Stories that light up *our hearts*

Stories and prayers for families
through Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany



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Province of St. Nicholas of Tolentine · Augustinian Recollects



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FOREWORD

A Time to Come Together

Dear families, dear brothers and sisters,

When the commissions and offices of our province met this November, two tasks stood out clearly, and we want to take them on together: helping our whole province live with a vocational heart, and walking alongside families. This book grew out of the wish to begin putting those two tasks into practice with something simple, something that could find its way into our homes and keep us company through Advent and Christmas.

To give our province a vocational heart means helping one another discover that God is still calling, that our lives have meaning, and that each of us can answer his love from within our own story. To hear that call, we need places where we can be ourselves, ask our questions out loud, and feel that someone is listening with genuine interest and respect.

The family is meant to be one of those places. It is where we learn how to relate to others, where we discover what we are good at, and where we first begin to ask who we are and what we have to offer. When people feel loved and welcomed, they find the freedom to grow, to make decisions, and to commit their lives.

We know that this is not always easy. Our homes also hold tiredness, worries, hard silences, and wounds that need time to heal. Every family has a story that deserves to be heard. We want to come close to that story with respect, to accompany its searching, and to recognize all the good that is already there in everyday life.

Working with families asks this of us: to walk beside them, to learn from them, and to build our communities together. It invites us to take care of our encounters, to listen before we answer, and to trust that people grow when they find support and companionship.

The seven stories in this book take us into a small neighborhood where there is waiting, absence, misunderstanding, and second

chances. Little by little, the people in it learn to look out for one another as they prepare to welcome Jesus. We may recognize something of our own lives in them: a conversation we keep putting off, a wish to be closer to someone, or simply the need to know we are not alone.

Through these stories, we want to draw near to the heart of Christmas: the Son of God becomes man, shares our life, and comes to save us out of love. In Jesus, we discover a God who comes close to our weakness and invites us to receive his love. At the manger, we can come just as we are, with our gratitude and also with whatever we still find hard to understand.

I want to offer special thanks to Fr. Alfonso Dávila for the time he gave to writing these stories, for the tenderness with which he brought their characters to life, and for the care he took to bring the mystery of Christmas close to our families.

Alongside the stories, you will find moments of prayer for the four Sundays of Advent, for

dinner on Christmas Eve, for Christmas Day, and for the feast of the Epiphany. Feel free to adapt them to the rhythm of your home. All it takes is a moment to gather, listen to the Gospel, and bring to the Lord whatever is in your hearts. Let the children ask their questions, let the grown-ups share their memories, and let each person find their own way to take part. Silence, too, can be a way of being together.

I hope these pages help us live this Christmas as families, with time to really see and hear one another. May they encourage us to reach out to those who are alone, to greet our neighbors, and to care for the bonds that hold our communities together.

And I hope we keep working together, religious and lay people, families and communities, so that our province may be a place where every person can discover God's call and find companions for the journey.

May the Child Jesus, born in Bethlehem, bless our homes and give us the joy of knowing that we are loved.

Fr. Eduardo Chávez Téllez Girón, OAR
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BEFORE YOU BEGIN

How to Use These Pages

This book offers seven gatherings around Jesus, from the beginning of Advent to the feast of the Epiphany. Every family can find its own rhythm. There is no need to plan a perfect celebration in order to spend a little time together.

During Advent, we begin each Sunday around the Advent wreath. One person reads the opening words, we light the candles, and we listen to the Gospel. Then we keep a moment of silence and pray. Anyone who wants to can share a thought; no one has to.

The story is for a day during the week when we can read it without rushing. We can take turns reading, stop when a child asks a question, or talk about it when we finish. Each week also suggests a simple gesture to help us carry into daily life what we have prayed and read.



On Christmas Eve and on Epiphany, we pray before the meal and before cutting the king cake. On Christmas Day, we gather around the nativity scene. The stories for those days can be read before or after, whenever it feels most natural for your family.

The instructions in italics are there to guide gestures and silences; there is no need to read them aloud. One person can read the prayer for everyone, and we all answer “Amen.” We can also pray it together.

The Gospel passages were chosen because of their connection to each gathering. They are not necessarily the readings from that day’s Mass.

Our road to Bethlehem

1. **Hope**
   First Sunday of Advent
   November 29, 2026

2. **Peace**
   Second Sunday of Advent
   December 6, 2026

3. **Joy**
   Third Sunday of Advent
   December 13, 2026

4. **Love**
   Fourth Sunday of Advent
   December 20, 2026

5. **Christmas Eve**
   God comes to our home
   December 24, 2026

6. **Christmas Day**
   The Son of God lives among us
   December 25, 2026

7. **The Epiphany**
   Overjoyed
   January 3, 2027



FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Hope

November 29, 2026

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Hope

On Sunday, we light the candle

OPENING WORDS

Today Advent begins. We gather with everything we are waiting for, with the people we carry in our hearts, and with the desire to welcome Jesus. As we light this first candle, we remember that God comes to meet us. Let us listen to how Joseph received the news that Emmanuel, God-with-us, was coming.

We light the first purple candle on the wreath.

GOSPEL **Matthew 1:18-25**

> 18 This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. His mother Mary was engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. 19 Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. 20 But as soon as he had made up his mind, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. The child in her comes from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to

> name him Jesus, because he will save his people
> from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill
> what the Lord had said through the prophet:
> 23 "Look, the virgin will conceive and give birth
> to a son, and they will name him Emmanuel,"
> which means "God is with us." 24 When Joseph
> woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord had
> commanded him and took his wife into his
> home. 25 He had no relations with her until she
> gave birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.



SILENCE

We keep a few moments of silence. What is each of us waiting for right now? We can tell Jesus about it and ask him to stay with us while we wait.

PRAYER

Jesus, we light this first candle because we are waiting for you.

You know what we long for, the people we miss, and the questions we sometimes find hard to say out loud.

There are days when the waiting feels long. We would like to know that everything will

turn out all right, to have the people we love close by, and to find an answer soon.

Stay with us while we wait. Teach us to trust in your love, even when we cannot yet see the way.

May there be a light in this home for anyone who feels alone, time to listen, and someone ready to open the door.

While we wait for your birth, help us draw close to those who need us.

Come, Lord Jesus. Make our hope grow.

AMEN.

A GESTURE FOR THE WEEK

This week, let's light a candle and pray for someone who is waiting for news or who needs some company.



STORY 1

The Lighted Window

To read during the week

Grandma always said that November crept into a house through your feet. That was why she wore two pairs of socks and eyed every open door with suspicion, as if winter were standing behind each one, waiting to be invited in.

