

# The Star of Bethlehem

By Neil MacDonald

The clouds are ominously dark upon Olympus' brow;  
The Delphic oracle has lost its ancient prestige now,  
For faith and trust in pagan gods are passing fast away,  
And men are weary of beliefs fast hastening to decay.

With wistful, ardent longings hearts of millions are aglow  
With hope that brighter day would dawn upon their night of woe,  
And a spirit of unrest stirs the nations near and far,  
But they wist not of the rising of Bethlehem's bright star.

Oh, vestals of the sacred fire, your lights are growing dim!  
The gods of Rome's Pantheon now must leave the way for Him  
Of whom inspired Isaiah writes and classic Virgil sings,  
A King for whom so lowly born no welcome pealing rings.



No regal pageant marks His birth, no princes greetings bring,  
But angel choristers aloft a heavenly anthem sing,  
And star-led sages from the east adore the Child divine  
And place their priceless gifts beside the Infant's manger shrine.

And since that bright, auspicious day since He His reign began  
Ideals purer far have swayed the destinies of man,  
And faith, so long eclipsed by doubt, illumed the human mind,  
Which, long immersed in gloom, had sought some certitude to find.

He taught us how to live aright, to suffer and be strong;  
That he who's ruled by selfish aims is ever in the wrong;  
That blessedness, not happiness, should be our constant aim,  
And that the right should be esteemed above success and fame.

He showed us how a sin-stained soul in purity might shine  
And wretched, ruined lives assume a semblance of divine;  
He taught us love should rule our hearts and rectitude life's plan;  
He taught us kindness and proclaimed the brotherhood of man.

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## Mexico's Christmas Posadas

One who has been away from the United States for a term of years the Christmas holidays there seem like a feverish rush, and the simple pleasures indulged in during the nine days of posadas in Mexico are returned to with a certain measure of relief.

A posada is an inn, and the idea pervading these festivities is that story, known to all the world, of Caesar Augustus, who, in the height of his power, wished to know the number of people who bowed beneath his scepter. In order to determine the fact he decreed that a census should be taken of all the nations composing the great Roman empire. To effect this Augustus sent twenty-four commissioners to the different parts of his world. The edict commanded that every person, rich or poor, weak or strong, should go to the place of his birth or to the original place of his family to have his or her name inscribed in the Roman registry.

Joseph and Mary, who were both of the royal house of David, went to the town of Bethlehem. They found it so full of people on the same mission that they wandered about the town for nine days seeking shelter. On the ninth day they were allowed to stay in the stable of a posada, and there the Nino Santo, or Holy Child, was born. The posadas are held for nine evenings in commemoration of those weary days.

Of course there are miserable homes where no sign of a posada is held, but

mexicans, rich and poor, are generous. No matter how dirty and ragged, every one is welcome in the churches, beautifully decorated, and at the nightly posadas held in them, though there the penatas are omitted, as the celebrations are entirely of a religious nature. To the children the penatas are very important features of the season. They



THE BABE IS PLACED IN THE MANGER.

represent men, women, goats and other animals, beautiful flowers, immense chrysanthemums, giant roses and peonies, lovely dahlias, nuns, monks in full costume and graceful musical instruments. Each figure contains an empty jar or penata of pottery, which is hid-

den by the decorations or costumes of colored tissue paper, most skillfully applied. The jars are filled with goodies and unbreakable toys.

When friends have been invited to a posada the house is decorated with evergreens and mosses, flowers and tinsel in all the rooms and corridors. In one room is the scene in the stable of Bethlehem—the stable yard and servants, the animals, trees and plants, groups of Biblical characters, little toy fountains. All that money can do to beautify the beginning of the "old, old story" is done according to the taste and means of the host and hostess. The little manger, amid soft lights and draperies, stands ready for the Nino Santo.

A procession of the guests and family forms in another part of the house, and the pilgrims, or peregrinos, march two and two, led by one who carries the Babe. Singing sweet hymns and the litanies, they go through the house, winding in and out of the rooms and galleries.

