



FREE LIFE NEWS

POINTING
THE WAY
TO LIFE IN
CHRIST



Issue # 76

WINTER EDITION '09-'10

*YOU CAN BE FREE NO MATTER WHERE YOU ARE IF
YOU ARE IN CHRIST JESUS*

A Boy and His Drum

By Eric J. Turk —Lynaugh Unit, TX

For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has.

Not according to what he does not have.

11 Cor. 8: 12

The excitement was palpable in the city, not a soul was untouched in all the land by the Emperor's edict. Caesar Augustus might as well have been on the moon as far as Ben Baraphu was concerned, that was until this. Apparently the Caesar wanted to know how many subjects he had in his Empire. And so now, a name that had been foreign to Ben as the Queen of Sheba suddenly had become quite personal as the whole world was turned upside down by a single word uttered from the Emperor's lips—the word, census.

Ben kicked the dirt of the street as he watched people from all over the country pour through the city gate. In all of Ben's nine years he had never seen an uproar in Jerusalem. For the business minded times were especially good. Ben watched in amazement as more money flowed through the hands of hagglers and traders in a single hour than Ben had seen in his whole life.

"Maybe I can earn a little money too, surely I can find someone who would like to hear me play for them." Ben tugged at the sling that was supported the small drum he carried with him virtually every where he went. He

thought of the raisin and date cakes he could buy, or the real cow's milk that would be such a dramatic improvement over the curdled goats milk and stale unleavened bread he was so accustomed to. He felt for the drumsticks he kept tucked in his belt. "I wish father was here to see this. I bet nothing like this had ever happened, even in his life."

Ben's lip began to quiver as thoughts of his father came crushing into his mind. How long had he been gone now, a whole year? About as long as Ben been carrying his drum.

Ben shook the thought from his head and pulled his drumsticks from his belt. He ran his hand over the tight drum head. He remembered his father presenting the drum to him as a gift for his seventh birthday. He remembered that his father had been acting quite peculiar in the days preceding his birthday; strange carving work done in the middle of the night, various scraps of animal skin lying around. Ben now realized it was all his father's efforts in making the drum for his son.

At the time it seemed to Ben that his father was more excited about the drum than anyone else. His father had been quite a musician and frequently entertained the family with his songs filled with flutes and tambourines. And it was obvious that he wanted to share his love for music with Ben.

A tear formed in Ben's eye as he remembered that expression on his father's face as Ben set aside his new drum in favor of some other now forgotten gift. He had wounded his father that day. But in the months following his father

had never stopped trying to encourage Ben, and calmly dealt with Ben's impatience as he taught him the basics of playing the drum.

Ben twirled a drumstick then quickly tapped out a rhythmic eight beat volley. He had become quite good in the two years since receiving the drum. And since his father's death nearly a year ago this gift had been his family's sole source of income besides the rations the temple priests provided his family.

Ben brushed away his tears and set out to find someone—anyone—who would like to hear him play.

The amount of people pouring into Jerusalem was enormous. Old and young, rich and poor alike were all returning to their hometown as ordered by the Emperor. Ben, being a small boy, had to be especially careful as he moved alongside the caravans of camels and donkeys, and the occasional elephant. More than once was he shouted at as he tapped his drum. . .

"Stop that, boy! You're scaring my animals". . . "Move along before I run you down!". . . "Get out of the way! And stop beating that drum!"

As the day wore on Ben grew increasingly discouraged, and the gnawing hunger in his belly wasn't easing much either. He thought of his mother and younger sister and hoped they were fairing better than he as they had spent the day begging for food from the temple priests

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CELEBRATING WITH PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING

We are excited to share with you the 9th anniversary issue of the Free Life News. What started out as a question, "How can we reach more people.? And the answer, "Let's do a newsletter!" Which lead to another question, "HOW?" Which brings us to this issue # 76 and 3900 copies.

We are thankful for our many writers and contributors, for the financial support, and prayers of our many friends. Thank You. I know many of you pass along these newsletters for others to read, which makes you a part of our ministry. Thank You.

We are thankful to Mike for setting up a web-site to post the Free Life News, sharing the

message of God's Grace to even more people around the world.