That afternoon, though, she was the one who opened the living room window.

"Hand me the lantern, Lucy."

It was a little brass lantern with a crooked pane of glass that nobody had ever managed

to straighten. Lucy carried it over with both hands.

"What do you want it for?"

"To put it right here."

"But you can barely see it."

Grandma lit the candle and closed the little glass door.

"From inside, not much. You have to look at it from outside."



From inside, not much. You have to look at it from outside.

Lucy didn't answer. She was nine years old, and she had spent the whole afternoon trying not to ask a certain question. She had managed it through lunch, while they cleared the table, and for the seven minutes it took her to put her colored pencils in order. Now she couldn't hold it in any longer.

"Is Dad coming home for Christmas?"

Grandma kept one hand on the lantern.

"We hope so, sweetheart."

“But is he coming?”

Her father had been working out of state since September. On Sundays he called after dinner and asked about school, about the cold, and about a tooth Lucy had lost so long ago that the new one was almost all the way in. Lately he kept saying he didn’t know yet which days he could come home.

“We don’t know yet.”

Lucy leaned her forehead against the window. Across the street was Mr. Walsh’s house, with all the blinds pulled down.

“Then I don’t like waiting.”

Grandma smoothed her hair and didn’t say anything.



They made the Advent wreath on a big platter. It had green branches, four candles, and a ribbon that always ended up in the butter, though nobody could ever explain how.

Mom lit the first candle, the purple one. Then she read a few words from the Gospel:

“They will name him Emmanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’”



Lucy looked at the empty spot on the hutch where the nativity scene would go.

"Then why did he take so long to come?"

Mom rested the book on her knees.

"A lot of the people who were waiting for him probably asked the same thing."

"Didn't they get tired of waiting?"

"I'm sure they did."

The answer surprised Lucy. She had always figured the people in the Bible were better at waiting than she was.

Grandma pulled her chair closer.

"Mary had to wait for him to be born, too. And get his little clothes ready. And sleep however she could with that big belly."

Lucy pictured Mary rolling over in bed, trying to get comfortable. She had never thought about that before.

"Did Jesus kick?"

Mom smiled.

"He was a real baby, Lucy."

Lucy stared at the flame. God had been as small as her baby cousin Nicky. He would have had tiny fingernails. He would have wrapped his hand around somebody's finger.

Before they put things away, she asked, very quietly, for Dad to be able to come home.



On Monday, when she got back from school, she saw Mr. Walsh standing at his front door. He was holding a bag of bread and searching for his keys with the look of a man who suspects his pockets have teamed up to make fun of him.

Lucy found a key lying next to the step.

"You dropped this."

"Ah. I knew it."

Mr. Walsh had enormous eyebrows. When he frowned, it looked like two little brushes were trying to sweep his nose.

Lucy pointed at his window.

"Aren't you putting up any lights?"

"Not this year."

"We put a lantern in ours."

"I saw it."

He said it looking over at Lucy's house. Then he unlocked the door and went in.



“They used to have a huge nativity set,” Mom said that night. “His wife made the mountains out of brown packing paper.”

Lucy remembered Mrs. Walsh handing her clementines. She always told her to take two, because one gets lonely in your pocket.

“Is he still sad?”

“He misses her very much.”

Lucy thought about the closed blinds.

“Can we bring him a snack?”

They made hot chocolate. Grandma found a pitcher with a lid, and Lucy picked out six cookies, although one broke and had to be eaten so the plate would look presentable.

Mr. Walsh took a long time to open the door.

“You didn’t have to go to any trouble.”

But he stepped aside to let them in.

The living room smelled like wood and like a house that had been shut up too long. Next to the hutch was a box with the word CHRISTMAS written on it in blue letters.

While Mom poured the hot chocolate, Lucy asked:

“Is the nativity set in there?”

The man nodded.

“Maggie knew how to set it up. I just took things out of the box.”

“I know how to take things out of boxes too.”

For the first time, Mr. Walsh’s eyebrows moved a little farther apart.

They opened the box.

There was a shepherd missing a foot, three sheep wrapped in a sock, and a Saint Joseph with a little piece of tinsel still stuck to him. Mr. Walsh held the manger for a long time.

“She always put the baby in last.”

Lucy found him inside a little box.

He was small. His arms were open wide.

“My grandma says Jesus was a real baby.”

“That’s right,” said Mr. Walsh.

“Then he probably cried when he was cold.”

The man ran his thumb along the edge of the manger.

“I suppose his mother picked him right up.”

They set the figures out on the hutch. Before they left, Lucy helped him raise the blinds.

That night Dad called. He still didn't know anything about the trip.

Lucy's mouth trembled a little, but she managed to tell him about the sheep that had spent the year in a sock. Dad laughed and wanted to know if they smelled like feet.

After she hung up, she went to the window.

Across the street, a light was on. Mr. Walsh was setting something next to the glass. When he saw her, he raised his hand.

Lucy raised hers.

Then she moved the lantern closer, carefully, so he could see it better.

"Jesus," she whispered, "take care of Dad tonight."

She thought for a moment.

"And Mr. Walsh too."

Grandma came to close the curtains, but Lucy left a little gap.

Just wide enough for the light to get through.



SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Peace

December 6, 2026

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Peace

On Sunday, we light the candle

OPENING WORDS

Today we light the second candle of Advent. We place before Jesus our relationships: the words that bring us closer and the hurts that still need care. He knows our story, and he invites us to seek reconciliation. Let us listen to his word, ready to take a first step, however small.

We light the first and the second candles, both purple.

GOSPEL Matthew 5:23-25

> 23 So if you are bringing your gift to the altar and
> there you remember that your brother has
> something against you, 24 leave your gift there at
> the altar. Go first and be reconciled with your
> brother, and then come back and offer your gift.
> 25 Settle things quickly with your opponent while
> you are still on the way to court with him, so
> that he does not hand you over to the judge, and
> the judge to the guard, and you are thrown into
> prison.



SILENCE

We keep a few moments of silence. Is there a word, an apology, or a gesture that could help keep the peace in our family? Each of us can speak with Jesus in our heart.

PRAYER

Jesus, you are our peace.

As we light this second candle, we place our family before you: everything that holds us together, and also the things we find hard to talk about.

You know the words that have hurt us, the times we have insisted on being right, and the hugs we keep putting off for another day.

Give us the courage to say we are sorry and the patience to listen without already planning our answer. Help us repair the harm we have done and rebuild trust, little by little.

We pray for those who live apart, for families that are hurting, and for all who suffer violence and war.



May your peace find a place at our table, in our conversations, and in our hands.

