

The Christmas Angel

The Healing of a Leper — *A True Story*

by John G. Lake

It was Christmas season in the mountains of Basotoland, South Africa. Everything seemed extremely unchristmaslike to an American.

Instead of snow and skating, green Christmas trees with their brilliant lightings, the thousand gifts of love, the splendid turkeys and Christmas puddings, and all that goes to make an American Christmas, the boiling sun and the hot winds from the desert search every nook and corner. Santa Claus himself, instead of appearing with bells and reindeer, fur coat and whiskers, comes with a loose red robe, and rides a camel.

On the Southern hemisphere, the seasons are reversed. Instead of Christmas coming in winter, it comes in the midst of the summer season. Indeed, everything is different. Even the skies, which have always seemed to us to be a fixture, have changed.

The great bear has disappeared, the North Star, which to every Westerner, is the travelers guide, cannot be seen here. On the opposite side of the earth new stars appear. Instead of the North Star is the Southern Cross, possibly the most loved of the starry groups.

A native hut, in general form like a round beehive, is seen in the distance. The framework is made of poles stood on end about three feet apart. Between these poles native women weave the small branches of trees, inside and out, as you would weave a basket.

It is then plastered with mud, and made smooth. The roof is of thatch, composed of long grasses, found in marshes a hundred miles away. They are cut by women and carried in bundles on the heads of the children to the site of the hut.

The floors of these huts are made of ant heaps, beaten until they are almost like cement. Then as top dressing for the floors soft cow manure is spread about an inch thick. When dry it is like a brown paper.

Every week the native girls give the floors a light dressing of fresh manure to fill the cracks and indentations, which keeps the floor perfectly smooth. For brooms a bunch of long grass is tied with strings.

In place of a soft mattress a mat of rushes lies on the floor, and for a pillow a stick of wood two inches thick stands on legs about six inches from the floor. No windows of any kind in these huts. Inside it is semi-darkness.

The only light admitted it through the low door, when it is permitted to be open. There is no chimney or exit for the smoke. A fire of dry cow manure is made in the middle of the floor and the place is densely filled with smoke.

When inside the hut one stands on their feet until the upper part of the hut is so filled with smoke that you breathe it in such quantities that you feel the need of relief. You try sitting

down, and gradually the smoke comes down to you.

Eventually you lie on the floor, and when you have learned the ways of the natives thoroughly and want to sleep, you turn your face toward the floor, as the smoke is lighter at the bottom.

In one corner of the hut a young man lies suffering. We tell him of the glad Christmas season, of the Christ Who was born. As the Babe of Bethlehem, of the host of angels who sang at His birth, of the shepherds and the wise men.

We tell him that He is the Redeemer of the world, that He came to take away the sorrows and sickness of man. And suddenly rising on his elbow he inquires, "Will He take away Basuto sickness?" (Leprosy) We tell him that our Christ is a Savior from both sin and sickness and is able to heal all disease.

A year has flown. It is Christmas again. This time we are traveling in a Boer wagon, almost as large as an American freight car. Sixteen oxen draw the wagon over the mountains. The wagon is fitted with great brakes to keep it from running on top of the oxen as they descend the mountains.

It is evening time. A great shouting of the native drivers and a mighty cracking of their long whips indicates that they are endeavoring to stop the team. Then the Boer farmer (a Dutchman), who is the owner of the wagon, shouts "Outspan," meaning unhitch, and the native men proceed to loose the oxen and turn them out for pasture. The other natives prepare supper on a fire built on the ground under the wagon.

We are just preparing to spread our blankets and lie down for the night when across the veld, a mile away, another wagon is seen approaching. When it come close, one of the natives accompanying the wagon, salutes us, and asks if he may talk with the white man.

We all sit together on the ground while he tells us at great length that his brother, a sick man, is in the wagon, also his aged mother. That many moons ago a white man had come to their hut and talked to the sick brother of One, Jesus, Who loved men, Who died for them, Who saves them from their sin and heals them of sicknesses.

He said pathetically, "We are seeking for Him, that my brother may be healed."

The native told us that four days before, in the nighttime, an angel came to his brother in the hut as he slept. And taking him by the shoulder awoke him, saying to him, "Come with me" The sick man replied that he was too weak, that he could not walk.

Then the angel took him by the arm and permitted him to lean upon him, led him out of the hut and down the road a short distance to where the two roads divide. Pointing down the road leading to the right the angel said, "Take your oxen and wagon and go three days on this road; cross the great river into the Orange Free State, and on the third evening, when the sun is set, you will find some white men camping by a wagon. They are missionaries. They will pray for you and you will be healed of your sickness."

In the morning, the young man, believing it to be a dream, told his aged mother, who related

it to the brother. The old mother was not inclined to pay much attention, saying simply, "My son has dreamed."

But the younger brother said: "The white people are having a Christmas, and I have heard that Christmas angels come to the earth to help the poor and the sick. Perhaps it is the Christmas angel that has come to my brother. We had better obey the words of the angel."

So the oxen were found and hitched to the wagon; a pile of grasses was put in the bottom and the sick man laid upon them and for three days they laboriously traveled over the mountains, looking for the fulfillment of the angel's words.

We were greatly impressed by the simplicity and sincerity of the native's statement, and at 11 o'clock at night, when he had finished relating to us in true native fashion his story, we accompanied him to the wagon where the sick man lay.

Looking into the beautiful heavens and realizing that possibly at that very hour, under the same beautiful skies of Palestine the Christ had been born, and the shepherds had listened to the joy notes of the angel host.

When "Peace on earth, good will to men," had come as the message of God to the sorrowing world.

We reverently obeyed the word of Christ, laid our hands upon the sick man, praying that the power of God should come upon him and heal him of this terrible disease and enlighten his spirit with a knowledge of God and His love.

His face changed; a glory light began to appear in his soul, the peace of God was in him, the virtue of Jesus flowed through him and his pains were gone. He fell asleep.

Christmas morning he bid us goodbye, saying, "I am going home again to tell all my people of your Jesus and of how he healed me, and of your Christmas angel, and of the power of your wonderful God, Who has made me well."

While we proceeded on our journey rejoicing that the Christmas angel ever leads the way to the healing of Christ.

Source: John G. Lake: His Life, His Sermons, His Boldness of Faith

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