So much has happened in the past nine years in the lives of our friends, sharing with us how the newsletter has changed their lives, *how they picked it out of the trash can, read it and prayed to receive Christ as their Savior and Lord, or how someone was sweeping the compound, found a newsletter, and because he couldn't pick anything up off of the ground, he swept it to his dorm room door.*

And our dear friend who wrote the very first article, completed his confinement and is now happily married,

And then there was the young man *who was happy to be put in Jail, so he could be warm, find-*

ing a newsletter and allowing the Lord to change his heart and mind, as a result is now studying God's Word through the Shalom Bible Collage and Seminary, preparing to preach the Word of Grace when he is released from Prison.

All there is left to say is: PRAISE THE LORD AND THANK YOU JESUS for giving us this wonderful ministry of reaching others for Your Kingdom.

Our prayer is that God will open more doors for which this newsletter may pass. Into the hands of someone who doesn't yet know Him and His Saving Grace, into someone hands who needs comfort, peace and joy in their lives, for many years to come. In Jesus Name, Amen.

We love because He first loved us!

Mack, Mitzi, and the Free Life Team

"For God so loved the world, He gave His one and only Son, that whosoever believes in Him, shall not perish but have everlasting life"
John 3 :16

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ENCOURAGEMENT FOR TODAY

" Therefore consider carefully how you will listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him."

"He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

'I am the Good Shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know Me. . .I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and they shall be one flock and one shepherd. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they shall follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.'

Luke 8:18; John 8:47; and John 10:14,16,27,28 NIV

God says,

" I am able to make all grace abound toward you."

2 Cor. 9:8





Silent Night! Holy Night

Silent night! Holy night! All is
 calm, all is bright. Round
 yon virgin mother and Child,
 Holy infant so tender and
 mild sleep in heavenly peace,
 Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night! Holy night!
 Shepherd quake at the sight,
 Glories stream from heaven a
 far, Heavenly hosts sing alle-
 luia Christ, the Savior is born!
 Christ, the Savior is born.

Silent night! Holy night! Son
 of God, loves pure light Radi-
 ant beams from Thy holy
 face with the dawn of re-
 deeming grace, Jesus, Lord at
 Thy birth, Jesus Lord at Thy
 birth.

From the Great Gospel Songs and Hymns.
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God's Abundant Blessings

The E-mail said, " *Thanks so much for the work you are doing for the Lord. I have been so much amazed of how the Lord is using you to minister to inmates. Surely the Lord deserves all the glory. I also possess the same ministerial name 'Free Life' at the church I pastor in Uganda, East Africa.* " Pastor Robert requests that we unite in prayer for them, as there are many in that Nation that have not as yet received the Gospel. *With your prayers and articles you can touch a life in Uganda, East Africa.*

Matt. 28: 18-21

HOW BIG IS GOD?

He created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void and darkness was over the surface of the deep and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.

Then God said: "Let there be light"

"Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters"

"Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place and let the dry land appear."

"Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants, fruit trees, and it was so."

"Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth."

And God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night. He made the stars also.

And God said: "Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens." "Let the earth bring forth living creatures, cattle, creeping things and beasts of the earth after their own kind." Then God said: "Let US make man in Our image, according to our likeness." And God said "it was good." (Genesis 1)

Who has measured the water in the hallow of His hand, and marked off the heavens by the span, and calculated the dust of the earth by the measure, and weighed the mountains in a balance and the hills in a pair of scales? Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord or as His counselor has informed Him?

(Isaiah 40:12)

HOW BIG IS GOD?

Big enough to rule the mighty universe, yet, small enough to live within our heart.

Have you trusted God with your life? Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power? Have you been washed in the Blood of the Lamb? Nothing but the Blood of Jesus can cleanse your soul. Will you come to Him today, so He can make your life whole? Will you pray a simple prayer of faith, asking Jesus to come into your heart and life? Make this new year the best year of your life, with the Lord Jesus Christ living in your heart, guiding and directing your every step. This is my prayer for you. ~ Mitzi ~

"None of Self and All of Thee"

Theodore Monod

Oh! The bitter shame and sorrow,
that a time could ever be, When I
let the Savior's pity plead in vain,
and proudly answered--

"All of self and none of thee."

Yet He found me: I beheld him
bleeding on that cursed tree;
Heard him pray, "Forgive them,
Father", and my wistful heart said
faintly--

"Some of self and some of Thee."

Day by day His tender mercy,
healing, helping, full and free,
Sweet and strong, and oh! So
patient, brought me lower while I
whispered--

"Less of self and more of Thee."