Today we want to take a first step with you.

AMEN.

A GESTURE FOR THE WEEK

This week, let's find a moment to listen, to apologize, or to take one step toward healing a relationship.



STORY 2

The Letter No One Wanted to Deliver

To read during the week

Mr. Walsh had two sons, a clock that ran seven minutes fast, and a table far too big for eating alone.

Any clockmaker could have fixed the clock. He could have traded the table for a smaller one. But for three years he hadn't known how to fix things with his sons.

Andrew lived four blocks away. Tom lived on the other side of town. Both of them visited their father, brought him fruit, and checked

on the furnace. But they never came at the same time.

"Is my brother here?"

Whichever one of them asked it, the question always meant the same thing: *Can I take my coat off?*

They had fallen out when the family woodshop closed. There had been money troubles, hard months, and decisions made without asking. Then came some words neither of them had forgotten, and some others both of them swore they had never said.

What Mr. Walsh remembered most was the slammed door. It had rattled the glasses in the china cabinet.

Ever since Lucy had helped him unpack the nativity set, Mr. Walsh had been leaving the living room blinds up.

That Saturday, Lucy went with her mother to bring him some soup. They found him wrapped in a blanket, with a notebook on his knees. Lately he got tired easily, and even an-

swering the door meant he had to sit and rest afterward.

"Are you making your Christmas list?" Lucy asked.

"Something harder than that."

At the top of the page he had written *Dear boys*, and underneath it, a blot of ink.

"You made a smudge."

"Yes. That's the part that came out fastest."

Lucy went over to the nativity scene. The sheep were still huddled together, as if they still remembered the sock where they had spent the year.

"Tomorrow we light the peace candle."

Mr. Walsh looked down at the page.

"I could use a little of that."

Lucy's mother sat down beside him while Lucy straightened the shepherd.

"Would you like me to call them?"

He took a while to answer.

"Both of them. Tell them to come tomorrow morning. And this time, please, tell them to take their coats off."



On Sunday, Andrew got there first. He brought clementines.

Tom showed up five minutes later with a bag of pears.

When they were little, they could split a single orange without arguing. Now they set the fruit down at opposite ends of the table.

Their father was sitting by the window. He waved them over.

“Come closer. I don’t have the voice today to talk to you from way over there.”

Andrew pulled up a chair. Tom stayed standing until his brother nudged the other chair toward him with his foot.

Mr. Walsh took an envelope out of his bathrobe pocket. He had written both their names on it in big, shaky letters.

“This is for you.”

Andrew reached for it, but his father held on to it a moment longer.

“For both of you.”

Tom put his hand under the envelope.

“What is it?”

“A letter. It took me a while. That pen is older than both of you, and it’s got a worse temper.”

They almost smiled.

"Read it together after I leave you in peace."

Then he asked about the grandchildren. He listened to their answers with his eyes closed, though he opened them whenever anyone lowered their voice.

When he fell asleep, his sons carried the mugs into the kitchen. Andrew washed. Tom dried.

For a few minutes, the only sound was the water.



Mr. Walsh died that afternoon.

He was in his own bed, and his sons were with him. That morning he had squeezed their hands; now they were the ones holding his.

When Lucy's mother arrived, she found them sitting in the living room. There were calls to make, people to let know. She took care of making coffee.

The envelope was still next to the fruit bowl.

Tom looked at it.

"We should read it."

Andrew nodded, but neither of them moved.

Finally, the younger one pulled his chair closer. Andrew opened the envelope.

Dear boys,

I don't know how to write this kind of thing. Your mother did. I was more the type to check whether you'd locked the windows.

I miss having you here together.

When one of you comes over, I'm happy. When the other one comes, I'm happy too. Then I sit here thinking about all the things I can't mention without one of you getting sad or changing the subject.

I've been afraid to talk too. Forgive me for that.

I don't know how to sort out the shop's accounts. Some things you'll have to settle yourselves. But I remember Tom waiting up when Andrew went out at night, and Andrew carrying Tom on his back the day he cut his foot open at the creek. That happened too.

Don't let the last argument keep your whole story.

Andrew stopped reading. Tom waited, looking down at his hands.

These days I've got the nativity set right in front of me. I keep thinking about how it was God who came looking for us. We were still a long way off, and he was already on his way.



We were still a long way off, and he was already on his way.

Jesus is our peace. I've heard that at Mass more times than I can count. Now I'm asking him to help you take the first step, even if your voice shakes.
You don't have to figure it all out tomorrow. You can start by listening.
I love you both.
Dad



The clock struck eight when it was still seven minutes to.



“I left you alone with the shop,” Andrew said.

Tom rubbed his forehead.

“Yeah.”

His brother looked down.

A while passed before Tom added:

“And I told you we’d have been better off without you.”

“I remember.”

“It wasn’t true.”

Andrew folded the letter, carefully following the creases their father had made.

“We can look at the accounts some other day.”

“Yeah.”

“Tomorrow… do you guys want to come over for dinner?”

Tom started crying before he could answer. His brother pulled his chair a little closer.



Across the street, Lucy and her mother lit the second Advent candle.

They prayed for Mr. Walsh and for his sons.

In the house across the way, the two brothers were still sitting by the window. The letter lay between them.

On the hutch, Saint Joseph still had his little piece of tinsel. And the manger was waiting for the Child who had come looking for them.



THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Joy

December 13, 2026

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Joy

On Sunday, we light the candle

OPENING WORDS

Today we light the pink candle: Jesus is near. We come with our joys and also with whatever weighs on us. We will hear how Mary went to visit Elizabeth, carrying Jesus within her. Let us open our hearts to that visit and to the joy of knowing that God is with us.

We light the two purple candles from the previous weeks and the third candle, the pink one.

GOSPEL *Luke 1:39-45*

> 39 In those days Mary set out and hurried to a
> town in the hill country of Judah, 40 where she
> entered the house of Zechariah and greeted
> Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greet-
> ing, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth
> was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 She cried out in
> a loud voice, "Blessed are you among women,
> and blessed is the fruit of your womb! 43 Who am
> I, that the mother of my Lord should come to
> me? 44 The moment the sound of your greeting
> reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped

for joy. [45] Blessed is she who believed that what the Lord said to her would be fulfilled."



SILENCE

We keep a few moments of silence. What visit or act of kindness are we grateful for today? Who could we keep company these days? Anyone who wants to can share.

PRAYER

Jesus, we light this pink candle because your birth is near.

Thank you for the little things that brighten our days: a visit, a laugh that comes when we least expect it, a voice we love asking how we're doing.

Today we also bring you our sadness. With you, we can admit that we are tired, that someone is missing, or that Christmas feels a little harder this year.