At last the wanderers stop at the door of the room in which is the manger. Two voices, representing Mary and Joseph, in a wailing hymn beg to be admitted. Voices within chant a denial. Finally a voice announces who they are that plead for shelter; then the door is thrown open, and the peregrinos are allowed to enter. The Babe is placed in the manger, often by a priest, and songs of rejoicing burst forth.

The penatas are next on the programme, the details varying with the fancy of the host.

In a convenient place the penata is suspended, and the little folk, and big ones who choose to take part in the merriment, are blindfolded one at a time, turned around a time or two, then given a stick with which to break the jar if possible. So many trials, then another tries. When one succeeds

the contents fall to the floor and a scramble follows to see who gets the most. In some old families there are evenings when the numerous servants partake of the joys of the posada and share in the souvenirs and refreshments provided.—Collier's Weekly.

## Christmas Eve In Bethlehem

BETHLEHEM, the central spot of interest in the Holy Land at Christmastide, is a Christian town set in the heart of Mohammedanism, where once a year the Greek church grants the use of the grotto of the Nativity to the Latin church. The ceremonies begin on Dec. 24 by the image of the youthful Christ being carried from the basilica of St. Helena to the sacred grotto of the Nativity, where the traditional spot of Christ's birth is marked by a silver star set in the rocky pavement.

The service begins at 10 o'clock in the evening. It opens with the chanting of psalms without any musical accompaniment. The patriarch of Jeru-



TYPICAL BETHLEHEM FAMILY OF TODAY.

salem usually officiates in the grotto, but on this occasion he is represented by the Latin bishop. The interior of the church is most picturesque, for there are only a few chairs provided for foreign visitors, while the bulk of the congregation is made up of the Bethlehemite women in their blue dresses with red frontlets, wearing peaked caps when married and flat caps covered by white veils when single.

As they enter the church they at first kneel down and then sit upon the ground in true oriental fashion. "In the dimly lighted church," says one who has seen the service, "these squatting varicolored figures, with their beautiful faces lit up by fits and starts by flashes of the candles, intent on devotion, seem like so many modern Madonnas come to celebrate the glory of the first Madonna."

Precisely at midnight the pontifical high mass is celebrated, the figure of Christ is brought in a basket and deposited upon the high altar, and the procession forms to accompany it to the crypt. As the long, chanting procession winds through the dimly lighted church there is something weirdly solemn about the ceremony, and as the sacred image passes various acts of worship are performed by the devout attendants. On the procession moves through the rough hewn, dimly lit passages from the Latin church to the grotto of the Nativity.

When the procession of richly robed ecclesiastics reaches the silver star set in the pavement the priests pause and stand in a group about the basket, which is deposited upon the star. Around this star is the inscription, "Hic de virgine natus est" ("Here he was born of a virgin"), for this is the spot upon which tradition places the actual birth of Jesus. There the impressive narrative of the birth of Jesus as found in the gospels is slowly recited, and when the passage (Luke ii, 7), "And she brought forth her firstborn Son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn," is read the figure is reverently picked up from the star and carried over to the opposite side of the grotto, where it is put into a rock cut manger. This concludes the service.—London Sphere.

### Mistletoe Myths.

Many English girls believe that they will not be wedded inside of twelve months unless they have at least one kiss under the mistletoe. In many counties a berry is plucked from the mistletoe with each kiss, and when there are no berries no kisses are allowed. Mistletoe used to be considered a charm or amulet to ward off the baleful influence of witches. It was also considered that its influence was irresistible, that no one could possibly pass beneath it without yielding to its power, and hence both matron and maid must submit to the salutation which has since become customary.—Self Culture Magazine.

### Christmas Candy.

To make chocolate caramels dissolve over a fire one cupful of molasses and two teaspoonfuls of sugar; add one-quarter of a pound of grated chocolate and a piece of butter the size of an egg; boil for fifteen or twenty minutes; pour into flat buttered dishes to the depth of a quarter of an inch and when cold cut into squares an inch in size.

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