Higher than the highest heavens,
Deeper than the deepest sea; Lord,
thy love at last has conquered;
Grant me now my soul's petition--

"None of self and all of Thee."

A NOTE OF ENCOURAGEMENT



This came to us from Ralph Hatchell at the Lynaugh Unit in Ft. Stockton, TX
Ralph writes:

"I receive a blessing as I read the Free Life Newsletter, sometimes a tear of joy comes down my face as I read the stories like the one you put in the Dec. '08-Jan. Feb '09 issue called 'The Three Trees'. I like to go back over things I read, for sometimes I miss things the first, second and third time through. Just like when you read the Bible, the more you read and study, the more things come to light. Things

made known through Jesus Christ! Oh, the joy to re-read things as a blessing you can have and receive. Learning to share with other Brothers in Christ as we have the same heart for the Lord., a wanting, a love to be used by God to help others. Not that a light will shine on us, but that through the words we say or write will shine on Jesus Christ our Lord, to lead others to Jesus and His love for mankind.

I want to thank everyone who writes for this newsletter, and to those who give of their time is a

blessing to others. Thank each one of you."

Thank you, Ralph for sharing your heart with us, We have been encouraged by your words, and we are pleased to hear that the Free Life News is a blessing to you. Now we want to encourage you to keep spreading the love of Jesus Christ to those you come in contact with, with a spirit of joy, peace and love.

Your friends at Free Life Ministries.

More Notes of Encouragement

This note came to us from Robby Gilbert who is on the Wynne Unit in Huntsville, Texas. He writes, "I'm a Soldier in the Army of God. The Lord Jesus Christ is my Commanding Officer, the Holy Bible is my code of conduct.... My God has and will continue to supply all of my needs. I serve the Lord faithfully daily, and on duty 24/7."

Thanks for sharing your testimony

with us ,Robby, May God bless you and give you the desires of your heart., as you continue serving Him.

Another note from Terry Perkins at the Bill Clements Unit says: Christian Brothers and Sisters, I enjoyed the Free Life News that I came across. The Soldering for Christ touched my heart. I am a Christian

and I saw a lot of "meats and fruits" in this newsletter. I pray that this Ministry will stay strong. Keep up the good work spreading the Good News.

Thank you Jerry, for these encouraging words. It is letters like this that keep us keeping on!. Keep on Soldering for Christ.

Dear Readers,

As we begin our 9th year of ministry through this newsletter, we need your help. Without testimonies, devotionals and poetry from you, we can't have a newsletter. Many of you may not know that this paper was created for you to have a place to share your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We publish quarterly, so the best way for you to get your article published is to sit down after you read this and write it, mail it in, and who knows? You may be the next published author!! The only things we ask is that what you write should glorify God in what he has done in your life. How He has changed you. Please do not be too graphic about your past, we don't need to know about that, but we want to know of your love for Him. Will you share that with us, so others may come to know Jesus too.?

A reminder, Free Life reserves the right to edit all content. Thanks, and we'll be looking for your letter in the mailbox soon.

The Free Life Team

God's Dearest Creature . . . YOU!

Excerpt from *The Wonder of God in His Creatures*
Jeannie —People to People Ministries

God's love for you is unending.

He said, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness." (Jeremiah 31:3)

But sin, which brings forth death, separates you and the whole world from God.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God... (Romans 3:23)

So God sent His Son Jesus...

"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son (Jesus) that whosoever believes in Him, shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

He died for your sins and the sins of the whole world; every sin—past, present and future!

Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit...(1 Peter 3:18)

Jesus was raised from the dead...He is alive, and will never die again!

Since Christ was raised from the dead, He cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over Him. The death He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life He lives, He lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Romans 6: 9-11)

The sin issue has been solved forever! Now, God can give eternal life to you and to all people who trust in His Son.

By this gospel you are saved...Christ died for our sins...He was buried on the third day according to the Scriptures...(1 Corinthians 15:2-4)
It is by faith you have been saved, through faith...and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.. Not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

The moment you trust in Jesus...His Spirit comes to live in you.

...your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God. You are not your own; you were bought with a price...(1 Corinthians 6:19)

Through faith in Christ Jesus, you are not only forgiven forever; you now have Life that will last forever.

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...(Romans 8:1)
(You) have been crucified with Christ and (you) no longer live, but Christ lives in (you). The life (you) live in the body (you) live by faith in the Son of God, who loved (you) and gave Himself for (you). (Galatians 2:20) Christ in you the hope of glory! (Colossians 1:27)

Jesus promises He will never leave you...Nothing can separate you from Him.

"Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5)
Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35;37-39)

The Father of All Comfort

By Charles F. Stanley

When I was a little boy, I sustained my share of scraped knees and stubbed toes. After my mother had evaluated the seriousness of each injury, she would bring a bottle of medicine, which I hated. When the cut was deep enough, my mother would apply iodine, which stung like crazy. No matter how much I begged for her not to, she knew best. My crying did not acknowledge her wisdom.

After the tiny applicator was rubbed on my wound—and while I was still loudly protesting—my mother did a wonderful thing. I can still picture it. She would gently blow on the stinging spot. My cries subsided as she soothed my body and, most of all, my heart.

This is perhaps one of the sweetest pictures to me of the God of all comfort. He, by the Holy Spirit, breathes comfort into the scrapes and wounds of life. The deeper the hurt, the more gentle the blowing.

The Hurt

My mother didn't prevent the pain, though she tried to warn me to be careful. Hurts are a part of a little boy's life.

Hurts are a part of a believer's life as well.

Comfort is found not in the absence of pain but in the midst of it. So many hurting Christians believe their walk with the Lord is not as it should be because of their

intense pain. They don't feel comfortable. Yet feeling comfortable and being comforted are two different things. The first is a nice feeling but tends to come and go, as feelings do. The second is a fact based on the Comforter, not on circumstances—and He does not come and go: "I will never leave you nor forsake you" ([Heb. 13:5](#)).

Those who have suffered with pain know that it gets tiring after a while. The weary saint cries out with Paul to remove the thorn ([2 Cor. 12:7-8](#)). The Lord Jesus Christ Himself prayed for His cup of suffering to be removed. He was so physically and emotionally weary that an angel was sent to strengthen Him ([Luke 22:42-43](#)).

Often, however, the child of God hears nothing from heaven. These are particularly difficult times, especially if the agony has persisted. And it is precisely at these times the Comforter is the most precious: the Shepherd in the valley; the Father to His child; the Rock of ages; the Shelter in time of storm.

Peace is not the absence of pain. We wouldn't be promised a Comforter—much less need One—if the Christian life was a life of unending bliss.

The Healing

The Comforter soothes in various ways—through Scripture, through hymns, through other saints (who have probably been hurt), or through myriad ways that that He custom designs to suit particular

hurts. He is wonderfully creative, perfectly matching the comfort with the sorrow.

We have this assurance: "As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you" ([Isa. 66:13](#)). This side of His comfort indicates His tenderness and gentleness, just as my mother cared for my hurts. As a comforting Father, He gives strength to go on in the midst of pain. As the perfect Parent, He knows exactly how to balance the two.

Here's the most wonderful thing: As God blows gently on the stinging wound, He remains close to His child. One can almost hear Him saying, "My hurting child, you are so special to Me. I hurt with you. I'm staying right here to take good care of you." The Father's tender care can be summed up by the slogan of a billboard that was advertising a local hospital: "The most critical moments demand exceptional care."

"Blessed be the God . . . of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" ([2 Cor. 1:3-4](#)).

We understand that although suffering is not eradicated, we have Someone who soothes us in the midst of it. Often we cry for even temporary pain relief, but the God of all comfort gives permanent consolation in the midst of excruciating pain. In our text, Paul makes it clear that the comfort from God is not only for our benefit but also for sharing with other hurting people.

Adapted from "*Charles Stanley's Handbook for Christian Living*" (2008).

Lift up your eyes. The heavenly Father waits to bless you—in inconceivable ways to make your life what you never dreamed it could be.

Anne Ortlund



The Red Leaf

Sam was a big game hunter in an unfamiliar land and sat crouched low, waiting for his prized moment to shoot. He heard a noise behind him and turned to look, but saw nothing so he resumed his waiting position. He heard it again and this time leaned out a little and saw the commotion was coming from a tree very near him.

A large snake was slowly making its way to a nest, high up in a tree. The mama bird was frantically chirping and fluttering her wings, trying to scare the snake away. Since that was not working and the snake being already too close to her, she flew away from her nest.

The hunter sat there watching, knowing the sure outcome of those little birds, when he noticed the mama bird making a quick dash back to her nest. She was holding a red leaf in her beak, she dropped it atop her nest covering her babies, and flew away to a nearby branch to watch.