Just as Mary carried you to Elizabeth's house, help us bring company to those who need it. Teach us to be glad when good things happen

to others, and to make room for anyone who doesn't feel like smiling today.

Open our eyes to the gifts of each day. May the joy of knowing that you love us grow in this family and reach our neighbors too.

How good it is that you are coming, Jesus. We are waiting for you.

AMEN.

A GESTURE FOR THE WEEK

Let's think of someone we could visit or call, and set aside some time to listen to how they're really doing.



STORY 3

The Pocket Full of Good Days

To read during the week

Mrs. Russo kept her buttons in a blue cookie tin. It was a very common habit among seamstresses, and a very disappointing one for children.

Lucy had opened that tin three times in her life. The contents had never improved.

"The pearl ones aren't for eating either," said Mrs. Russo, without looking up from her sewing.

Lucy put the lid back on.

She had come with her mother to drop off a coat. It belonged to Tom, Mr. Walsh's younger son, and it needed a new lining.

"He says there's no rush," Mom explained.

"Then it'll be done sooner. The clothes that are in a hurry pile up on that chair and start staring at me."

The chair had disappeared under a mountain of pants.

Lucy smiled. So did Mrs. Russo, though the smile didn't last long.

Mrs. Russo loved December.

Other years she hung a little bell on the shop door, sang while she sewed, and kept candy in a dish that she had never once confused with the button tin.

But that year her daughter had moved away with the kids, all the way to Arizona. They had jobs there, and school, and a small house whose windows Mrs. Russo knew only from photos. She was happy for them. She said so every time anyone asked.

Then they would ask:

“Are they coming home for Christmas?”

And she would have to explain that they weren’t.

When she got home, the chairs were exactly where she had left them. Nobody had lost a sock or needed poster board for school the next day. Even the cookies lasted too long.

On Sunday, December thirteenth, when she got back from Mass, she took off her coat without turning on the radio.

The priest had talked about joy. The candle was pink, and the children had sung with so much enthusiasm that one of them kept going after everyone else had stopped.

Mrs. Russo had laughed.

Now, in the quiet of the shop, that joy felt very far away from her hands.



She decided to take out the lining of Tom’s coat.

It was a good coat, worn at the cuffs. When she opened the seam of one pocket, she found a marble, two very old crumbs, and a folded piece of paper.

There was a drawing on it.

It showed a man with stick legs, a little girl, and something that could have been a dog or a table with ears. Above it, in big letters, someone had written:

GOOD FOR ONE GOOD DAY WITH DAD. EVEN IF IT RAINS.

Underneath was a condition:

NO SHOE SHOPPING.

Mrs. Russo burst out laughing.

She knew that kind of condition. Once she had taken her grandson to feed the ducks and had used the trip to buy him a pair of pants. He considered it a betrayal for the rest of the winter.

She looked at the drawing again.

Then she started to cry, with a little laugh still caught in her throat.

That was how Lucy found her when she came in with her grandmother.

“Did you poke yourself?”

Mrs. Russo set the paper on the table.

“No, honey. Not today.”

Grandma took off her coat.

“Let’s put the kettle on.”

They didn't tell her to cheer up. Grandma found the mugs, and Lucy sat down next to her.

Mrs. Russo showed them the drawing.

"Tom's daughter must have made it," Lucy said. "That's how she draws dogs. They always look like you could put a tablecloth on them."

All three of them laughed.

Then Mrs. Russo talked about her grandchildren. About the little one, who slept with a wooden spoon, and the older one, who asked for dresses with pockets big enough to hold rocks.

"I'm glad they're doing well," she said. "But I miss them so much that sometimes the Christmas lights make me angry."

She looked down, embarrassed.

Grandma set down her mug.

"You can tell Jesus that too."

"I'm not going to complain to him on his birthday, of all days."

"Rose, if he came to be with us, we'd better let him in on this too."

Mrs. Russo stared at the steam.

“This morning they told us to rejoice.”

“Yes. And I think you can start by letting us keep you company while you’re sad.”



On the table was a small book of the Gospels that Mrs. Russo kept next to her reading glasses.

Grandma opened it to the story of Mary’s visit to Elizabeth.

Lucy knew the story, but that morning she noticed something.

“Mary went to her house.”

“Yes.”

“She didn’t wait for Elizabeth to come to her.”

Grandma nodded.

They read how Elizabeth was filled with joy when Mary arrived, carrying Jesus within her.

Mrs. Russo ran her finger along the edge of the page.

For a long time, she had pictured that visit like a holy card: two women in clean dresses, standing still in a doorway. Now she thought about the road, about how tired Mary must

have been, about the water Elizabeth would have offered her. About how good it must have felt to hear a voice you love inside your own house.



About how good it must have felt to hear a voice you love inside your own house.

She looked at the three mugs.

"Would you two stay for lunch? I have enough soup for days."

"We can help you with that," said Grandma.



In the afternoon, Tom came by.

Mrs. Russo handed him the drawing before she showed him the coat.

He held it carefully.

"I thought I'd lost this."

His daughter had given it to him months ago. The promised day had never happened.



“Something always came up,” he said.

He took out his phone and called home.

“Tell her to put her boots on. We’re going for a walk.”

He listened to the answer and smiled.

“Yes. Even if it rains.”

Mrs. Russo lent him an umbrella and sat back down. There was still work to do. There was still soup too, and in a little while, she would call her grandchildren.

Before threading the needle, she looked at the open Gospel.

“Thanks for the visit, Jesus,” she murmured.

Then she went looking for the little bell for the door.

It was in a drawer, under some ribbons. She hung it up and rang it once, to make sure it still remembered how.

That night she still missed the kids.

But when her daughter called, Mrs. Russo had something to tell her.



FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Love

December 20, 2026

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Love

On Sunday, we light the candle

OPENING WORDS

Christmas is very close. Today we look at Joseph, who welcomed Mary and took the Child into his care. The Son of God chose to come into a family and to let himself be cared for. As we light the fourth candle, let us think of the people who have been entrusted to us, and get our home ready to welcome Jesus.

We light the three candles from the previous weeks and the fourth one, which is purple. All four candles are now lit.

GOSPEL *Matthew 1:24-25*

> 24 When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of
> the Lord had commanded him and took his wife
> into his home. 25 He had no relations with her
> until she gave birth to a son, and he named him
> Jesus.



SILENCE

We keep a few moments of silence. Who needs our attention today? Let's think of one concrete way to care for that person, and give thanks for the people who care for us.

PRAYER

Jesus, as we light this fourth candle, we think of your tiny hands, of Mary holding you, and of Joseph watching over you while you slept.

