

EXPLORERS

The Way, Truth, and Life Series

December 2, 2018



A Real Christmas

Judy Carlsen

"It's my turn," Mary told her mother. "I'm the right age, and my name is even Mary!"

Mother laughed. "You do have a special name. But how can you be sure you'll be chosen to be Mary in the play?"

Mary answered, "It's my year."

"I hope you won't be upset if it doesn't happen," Mother said.

"I'll be fine," Mary insisted. "I just know this Christmas is going to be very special for me."

"Every Christmas should be special," Mother said. "I'm praying that this will be a good one."

Mary's family had had a hard year. In the spring strong winds had toppled a large tree in their yard onto the roof. Their home insurance had covered most of the damage to the roof, but many items in the attic had

been broken, including most of their Christmas decorations.

After Mary's father lost his job, it took him four months to find other work, making it hard to pay bills. No money was left for extras.

Then gasoline prices went up, and Mary's father needed to drive to work each day. That meant the family had to tighten their budget even more.

That same day her father told the family at supper-time about a hard decision. "Mother and I have decided that we cannot visit Grandfather and Grandmother for Christmas this year. With Christmas in the middle of the week, I don't get much time off. I get off a few hours early on Christmas Eve, and I'm off on Christmas Day, but that's all. I haven't worked there long enough to earn any vacation time. It's too long a trip to go for only part of one day."

Mary knew her father was right. The trip took about six hours each way.

Tommy, Mary's younger brother, said sadly, "What will we do? We always go to Grandfather and Grandmother's house!"

Tommy's mother smiled. "We'll have a good Christmas right here at home. We'll talk to everyone on the phone on Christmas Day."

Mary's father said, "Maybe we can visit them when the weather is better. Maybe they can come to our house."

"Couldn't they come here for Christmas?" Mary asked.

Mary's father replied, "When we asked them, they said it's too far to come for such a short time."

"I wish Christmas was always on a weekend," Mary said. "It would be much easier for everyone."

"Amen to that," her father agreed.

"We can still have a wonderful celebration," Mary's mother added.

Trying to think positively, Mary said, "That's true. We can have fun playing in the snow." Then she turned to Tommy and added, "You know how you love making snowmen."

Tommy replied, "Right! We can give our gifts and drink hot chocolate and sing carols."

"That's the spirit!" his father exclaimed.

The following Sunday at the beginning of Sunday school, the head teacher announced a change in the Christmas program. "The person who planned to direct the play is very sick. We don't have time to get another

director and put together a new play, since Christmas is only a few weeks away. Instead, we want each class to share a song or a poem."

Mary could not believe her ears. This was supposed to be her year to be Mary. Why had God let the director get sick? Then she stopped herself, realizing her thoughts were selfish. She knew that instead of feeling sorry for herself, she should be praying that the sick woman would soon be well.

"I'm sorry," Mary's mother said when Mary told her of the change. "I know your heart was set on playing Mary. Maybe you can next year."

"Maybe next year," thought Mary, "things will be back to normal. Then we can have a real Christmas."

Mary and her brother planned to earn money for Christmas gifts by shoveling snow for neighbors, but the weather stayed too warm. On many days rain fell instead of snow.

"We can't shovel rain," Mary said sadly. "What can we do?"

When Tommy and Mary went to their mother for some suggestions, she responded, "What about offering to help our neighbors with their household chores? You could ask about going to the supermarket for them or raking their leaves."

The two children went around to all their neighbors to see whether anyone needed help with anything. The people at most of the houses said they had family members who helped them with errands. Finally, at one house with a big yard an elderly couple said they needed their leaves raked.

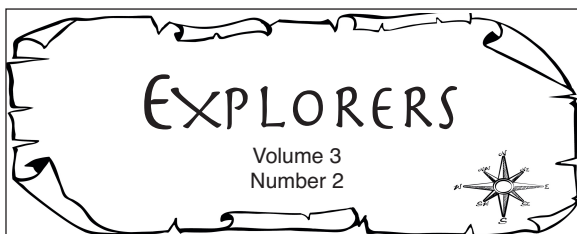
The children spent four hours gathering up all the leaves. It was a lot of work, but they received ten dollars for their efforts.

"It's a start, Mary said to Tommy as they wearily walked home.

"Woof! Woof!" They could see their next-door neighbor's dog barking at the front window. Buddy was a playful dog and loved to run in his back yard when Tommy and Mary were outside.

Mary and her brother waved at Buddy as he barked a welcome from inside the house.

A few minutes later, they were sitting at their kitchen table, drinking hot chocolate and enjoying their mother's freshly baked peanut butter cookies when the phone rang. Their mother picked it up and in a few minutes said, "I see. Yes, I'm sure they would be happy to help, Mr. Coats. I'll send them over."



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After putting the receiver back in its cradle, Mother said, "Well, children, you may have another job. That was Mr. Coats, our next-door neighbor. He said he fell and hurt his leg. He needs someone to walk Buddy for a few days. What do you think?"

Both children nodded, and Mary said, "That would be great!" Pausing, she added, "I mean, we're sorry Mr. Coats hurt himself, but we would love to walk Buddy."

"I wonder how much he will pay us," Tommy said.

Tommy's mother smiled. "That will be up to Mr. Coats. You just do your best job. I'm sure he will be fair."

Mary and her brother began walking Buddy that very day. As they started down the sidewalk, they met another neighbor who was walking her dog. Buddy and the other dog touched noses. "They must be friends!" Mary said.

"Oh, yes. My dog and Buddy know each other," the woman said. "Would you like to walk my dog sometimes too? I am working later these days, and sometimes I don't get home until very late at night. I'd like you to take him out around 5:00 p.m."