Sam thought, "Why did she do that, is she maybe trying to hide her chicks. Not a chance it'll work, that hungry

snake has zeroed-in on his prey." Then the hunter witnessed something very strange. Just as the snake came up to the tip of the nest, he turned and hurriedly began his journey back down and away from the tree.

Later that night, a native asked him if he had any luck during his hunt. Sam replied, 'I didn't, but a little bird did.' And he began to relay to the native about what he saw the little bird do.

The native smiled, "That red leaf the bird used is poisonous. Highly poisonous to the snake, they just know not to touch it. When the snake saw it, it just quickly got away."

The Bible says the God sees the sparrows, He provided a poisonous leaf offensive to a snake, that a mother bird could use to cover her young and keep them safe, thus by it her young were not devoured.

So I wonder how much more pleading the Blood of Jesus over our young,

which He provided for us, will keep them safe and from being devoured by our enemy. The Blood of Jesus is highly poisonous to him.

"God presented His Son as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in His blood." Romans 3:25

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap, yet your heavenly Father provides for them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" Matthew 6:26



Jesus Christ

**The same
yesterday,
today, And
forever**

MY NAME

I was regretting the past

And fearing the future

Suddenly my Lord was speaking:

"My name is I AM"

He paused,

I waited. He continued

"When you live in the past with its mistakes and regrets, it is hard. I am

not there. My name is not I WAS.

When you live in the future, With it's problems and fears. It is hard. I am not there. My name is not I WILL BE.

When you live in this moment

It is not hard. I am here

My name is I AM."

Helen Mallicoat

Give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name; make known to the nations what he has done,

Sing to him, sing praise to Him; tell of all his wonderful acts.

Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.

Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always. Psalms 105:1-4

Testimony of Faith

David Brock —Hughes Unit

I want to give God all the praise, honor, and glory because I could have never completed the Bible correspondence course without Him. He is teaching me to trust him in all things no matter what it is. He is showing me how to walk with him in a personal relationship through Jesus Christ. This has become a Spiritual Journey, and it just keeps getting better. I have come to realize that he sets us up with divine appointments, and he has already prepared the way. He has set people in my path, and Christian brothers to embrace me when I arrive (at a new unit) and make me feel welcome. He orchestrates all these things to prove to me that he is always there, and his Spirit is always with me, no matter where I am. It's overwhelming to say the least! The joy of the Lord is our strength! When the hand of God touches you, you will never be the same again. Truly, we *are* new creatures! We are changed from the inside out, and his word renews our mind. I may not be able to quote every scripture in the Bible, but I am living it every day of my life. I am free on the inside and nothing can change that!

Amen and amen!

FOR WHOM?

BY E.J. TURK— Ft. Stockton, TX

For whom is Your sky so blue?

For whom are Your colors true?

For me? For me?

But who am I, Oh Lord, Who am I?

For whom do You shine Your light?

For whom do you give vivid sight?

For me? For me?

But why, Oh Lord, but why?

For whom is Your flower's scent?

For whom are your efforts spent?

For me? For me?

But who am I, Oh Lord, who am I?

For whom was the Virgin birth?

For whom did you tread the earth?

For me? For me?

But why, Oh Lord, but why?

For whom was the thorny crown?

For whom did they throw You down?

For me? For me?

But who am I, Oh Lord, who am I?

For whom was the rugged Cross?

For whom did You give it all?

For me? For me?

How great the cost!

"Greater love has no one than this,

That He lay His life down for His friends."

For me. Oh Lord, for me?

But I'm not worthy at all!

"For love! For Me! I made you to be!

My little lamb, My precious child.

For your smile, your heart of hope!

Come to Me for Me to hold.

"See, you're clean! I've made you new!

That's why I did it, it's proven true!

"Take My hand, I want you near.

No more pain, no more fear.

"That's why I came, Oh son of man,

To seek and save that which was lost

Can't you see? Can't you tell?

I love you child! I paid the cost!"



*Rejoice in the
Lord always,
again I say,
Rejoice!*

A Boy and His Drum

Ben was tired and dirty, his mouth dry. His day had been long and as the sunlight began to diminish so did the number of pilgrims entering the city. Now all that remains were stricken travelers, much like himself, and he didn't imagine any of them would be interested in hearing him play, let alone paying him for it.