You are the Son of God, and yet you chose to need someone to take care of you. You let yourself be carried, kept warm, and fed.

Teach us to love like that: with time, with attention, and with tenderness.

Help us put down whatever we are holding when someone needs us to listen. May we ask for help without embarrassment and accept other people's love with gratitude.

We pray for everyone who cares for children, for the elderly, and for the sick. Hold them up when they are tired, and keep them company.



In our home, may no one have to earn love by always being good or doing everything perfectly. And when we get it wrong, may we learn to say we are sorry and start again.

Jesus, make our hearts more attentive. We want to welcome you and take care of you.

AMEN.

A GESTURE FOR THE WEEK

Let's find some time to be together without rushing and without screens. Each person can suggest something simple they would like to share.



STORY 4

A Coat with Long Sleeves

To read during the week

Tom had a habit of saying “Be right there” from any room in the house. He said it with such confidence that for years his daughter believed it meant he was on his way.

Over time, Annie learned it could mean a lot of things: that he was looking for his keys, that he was finishing a phone call, or that he had completely forgotten why anyone had called him.

That Sunday, the last one before Christmas, he had been on his way all morning.

“Dad, will you help me with the nativity set?”

“Be right there.”

Annie put out the sheep.

“Dad, I can’t find the bridge.”

“One second.”

Annie made a river out of blue tissue paper that ran straight into the wall. It didn’t seem like a very good place for a river to end up, but she couldn’t figure out how to fix it.

Ever since their walk in the rain a week earlier, she had been hoping for another afternoon with her father. That day they had come home soaking wet. Tom had stepped right into a puddle that, according to Annie, could have been seen from any country in the world.

They had bought roasted chestnuts, and he hadn’t looked at his phone once.

Annie still kept the empty paper bag in her room.



When Tom finally appeared, he had his keys in his hand.

“We need to head out.”



“But the nativity set…”

“We’ll finish it later. We have to go pick up a few things.”

He had been planning to buy her new boots, a dress for Christmas Eve, and a game she had pointed at in a store window.

Ever since his father died, he had been worried that the house felt sad. Whenever he saw Annie being quiet, he thought of something else he could buy her.

Annie picked up the figure of the Baby Jesus.

She had put it next to the river so it wouldn’t get lost among the papers. When she stood up, she tripped over a box.

The figure fell.

There was a small sound, hardly anything.

One of the hands ended up under the table.

“Annie, be careful,” Tom said. “I’ve told you a hundred times not to leave everything on the floor.”

She crouched down without answering.

She found the hand, picked up the Baby, and stayed there with both pieces in her palm.

“It was Grandpa’s.”

Tom stopped searching his pocket for the keys. They were already in his hand.



Annie didn't cry right away. First she pressed her lips together, as if she could still keep it from having happened.

"We can buy another one," he said.

That was when she started crying.

Tom looked at the little figure. It had a small smudge of blue paint on its back. He remembered his father painting the stable at the kitchen table, with a brush that was too thick and his glasses sliding down his nose.

He sat down on the floor.

"Okay. Let me see."

Annie opened her hand.

It was a clean break.

"I think we can fix it."

"Do you know how?"

"Grandpa taught me how to fix a few things."

Annie wiped her nose on her sleeve.

Tom almost told her to use a tissue. Instead, he took out his handkerchief and gave it to her.

"I'm sorry I talked to you like that."

Annie laid the figure on a piece of paper.

"I just wanted to set it up with you."



They searched three drawers for glue.



And help me be here when I'm home.

They found dead batteries, a key to no known door, and the instructions for a blender that had stopped existing six years earlier.

Finally Tom called his brother.

"Andrew, do you still have that glue we used for the figures?"

He listened for a moment.

"Yeah. That one."

He listened again and looked at Annie.

“Your uncle says not to use too much. He says I always used too much.”

“Then you should listen to him.”

Tom smiled.

They walked over to get it. Andrew didn’t live far, but the air had turned cold, and halfway there Annie started to shiver.

Her father took off his coat and put it around her shoulders.

It was the one Mrs. Russo had just fixed. The new lining still smelled a little like the iron.

The sleeves hung way past Annie’s hands.

“I look like a really tiny lady.”

“A lady with a lot of coat.”

Tom bent down to button one of the buttons.

For a moment he remembered how many times his own father had done exactly the same thing.



At home, they put the hand back on with a single drop of glue.

Annie held it in place with one finger.

“Very gently,” said Tom.

They waited, bent over the table.

Annie looked at the figure’s bare feet.

“Was Jesus cold?”

“Sure he was.”

“Did Mary put a coat on him?”

“She wrapped him up tight. And she held him in her arms.”

Annie thought for a moment.

“If he was God, why couldn’t he just keep himself warm?”

Tom looked at those tiny hands.

“Because he became a real baby. He needed people to take care of him.”

“Even to wipe his nose?”

Tom couldn’t help laughing.

“Even that.”

Annie studied the figure with new attention.

“Then Mary had a lot of work to do.”

“So did Saint Joseph.”

They were quiet for a while.

Then she asked:

“Do you think Jesus knows how much I miss Grandpa?”

Tom set the glue down on the table.

“Yes, sweetheart. Jesus cried too, when someone he loved died.”

Annie moved closer to her father. He pulled her onto his lap.

This time, he didn’t think of anything to buy her.



When the figure was ready, they finished the nativity scene.

Tom found the bridge inside the stable, and Annie got the river to go somewhere. They left the manger empty until Christmas Eve and put the Baby away in a little box, on a bed of cotton.

That evening they lit the fourth Advent candle.

Annie wanted to say thank you that Jesus’s hand was fixed. Tom said thank you for his brother.

Then he added:

“And help me be here when I’m home.”

Annie looked at him but didn’t say anything.

Later, while he was making dinner, he felt two little taps on his back.

Annie was standing behind him, wrapped in his coat again. She had lifted one empty sleeve up to her father's shoulder.

"What are you doing?"

"Covering you up. You must be cold too."

Tom turned around and hugged her, coat and all.

Dinner had to wait a little while.



GOD COMES TO OUR HOME

Christmas Eve

December 24, 2026

GOD COMES TO OUR HOME

Christmas Eve

Before dinner

OPENING WORDS

Before we begin this meal, we stop to give thanks. Tonight we celebrate that Jesus has been born and has chosen to share our life. Let us ask that our table be a place of welcome and that our hearts have room for others. Let us listen to the story of his birth.

We gather around the table before the food is served. We can turn toward the nativity scene.