"We'd be glad to walk your dog," Mary said.

In the weeks before Christmas, the children earned a good amount of money doing jobs for neighbors.

"What shall we buy Father and Mother?" Mary asked her brother.

On Saturday, still wondering what to get, they asked their mother for permission to look at the mall. She was going there anyway and said they could go with her.

In a Christian bookstore, the children found a beautiful picture of Jesus talking to people and holding children on His lap. They liked the picture and decided it could be a combined gift for both their parents. "This will be a great surprise," Mary said happily.

"What do you think we should buy with the rest of the money we earned?" Tommy asked.

"Let's pray and ask God to show us what to do," Mary answered. "I'm sure He will guide us if we ask Him."

Before going to sleep, they both prayed for wisdom in knowing what to do with the money.

The next morning in Sunday school, the teacher talked about a needy family in their community. "The family lost everything in a fire," she explained. "We are trying to get some money together to help them."

Mary and her brother looked at each other from across the room and nodded. Here was God's answer!

When Christmas Day finally arrived, the children's father read the Christmas narrative in Luke 2 and prayed for God to bless each one. Then they took turns praying and thanking God for bringing them through this difficult year.

What joy to see their parents' smiles when they unwrapped the picture of Jesus! "We will hang it right over our sofa," their mother said. "Each day it will help us remember that Jesus Christ is the real reason for the season."

—Gospel Herald and Sunday School Times



We Were There

"When you get home from school, go back to the woods and start sawing on the elm tree." Those were my father's orders for my brother and me one wintry day when we were boys. So, late in the afternoon there we were, sawing away on the old elm. The log was big and tough. The saw pulled hard. Our arms and backs ached. It was slow, hard work, but Dad wanted that old elm cut up into wood. We did not know where Dad was, but we knew what he wanted us to do.

Then unexpectedly around the bend in the road the horses came trotting with the sleigh. Dad was coming to get a load of wood. He was in good spirits, too, and cheerily called to us as he drove up. He paid little attention to how much work we had done, but it seemed that he was happy just to find us doing what he had told us to do. We soon learned the reason why.

Said he, "I just came from your Uncle Walt's. I told him that you fellows were supposed to be back here sawing on this elm. Your Uncle Walt said, 'I'll dare say they'll be at the neighbor's playing.' I said, 'They'll be there.'"

We were there. How good it made us feel!

— Selected

Answer to last week's puzzle:

Words — by the way, Y.T., the way, Yield, day, Y.T., Thaddeus, sat, TT, thorn, navy, you, us, should, dew, would, deliver, rest, t.g., goest, tan, Nob.

Message — I am the LORD thy God . . . which leadeth thee **by the way that thou shouldest go** (Isa. 48:17).

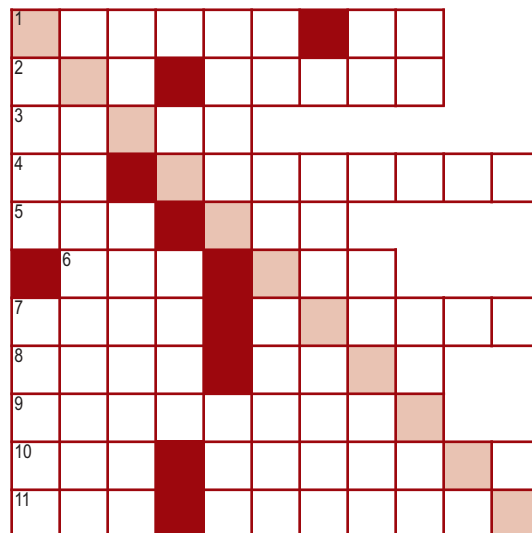
PENCIL ACTIVITIES

Progressive Acrostic

Connie Foster

In today's lesson Isaac refused to fight with his neighbors, but endeavored to be at peace with them. Each scripture below is about peace. Look up each one, and place the missing word or words into the row of boxes with the corresponding number. When you are finished, the shaded boxes will contain a word that goes with today's lesson.

1. "Seek peace, and ____" (Ps. 34:14).
2. "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom. . . . All ____ are peace" (Prov. 3:13-17).
3. "Follow . . . peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure ____" (2 Tim. 2:22).
4. "Behold, I give unto him ____ of peace" (Num. 25:12).
5. "Behold the upright: for ____ of that man is peace" (Ps. 37:37).
6. "Follow peace with ____" (Heb. 12:14).
7. "God ____ us to peace" (1 Cor. 7:15).
8. "The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them ____ peace" (Jas. 3:18).
9. "The meek . . . shall delight themselves in the ____ of peace" (Ps. 37:11).
10. "He maketh peace in ____" (Ps. 147:14).
11. "When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even ____ to be at peace with him" (Prov. 16:7).



Word-A-Gram

Connie Foster

Today's key verse begins, "Blessed are the peacemakers." Each scripture below tells something about peace. Look up each verse, and fill in the missing words. Then transfer each numbered letter to the box with the corresponding number. When you are finished, you will be able to read another scripture about peace.

1. "God hath ____ us to peace" (1 Cor. 7:15).
17 1 4
2. "Let the peace of ____ your ____" (Col. 3:15).
13 23 8 5 10
3. "Have peace ____" (Mark 9:50).
15 24 19 27 9
4. "____ at peace ____" (1 Thess. 5:13).
20 11 29 26 22
5. "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably ____" (Rom. 12:18).
28 16 21 12
6. "____ the things which make for peace" (Rom. 14:19).
25 3 2
7. "____ peace, and ____ it" (Ps. 34:14).
18 14 7

See answer next week.

1	2	3	4	5	6	Q	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	(1	27	28	29	2	:	2)			