

Favorite Stories

of the
Season

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REPROBATUS

—1—

Reprobatus had grown into a giant of a man...young and eager, taking great pride in his strength. Simple and forthright in his reasoning, Reprobatus saw how other men stood in awe of his strength and power. He concluded that the only worthwhile thing in the world was strength. So, he resolved that the only master he would serve must be mightier than himself...mightier than any other being.

First, he offered his services to the village blacksmith. But it took only a few strokes on the anvil and Reprobatus shrugged in disgust. This man, compared to him, was a weakling.

One day Reprobatus heard mention of another master who used the name of Pluto. When he asked who this Pluto might be, the answer was that he was a king of darkness and death, whom all men, even the powerful Reprobatus might well fear. Reprobatus took off to seek this new and mightiest master of all. When he found him, Pluto agreed to let Reprobatus serve him. Pluto commanded Reprobatus to take a stand on the shore of a deep river and whoever should want to cross, he was to carry across on his back...from now into all eternity.

And so it was that through the long years he carried any and all across the river. One Christmas day, a small child came to him and asked to be carried to the far shore. Laughing and sure of his great strength, Reprobatus easily and lightly tossed the child to his shoulder and waded into the swift water.

REPROBATUS

—2—

But the farther he went the harder became the going. The weight of the child wore heavily upon him till he thought his back would buckle. Gasping in midstream, he braced against the torrent, and cried: “What kind of child are you that you are heavier than any **man**...heavy as though the whole **world** were pressing down on me?”

The small voice replied, “I grow heavy as the world because I created the world, redeemed the world and bear all the sins and sorrows of the world.” And, with these words, the weight lifted and the child disappeared. Reprobatus marveled. This child was surely mightier than Pluto, the master of darkness, for the child was strong enough to bear all his sorrows, strong enough to shape the earth. This was the new Master that he would serve.

But who was He? Where was He?

He told his strange adventure in the first town that he came to...asking if the Child had come that way. The people looked at him in awe. “You have seen the Christkind who walks among men only on Christmas day.”

And so it happened that Reprobatus found his new Master. He also took a new name, Christopher...carrier of Christ. St. Christopher, patron protector of travelers, who it is said, will see you safely on your way, just as he carried a child across a flooded stream.

GODS of MYTHOLOGY

—1—

Holly and mistletoe, Druid oaks and Viking fir trees advanced from a dark past to the joyous yuletide of today. But, what of other more ancient divinities that were worshiped in the lands bordering the Mediterranean where the Christ Child was born, and while He was growing up? Can a stretch of the imagination put such divinities as Mars, Venus, Jupiter, Apollo and others, in their places at Christmas time?

Who needs imagination? Let's look into a book of mythology in the night stand drawer and step into a time when men's minds were alive with insight and a quest for knowledge that may never be surpassed. Or, that is what some writers would have us believe.

The Greeks had a word for it. The Romans, whose practicality stood in awe of Greek thought and culture, copied the word to make it their own. The word was "Zeus." Zeus, you may recall, was the father of the entire family of gods. According to the Romans, he became "Zeus Pater"... "God the Father"... "Jupiter." At this time of year Jupiter is one of the brightest stars in the sky. So, the idea of the "Fatherhood of God" was by no means a new idea.

Zeus Pater or Jupiter...whatever you want to call him, had a son who was especially brilliant and beloved. In fact, he was just that...the sun...s-u-n, also called Apollo. He seemed to be all that a man should be—strong, loving, he delighted and excelled in physical skills, athletics, music, and poetry. An all around good fellow who was simply too good for this world.

GODS of MYTHOLOGY

—2—

Because he was the Sun...Light...light itself, he was also the Truth. From the Truth nothing is hidden. So, when the early Christian writers spoke of **their** Saviour as the “Son of Righteousness”, they gave their converts a preview of a figure that was already an **idea** and to some an **ideal**...Apollo. Apollo served his purpose so well that artists of the time gave him the flaring light of the halo that later transferred to portraits of Christ.