GOSPEL *Luke 2:1-7*

> 1 In those days a decree went out from Caesar
> Augustus that the whole world should be regis-
> tered. 2 This was the first registration, when
> Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 So everyone
> went to be registered, each to his own town.
> 4 Joseph too went up from Galilee, from the
> town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David
> that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the
> house and family of David, 5 to be registered
> with Mary, his wife, who was with child. 6 While
> they were there, the time came for her to give
> birth, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn son.

> She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.



SILENCE

We keep a short silence and lovingly remember those who are far away, those who have died, and those who are alone tonight.

PRAYER

Loving Father, tonight we thank you because your Son Jesus has been born among us.

Thank you for this table, for the food we are about to share, and for the hands that prepared it. Thank you for each person here, with their story, their joys, and their worries.

We lovingly remember those who are far away, and we entrust to your love those who have died. Their place is still dear to our family.

We pray for those who are eating alone tonight, for those who have no home, and for those who are working tonight to take care of

others. Show us how we can be with them and share what we have.

Bless this food and our conversation. Help us listen to each other, laugh together, and be grateful for the gift of being together.

Make room in our hearts for whoever comes to the door.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, your Son, whom tonight we see as a little child in the manger.

AMEN.



STORY 5

The Place by the Door

To read together as a family

Lucy's mother had been saying since four o'clock that she wasn't going to make a big fuss over dinner this year.

By seven, she had used every pot in the house.

Grandma was peeling potatoes with the calm of someone who knows that, sooner or later, people will have to sit down and eat. Lucy was folding napkins. She had learned how to turn them into fans, although as soon as she let go, the fans went back to being napkins with problems.

Dad had gotten home the night before.

For several minutes, Lucy hadn't let him take his coat off. She had hugged him around the waist with her face buried between the buttons, while he held his suitcase and laughed with wet eyes.

Now he was in the kitchen, following instructions.

"Not that one. The big platter."

"This one's big."

"The other big one."

He had discovered that a kitchen could hold any number of big things, and that only one of them was ever the right one.



The table was set for six.

Aunt Ellen was coming too, with her little boy Max, who ate sitting on two cushions and believed black olives were meant to be worn on your fingers.

Grandma counted the chairs.

"We're one short."

They brought in the desk chair. It was lower than the others and had a screw that complained every time anyone shifted.

They put it next to the door.

"I'll sit there," said Dad.

Lucy put the prettiest napkin at that place.

Then she went over to the hutch. The nativity scene was finished, but the Baby was missing. They would put him in after dinner.

"Can I be the one to put him in?"

"It's your turn this year," said Mom.

Lucy looked at the little figure, still wrapped in tissue paper.

Everything was just the way it was supposed to be.



The doorbell rang while Dad was trying to work out which platter was the medium one.

Mrs. Russo was standing on the porch.

She had her purse, a covered tin, and the look of someone hoping she wasn't intruding.

"I brought you some pizzelle. I made way too many."

Grandma looked at the tin.

Then she looked at Mrs. Russo.

"Where are you having dinner?"

"At home. I've got things."

She said it lightly, but she had done her hair and was wearing a pair of small earrings Lucy had never seen her wear in the shop.

"Come in," Mom called from the kitchen.

"Oh no, I just came to drop these off."

Dad took the tin.

Grandma took her coat.

Lucy took her hand.

Between the three of them, they settled the matter before Mrs. Russo could come up with another excuse.



So then there were seven.

Mom opened the drawer with the good silverware and stood there for a moment without moving.



After such a long journey, he would want to be close too.

There were six matching plates. Six good glasses. Six cloth napkins.

Lucy, who had followed her in, heard her sigh.

"We can use my plate with the flowers," she said.

"Yes, honey."

"And I'll take a paper napkin."

Mom glanced toward the living room. Mrs. Russo was standing next to the table, holding her purse with both hands.

Mom closed the drawer.

"Rose, can you help me with the gravy? I think it needs something, and I can't tell what."

Mrs. Russo put her purse down right away.

She tasted the gravy, asked for a clean spoon, and added a little of the broth left in one of the pots.

"Now leave it alone."

"For how long?"

"Until you stop staring at it."

Grandma laughed from the doorway.



The seventh chair turned out to be a stool.

Dad put it between his chair and Lucy's, but Mrs. Russo protested:

"I'll sit there. You had everything all set up."

"I've been sitting in a perfectly good chair for weeks," he said. "Tonight this stool looks wonderful to me."

They all squeezed in a little closer.



After dinner, Lucy brought out the Baby Jesus.

She carried him on her open palms, slowly, the way she had seen people carry very small babies.

Dad read the story of the birth. When he got to the manger, Lucy looked at her nativity scene: the clean moss, the roof held firmly in place, Mary kneeling without a single spot on her dress.

"Was it this nice?"

Grandma gently shook her head.



“It was probably a lot poorer.”

Lucy turned to her mother.

“Where did they give him a bath?”

Mom took a moment to answer.

“They must have found some water. And a clean cloth.”

“Was Mary tired?”

“Very tired, I’d imagine.”

Mrs. Russo straightened one of the figures that had tipped over.

“Thank goodness Joseph was there.”

Lucy looked at the Baby. It was strange to think that God had come to a place where so many things were missing. That someone would have had to go find him water, push the straw aside, and bring him a light.

“I would’ve given him my bed,” she said.

Her little cousin wanted to know where she would sleep, then.

“Not with you. You kick.”

Everyone laughed, even Max.

Then Lucy placed Jesus in the manger.



As they lingered at the table, Mrs. Russo told them how her grandson had once tried to mail a piece of toast.

Dad told stories about the place where he worked. Aunt Ellen asked for the gravy recipe. No one seemed to notice that the plates didn't match.

At a moment when everyone else was talking, Mrs. Russo leaned toward Lucy's mother.

"Thank you. I didn't know how hard it was going to be to go home tonight."

Mom squeezed her hand under the table.

While they were clearing up, Lucy found her napkin squashed flat. She tried to fluff up the folds, but it was too late.

From the kitchen came the sound of running water and the voices of Mom and Mrs. Russo, arguing in a friendly way about who should do the dishes.

Lucy left the napkin next to the nativity scene.

Then she moved Saint Joseph a little closer to the manger.

It seemed to her that after such a long journey, he would want to be close too.



THE SON OF GOD LIVES AMONG US

Christmas Day

December 25, 2026

THE SON OF GOD LIVES AMONG US

Christmas Day

Around the Child Jesus

OPENING WORDS

Today we come to the nativity scene to look at Jesus and stay with him for a while. The Gospel calls the Son of God the Word, God's eternal Word, who became man and came to live among us. Let us listen calmly and give thanks that he is with us.