As Ben's hopes began to sink with the setting sun he slowly tapped out a mournful dirge his father had taught him.

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"Oh Joseph! Let me see your hand. Do you feel that? Our baby is jumping!" Joseph ran his hand over Mary's pregnant belly. They had stopped in the middle of the road with their donkey in the midst of the sparse flow of travelers. "I don't know why he's so excited, he hasn't moved much at all for hours."

Joseph looked as his hand then into Mary's carmel colored eyes. Joseph looked at the buildings surrounding them. He felt the lightness of their money bag. "We must find lodging soon. I don't think we'll fair well here in Jerusalem, we might as well head on to Bethlehem. Here, let me help you onto the donkey." "Joseph," Mary said.

It was just one word but it contained all the warmth and love he knew his special bride had for him. "God will provide, Joseph. Trust in Him."

As the couple were enjoying their intimate moment a small boy walked by tapping a drum. "Oh Joseph! Feel! He's moving again! I think he likes the drum!"

Mary smiled at her husband and nodded toward the little drummer boy. Joseph raised his eyes with playful impatience then smiled back. "Boy! "Come here, You with the drum! Would you come here please."

Ben looked around then pointed at himself. "Yes, you," Joseph said. "Come here, we would like to hear you play."

Ben nearly ran the few steps between him and the couple. "What would you like for me to play?" Ben said nervously.

"Something lively. Something happy. I think we could all use some encouragement." Joseph looked at Mary and smiled.

Ben quickly began to tap out a upbeat rhythm that had Mary gently swaying her head as she giggled at her baby's movements.

After several minutes Joseph held up his hand. Ben ended his tune with three quick snaps on his drum. "You're quite good, little boy. Perhaps we'll meet again and we can enjoy your talents more. We must be going, but... "Here," Joseph held out his large hand. Ben tucked away his drum sticks and eagerly held out both of his hands. Into them fell two small copper coins. "I wish I had more to give, you definitely deserve it."

With that Joseph helped Mary onto the donkey and they made their way toward the city gate and Bethlehem beyond. As they were leaving Mary looked back at a little boy with his hands at his heart whispering thank you into the night.

Ben waited for nearly an hour hoping someone else would come along desiring to hear a good rhythm. No one else came, though, and when Ben was virtually alone in the street he decided to head home.

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A Boy and His Drum

As Ben turned his back on the gate and began walking away he sensed something behind him. Turning he saw three camels and an elephant passing outside the city gate. He noticed that there were three satin robed riders, one atop each camel, and that the elephant was burdened down with a large payload.

“Where could they be headed,” Ben wondered. And as curiosity got the best of him Ben passed through the gate leaving Jerusalem behind and headed after the foreigners into the night,

The foreigners had stopped a short distance ahead and as Ben drew closer he noticed one holding a scroll and another pointing to a very bright star. Ben thought the moon was out but as he gazed in wonder at the star realized that the whole country side was illuminated by this unusual sight.



Coming within a few steps of the strange caravan Ben could hear them speaking in a strange language.

He saw starlight glinting off odd hints of gold partially covered by ornate tapestries atop the elephant's back. Moved by the exotic sight Ben began to play his drum trying to express his feeling through his music.

The riders looked at Ben then at each other, “Come,” they said in unison. Then the one with the scroll told him, “we're looking for a King born this very night. We bring Him gifts to honor Him. Perhaps you would like to honor Him as well. Follow us if you would like.”

Ben stopped his playing and watched in amazement as the foreigners each nodded toward him then urged their camels to continue their course.

“A King?” Ben whispered. The closest Ben had ever been to royalty was when he was pushed away by the foot of a roman soldier who led a procession carrying Herod to his palace. Ben never saw Herod, just the dirt of the streets of Jerusalem. How could a poor boy of nine years pass up such an opportunity? After a few moments of thought Ben quickly caught up with the caravan, trotting along side the gift bearing procession.

They moved along for about an hour, Ben envisioning a palace the whole time. Suddenly the foreigners began speaking in their peculiar language. They were quite excited, wide eyed

and smiling, as they pointed to the sky. As they came to a stop Ben looked up to see the brightest star he'd ever seen shining directly above them.

“We have arrived little one! Come, let us go and see the King!” quickly the foreigners got down from their camels and each retrieved an object from the elephant's load. The scent of exotic spices and perfumes filled the night air. Ben followed the men around their animals and watched in amazement as they disappeared into the mouth of a cave.

