is a soothing sound. As she nuzzles and gently nudges her babe to nurse, the cow 'talks'.

Legend has it that animals can talk on Christmas eve at midnight. What might they say? Do they rejoice in knowing the role that their ancestors played on Christmas? Did the animals in the stable with Mary and Joseph utter words of comfort to the babe nestled in the hay in their manger?

Christmas on the farm is indeed very special. But Christmas anywhere is special to all who rejoice in the anniversary of Christ's birth. Another hymn, written one hundred years ago by Christina G. Rossetti, poses an important question:



Members at the U.C.C. church in Reinholds place something they treasure before the manger as if they were bringing it to the Christ Child. One brought a key to his home for Jesus had no place to call His own. What will you give?



This is the Schuster's barn that houses the manger referred to in the story.

*"What can I give Him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man, I would do my part;
Yet what can I give Him - Give my heart."*

Often seen on the bumpers of cars is a sign of the times which should be heeded: "Wise men still seek Him."