We gather around the nativity scene. We can bring the figure of the Baby closer so everyone can see.

GOSPEL *John 1:14-18*

> 14 And the Word became flesh and made his
> dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the
> glory of the Father's only Son, full of grace and
> truth. 15 John testified to him and cried out, say-
> ing, "This is the one I was speaking about when I
> said, 'The one who comes after me ranks ahead
> of me, because he existed before me.'" 16 From his
> fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.
> 17 For the law was given through Moses; grace
> and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one

> has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.



SILENCE

We look at the Baby in silence and then begin the prayer. At the pause, anyone who wishes can give thanks for something or name a person they want to pray for.

PRAYER

Jesus, today we come close to look at you.

How small you are. Mary can hold you in her arms, and Joseph leans in to watch you sleep.

You are the Son of God, and you chose to be born like us. You will be hungry and sleepy, you will learn to walk, and you will know friendship, joy, and tears.

Thank you for coming to share our life. Thank you for loving us first, for coming close, and for coming to save us.

Today we want to stay here with you for a moment.

We keep silence. Each person can tell Jesus something they are grateful for, or name someone they want to pray for.

Child Jesus, receive what we carry in our hearts. Bless our family and everyone who needs to feel loved.

Teach us to recognize you in the Gospel and to serve you in the people we meet every day.

Today we celebrate that you were born.
What a joy to have you here with us.

AMEN.



STORY 6

The Morning of Little Things

To read together as a family

Max opened the present from the hardest corner, the way kids do when grown-ups tell them to start from the other side.

Inside was a box of colored pencils.

There were twenty-four of them, arranged by color, and they smelled like new wood. His mother had looked for a kind that wouldn't break the second he pressed down a little.

Max looked at them.

Then he looked under the tree.

“Isn’t there another one?”

Aunt Ellen folded up the wrapping paper she had just picked up.

“Uncle Joe’s box hasn’t come yet, honey. The mail’s slow at Christmas.”

He already knew that. But he had been hoping for a remote-control car. Red, if possible. Although under the circumstances, he would have settled for blue.

“Oh.”

His mother stopped folding the paper.

“I thought you’d like them. You’re always drawing.”

“I do like them.”

He said it while looking under the couch, in case a present had slid under there.



They had slept over at Lucy’s house after dinner on Christmas Eve.

The smell of toast drifted in from the kitchen. Grandma was wearing two different slippers and insisted that both were comfortable, which was all anyone should ask of a slipper.

Max sat down next to his cousin with the box on his knees.

"You could draw a car," she suggested.

"But it won't go."

Lucy had to admit that was a problem.

After breakfast they went to Mass. Max buttoned his coat wrong and slipped a red pencil into his pocket.

The church was packed. Up front, near the altar, there was a figure of the Baby Jesus lying on white cloths.

Max stood on tiptoe.

"He's bigger than ours," he whispered.

During the reading, he heard that the Word had become flesh. He looked at his mother to ask her something, but she was listening, so he decided to save the question.

He saved it all the way to the end of Mass, which, for Max, took considerable effort.



"What does it mean that he became flesh?"

Aunt Ellen took his hand as they went down the church steps.

“It means the Son of God became a man. Like us.”

“With bones?”

“With bones.”

“And blood?”

“And blood.”

Max thought about a scrape he had on his knee.

“So if he fell down, did it hurt?”

“Yes.”

They walked a little way.

“Then when he was little, what could he do?”

“What babies do. Sleep, cry, eat…”

Max looked back at the church.

It was hard for him to understand why they had rung the bells so much for someone who couldn’t even walk yet.

When they got back, he found his uncle sitting by the nativity scene. He was straightening the roof of the stable, which had woken up leaning on Saint Joseph.

Max crouched down beside him.

“Didn’t Jesus bring anything?”

His uncle set the roof back in place.

“What do you mean, anything?”

“A present. He was God. He could’ve brought something.”

The man looked at him for a moment.

“Do you remember what Lucy wished for this year?”

Max nodded. His cousin had talked a lot about her dad coming home.

“When I got here, I had a present for her in my suitcase. But she wouldn’t let me open it. She wanted me to sit down with her.”

“Because she missed you.”

“Exactly.”

Max looked at the Baby.

“So God came so we could be with him?”

“Yes. He came himself, because he loves us. To live our life and to save us.”

The boy touched the edge of the manger.

“He didn’t take up much room.”

His uncle smiled.

“Mary could carry him in her arms.”

In the afternoon, they went to see Andrew. He had brought his father's nativity set to his house so he could keep it up until Epiphany.

He had spent the morning sorting through some of his father's things, and on the table were Mr. Walsh's glasses, a ring of keys, and a clock that ran seven minutes fast.

When they came in, Lucy glanced at the empty armchair.

Andrew stood up.

"Come on in. Tom and Annie are on their way."

Max had brought his pencils. His mother had told him he could draw while the grown-ups talked.

He set himself up at one end of the table.

First he drew a red car.

He gave it giant wheels, two headlights, and an exhaust pipe putting out enough smoke to worry any mechanic.

Then he looked at Andrew.

The man was holding his father's glasses. He folded them and opened them again.

Max turned the paper over.

"Do you have yellow?" Lucy asked, sitting down next to him.

He had two.
They picked the brightest one.



They drew a big star. Lucy drew the points and Max colored them in so carefully that he stuck his tongue out.

In the middle, they drew a stable. There was barely enough room inside for Mary, Joseph, and the Baby, but they squeezed together a little and everyone fit.



There was barely enough room inside for Mary, Joseph, and the Baby, but they squeezed together a little and everyone fit.

"We need to write something," said Lucy.

Max thought about it.

Then he asked her to write:

JESUS IS HERE.



When they were done, he went over to Andrew.

"This is for you."

The man put down the glasses.

He looked at the drawing for a long time.

"Thank you, Max."

The boy stayed next to him.

"You can be sad," he added. "Mrs. Russo was sad and we stayed with her."

Andrew ran a hand through Max's hair.

"Would you stay with me for a little while too?"

Max pulled up a chair.

When Tom arrived, they found some scissors and cut out the star.

The two brothers put it next to their father's nativity set. Annie checked that you could see it from the door.

Before they left, Max looked at his pencils. The yellow one was already a little shorter than the others.

His mother helped him put them away.

"So how do they color?"

“Really good.”

He closed the box and tucked it under his arm.

Then he ran back to Andrew.

He hadn’t forgotten a drawing, and he didn’t need to get a pencil back.

He just wanted to give him a hug before he left.