“Where are we,” Ben wondered, “A sheep's pen?”

Ben could see torchlight flickering against the walls of the cave. He could hear hushed whispering and occasionally the bleating of a lamb. As he entered the cave a somber reverence overtook him. Despite this being a stable he could sense the importance of the moment, he could feel. . . a presence.

Entering the inner chamber, Ben saw his fellow travelers bowed down low. They were urgently whispering, even weeping, as they pushed their gifts of shimmering gold and fragrant spices toward a small wooden trough.

Ben adjusted the sling of his drum and knelt down as well. He hadn't yet seen the King but His mere presence commanded reverence. Ben closed his eyes. He thought his of father, he could see him smiling and waving telling him, “It's okay, Ben, everything is going to be okay.” He thought of his mother and sister. A tear trickled down his cheek and Ben suddenly felt moved to pray.

“Look Joseph, It's the little drummer boy.” Mary said.

Ben quickly looked up at the sound of the familiar voice. He wiped at the blur of tears in his eyes to see the young couple next to the wooden trough.

“Would you like to see our baby?” Mary asked. One of the foreigners looked at Ben and winked.

“Yes, yes, I would.” Slowly Ben rose to his feet and stepped closer to the young family. Mary smiled at Ben and then pulled back a blanket revealing the baby's face. He was flashing golden brown eyes and working tiny rose colored lips as if trying to suckle.

His name is Jesus,” Mary said. She looked at Joseph and smiled.

Ben looked back at the foreigners still bowed down. He looked at the treasures they had brought. He looked at his own dirty hands, his ragged clothes. His worn drum. Ben looked at Mary and Joseph, then at baby Jesus.

“I don't deserve to be here,” Ben whispered. “I'm just a poor boy. I don't have a gift to bring. Not one that's fit for a . . . For a King.” Ben looked down and tears dripped from his face. Remembering the joy Joseph and Mary shared earlier when he played for them he asked, “Shall I play for you? Would you like to hear my drum?”

Mary looked at her baby then to Ben. She smiled then nodded that it would be fine for him to play.

Ben took a deep breath as he pulled out his drumsticks. Ben had played for many people in his life but never for a King. And not just any King. This little baby, this Jesus, had a presence that touched Ben's heart to the core. What could Ben offer that would be worthy of such a One as this?

“Give them your heart, Ben, when you play give them your heart.” these had been his father's last words to him before he had died, “When you play, play for God.”

Ben began to strike the head of his drum. He played with speed. He played with skill. He pounded out a stately cadence, a drum march for a King. A passion began to well up within Ben's heart, and that love that burned within his was translated through the blur of his drumsticks as they tapped out the song of his life. He played his drum for Jesus. He played his best for the King. Ben played from his heart, for God.

In his heart Ben whispered, “All I have is my life, and to You my life I give.” He knew this was no ordinary baby, and he knew that from this night forward the world would be forever changed. “For the glory of God I'll follow You King Jesus. Thank you for hearing my song.”

When Ben finished his song, he knelt back down before the King. He prayed and thanked God for such a privilege, and told God that he hoped it was a worthy offering. Peace settled so that sheep's pen, on every heart present that night.

“Oh Joseph! Look! Look at our baby!” Mary laughed and thanked God for such a gift.

When Ben looked up he saw Mary and Joseph looking at him. He then looked at the newborn King. From His wooden trough, Jesus looked back. He was smiling, as if to “Thank you,” and, “well done.” He was smiling at Ben. . . . At the boy and his drum.

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise— the fruit of lips that confess His Name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifice God is pleased.

Hebrews 13: 15, 18

**Pa rum pum pum pum rum pum pum pum
Rum pum pum pum**



A CHRISTMAS GIFT

We were the only family with children in the restaurant. I sat Justin in a high chair and noticed everyone was eating and talking. Suddenly, Justin squealed with delight and said, "Hi there."

He pounded his fat baby hands on the high chair tray. His eyes were wide with excitement and his mouth was bared in a toothless grin. He wriggled and giggled with merriment.

I looked around and saw the source of his merriment. It was a man with a tattered rag of a coat; dirty, greasy and worn. His pants were baggy with a zipper at half-mast and his toes poked out of would-be shoes. His shirt was dirty and his hair was uncombed and unwashed. His whiskers were too short to be called a beard and his nose was so varicose it looked like a road map. We were too far from him to tell, but I was sure he smelled. His hands waved and flapped on loose wrists.

"Hi there, baby. Hi there big boy. I see ya, buster," the man said to Justin.

My husband and I exchanged looks, "What do we do?"

Justin continued to laugh and answer, "Hi. Hi there."

Everyone in the restaurant noticed and looked at us and then at the man. The old geezer was creating a nuisance with my beautiful boy.

Our meal came and the man began shouting from across the room, "Do you know patty cake." Do you know peek-a boo? Hey, look he knows peek-a-boo."

Nobody thought the old man was cute. He was obviously drunk. My husband & I were embarrassed. We ate in silence, all except Justin, who was running through his repertoire for the admiring skid-row bum, who in turn reciprocated with his cute comments.

We finally got through the meal and headed toward the door. My husband went to pay the check and told me to meet him in the parking lot. The old man sat poised between me and the door.

"Lord, just let me get out of here before he speaks to me or Justin," I prayed.

As I drew closer to the man, I turned my back trying to sidestep him and avoid any air he might be breathing. As I did, Justin leaned over my arm, reaching with both arms in a baby's 'pick-me-up' position. Before I could stop him, Justin had propelled himself from my arms to the man's. Suddenly, a very old smelly man and a very young baby consummated their love relationship. Justin in an act of total trust, love, and submission, laid his head upon the man's shoulder. The man's eyes closed, and I saw tears hover beneath his eyelashes. His aged hands, full of grime, pain and hard labor, so gently, cradled my baby's bottom and stroked his back. No two beings have ever loved so deeply for so short a time.

I stood awestruck. The old man rocked and cradled Justin in his arms for a moment, and then his eyes opened and set squarely on mine. He said in a firm commanding voice, "You take care of this baby."

Somehow I managed, "I will," from a throat that contained a stone.

He pried Justin from his chest-unwillingly, longingly, as though he were in pain. I received my baby, and the man said, "God bless you, ma'am. You've given me my Christmas gift."

I said nothing more than a muttered thanks. With Justin in my arms, I ran for the car. My husband was wondering why I was crying and holding Justin so tightly and why I was saying, "My God, my God, forgive me."

I had just witnessed Christ's love shown through the innocence of a tiny child who saw no sin, who made no judgment; a child who saw a soul, and a mother who saw a suit of clothes. I was a Christian who was blind, holding a child who was not.

I felt it was God asking, "Are you willing to share your son for a moment?" when He shared His for all eternity.

The ragged old man, unwittingly, had reminded me, "to enter the Kingdom of God, we must become as little children."



And He called a child to Himself and set him before them. And said, "truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." And whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. "and whoever receives one such child in my sake receives Me."

Matt. 18:2-5

God gave His only Son, so you could have life.

Receive Him today

"My God, my God, forgive me."

"To enter the Kingdom of God, we must become as little children."

Praise God that He reached down to us, so we could reach up to Him!

A LOVE LETTER JUST FOR YOU

Dear Friend,

I just had to write to tell you how much I love you and care for you.

Yesterday, I saw you walking and laughing with your friends. I hoped that soon you'd want me to walk along with you, too. So I painted you a sunset to close your day and whispered a cool breeze to refresh you.

I waited...you never called. I just kept on loving you. As I watched you fall asleep last night, I wanted so much to touch you. I spilled moonlight onto your face, trickling down your cheeks as so many tears have. You didn't even think of me. I wanted to comfort you.

The next day I exploded a brilliant sunrise into glorious morning for you. But you woke up late and rushed off to work. You didn't even notice. My sky became cloudy and my tears were the rain.

I LOVE YOU !!!

Oh, if you'd only listen. I really LOVE you. I try to say it in the quiet of the green meadow and in the vibrant blue sky. The wind whispers my love throughout the treetops and spills it into the vivid colors of all the flowers. I shout it to you in the thunder of the great waterfalls and compose love songs for birds tossing for you. I warm you with the clothing of my sunshine and perfume the air with nature's sweet scent. My love for you is deeper than any ocean and greater than any need in your heart. If you'd only realize how I care.

My dad sends his love. I want you to meet him. He cares, too. Fathers are just that way. So, please, call on me soon. No matter how long it takes, I'll wait forever. Because..... I LOVE YOU.

Your Friend, Jesus

(Written by Yvonne S. Rathkey)



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God Bless
You