OVERJOYED

The Epiphany

January 3, 2027

OVERJOYED

The Epiphany

Before we cut the king cake

OPENING WORDS

Before we cut the king cake, we remember the Magi. The star led them to Jesus, and finding him filled them with joy. Today we offer him our gratitude and ask him to teach us to keep seeking him and to share with others.

We set the king cake on the table and wait until the prayer is over to cut it.

GOSPEL *Matthew 2:9-11*

> 9 After their audience with the king, they set out.
> And the star they had seen at its rising went
> ahead of them, until it came and stopped over
> the place where the child was. 10 When they saw
> the star, they were overjoyed beyond measure.
> 11 On entering the house, they saw the child with
> Mary his mother. They knelt down and wor-
> shiped him. Then they opened their treasures
> and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and
> myrrh.



SILENCE

We keep a short silence. We give thanks for a gift we received this Christmas, and we think of something we could share, even after the holidays are over.

PRAYER

Loving Father, the Magi were overjoyed when they saw the star that was leading them to Jesus. When they found the Child with Mary, they worshiped him and offered him their gifts.

Today we too want to come to your Son with grateful and open hearts.

Bless this king cake we are about to share, the hands that made it, and everyone gathered at our table.

Thank you for the gifts we have received and for the love of everyone who thought of us. Teach us to share generously, to enjoy things without wanting to keep the best for ourselves, and to remember those who have less.

May our family lead others to Jesus by the way we welcome, forgive, and care.

And when the holidays are over, may we keep seeking your Son every day, with the same great joy the Magi felt.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

AMEN.



STORY 7

The Star at the Last House

To read together as a family

On Epiphany morning, Max discovered that a remote-control car needed batteries, and that Uncle Joe, after shipping it halfway across the country, could forget a detail like that.

His mother found two in a kitchen drawer.

The car shot down the hallway, ran over a slipper, and got stuck under the couch. Max lay down on the floor to rescue it.

After lunch, the same thing happened again. This time, from under the couch, he saw Lucy's shoes. She had just come in.

"We're going over to Andrew's."

"I can't right now. There's been an accident."

Lucy knelt down, pulled out the car, and handed it to him.

"We're bringing king cake."

Max decided the driver could take a break.



Andrew met them at the door with his scarf still on.

The furnace had broken down during the night. On the table were a cup of coffee, some tools, and a scrap of paper with the phone number of a repairman who wouldn't be back until the next day.

"Come have dessert with us," Lucy's mother said.

He looked around the living room.

He had started packing up some of his father's things, and every object seemed to be asking him to stay a little longer. The nativity set was still on the hutch. Next to the stable was the paper star the kids had given him on Christmas.

“I don’t want to be any trouble.”

“Then you can carry the king cake,” she answered, putting it in his hands.

Max went over to the hutch.

“Can we bring the star?”

Andrew carefully peeled off the tape holding it up.

“Of course.”

Max held it by one point.

In the middle, above a little drawn stable, it said: JESUS IS HERE.



They ran into Annie and her father as they turned the corner.

Tom was wearing the coat Mrs. Russo had fixed. Annie was wearing new boots and stomping as hard as she could, because new boots deserve to have the ground notice them.

“We’re going to have dessert,” Max announced. “I’m carrying the star.”

Tom looked at his brother.

“You can stay at our place tonight. Until they fix the furnace.”

Andrew started to protest.

"I already made up the guest room," Tom added.

His brother closed his mouth. Then he nodded.

They had talked several times since their father died. Some things were still hard to bring up. But that afternoon they walked together, arguing about what kind of repair the boiler might need.

Annie thought it was the most boring conversation in the world.

It did both brothers a lot of good.



I hope this Christmas helps us open the door to him.



The last house before the town square was Mrs. Russo's.

The light was on in the shop. She was bent over the sewing machine, her glasses perched on the end of her nose.

Lucy tapped on the glass.

Mrs. Russo held up one finger: one more seam.

The kids waited.

Then she held up another.

Lucy's mother opened the door, and the little bell rang.

"We came to get you."

"I'm just finishing a sleeve."

"The other one can keep it company until tomorrow."

Mrs. Russo looked out at the street. Andrew was holding the king cake. Tom had put on his brother's scarf while Andrew buttoned his coat. The kids were fogging up the shop window with their breath.

She turned off the machine.



When they got home, they had to put the leaf in the table.

Grandma brought out the big tablecloth, the one with an old burn mark that always ended up under some dish. Lucy's father pulled up the stool and sat on it before anyone could offer.

Annie looked at the nativity scene.

"The Wise Men are still far away."

They were still next to a flowerpot, at a distance that might look short to a person, but was considerable for a clay camel.

The three kids moved them closer together.

Max put the star on top of the stable. One of the points was bent, and the yellow had darker patches where he had pressed down hard with the pencil.

Grandma opened the Gospel and read how the Magi were overjoyed when they saw the star, and how they found the Child with Mary, his mother, and worshiped him.

"Does worship mean loving somebody a lot?" Annie asked.

"It means recognizing that Jesus is God and offering him our love," Grandma answered.

Max looked at his empty hands.

"We didn't bring any gold."

“We can start by staying here with him for a minute.”

They were quiet.

Andrew prayed for his father. Mrs. Russo gave thanks for her grandchildren. Lucy looked at her dad, sitting on the stool, and then at the Baby.

Max didn’t know what to say.

In the end, he told him that everybody had come.





A few words for you

And now, dear reader, while they hunt for the knife to cut the king cake (which someone, inexplicably, has put away with the spoons), allow me a few words.

Maybe these stories have seemed too pious to you. Or too nice. Maybe you’ve thought that reconciliation is harder than this, that some chairs stay empty, and

that some people knock on doors that no one opens.

You're right. Andrew and Tom still have to learn how to listen to each other. Mrs. Russo will miss her grandchildren again. And all of them will go on feeling Mr. Walsh's absence.

But the rest will have happened too: a visit, a letter, an apology, a shared dinner. It's worth making room for those things when we tell the story of what the world is like.

Sometimes we need to come back to our families, take care of our communities, and greet our neighbors by name. To ask "How are you?" and stay long enough to hear the answer. To pull up a chair. To dare to call first.

In Bethlehem we meet a God who chose to come close in just this way: with a face we can look at, hands we can hold, and a human life to share. The Son of God was born among us out of love, to save us and bring us to the Father.

I hope this Christmas helps us open the door to him. I hope we learn to care

for the people he has placed near us, and to recognize those who are still waiting outside.

And I hope, dear reader, that we too are overjoyed, because God was born.

Grandma just found the knife.

Pull up a chair. There's room.



Pull up a chair. There's room.

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