This is one of the oldest coincidences of the idea of a “Dying God” or as one writer expressed it, “A suffering servant of God, who, by his own bodily death delivered his people and saved for them the gifts of knowledge and power that he had given them, and then arose again to a place of glory.”

Going even further back than the Greeks, the Egyptians had the same belief in their Legend of Osiris, the chief of their gods. Osiris, they said, came to earth when men were still savages. He gave them laws, introduced agriculture, marriage and many other things. Another god killed him out of jealousy. But every Spring, Osiris rose again when the Nile River flooded and blessed his people with prosperity.

Are these coincidences, or myth, or were they shadows of coming events?

THE DONKEY

—1—

Every child is impatient for Christmas to come. The excited anticipation is almost too much to bear by Christmas Eve. Nick and Ryan felt that way. And it seemed that they would never get their farm chores done.

Finally the firewood was in, the cows and chickens fed, and all they had to do was coax the pet donkey, Susan, into the barn. But, Susan stopped just outside the barn, cocked her head as though listening to something and refused to budge. In frustration and almost in tears, the boys went for their grandfather for help. Big Gramps, grinning, approached Susan and gently scratched her ears. “Give her time, boys. It’s Christmas Eve and on Christmas Eve donkeys have much to remember.” Susan nodded as if she understood and agreed. Then, with a quiet, independent, dignity that donkeys have, she walked into her stall.

Once inside the house, sitting by the fireplace, Nick asked, “Gramps, what did you mean—what could donkeys have to remember on Christmas Eve?” Gramps grinned and replied, “Well, boys, let me tell you a story.” Ryan and Nick settled down close to the fireplace, looked up at Gramps, happy in the knowledge that stories postponed bedtime. And besides, his stories, though sometimes far fetched, were usually really special.

“Did you ever notice how Susan’s hair is darker and coarser down her back and across her shoulders? It’s sort of a cross shaped marked that all donkeys have. You could say that every donkey has a cross to bear.”

THE DONKEY

—2—

“A very long time ago, on the very first Christmas, a young donkey with all the patience in the world, traveled long, weary miles to Bethlehem. He carried a precious cargo—a woman who was soon to have a child. He carried her right into the town of Bethlehem and into a stable. There, the donkey stood with the other animals near the manger where the mother and the new born babe lay. A star shone overhead in the sky as if to tell the world that someone very special had been born here.

The little donkey was proud. But, he had an even greater task ahead. An evil, jealous king had heard of this birth and feared that the child had been born to take away his throne. The king was determined that the child must die. He sent soldiers searching every street, every home, every hut, every inn, searching for the child. A kind man led the young mother and the babe away from the town, across the rough desert, on the back of that same young donkey. Though he must have been weary, the donkey never balked, never stopped, never complained. Finally, the trip was completed. The mother and child were safe, the donkey had done his job.

But, the story does not end there—the donkey would see the child again. The child had grown into manhood, and though destined to be a **prince** among men, He was now a **prisoner** condemned to death.

THE DONKEY

—3—

Along the the road to Calvary, the crowds jostled, some to pray, some to jeer. The little donkey was old now, more than thirty years old. Each load he carried seemed to be a little heavier...requiring more effort. But, when he saw his first master struggling up the hill burdened with a heavy cross, he wanted to help the child that he had once saved from Herod's men. He carefully nuzzled through the throng of people where his Master would pass and seemed to offer his willing back to carry the load. His Master paused, laid his hand on the donkey's back, and said, "Patient beast, you alone in all the world would carry this cross for me, but it is one that I must carry alone. But through the years when you bear the burdens of other men, you shall wear a badge of faithful service...a likeness of this cross upon your back."

Nick and Ryan sat silent as Gramps paused. Finally, Ryan said, "I guess if Susan wants to stand out under the stars for awhile, it's alright with me." And, Nick said, "I guess donkeys really do have a lot to remember on Christmas Eve."

THE RING

—1—

Ross Catlin found a ring...and the entire Christmas season changed for him! Indeed, his entire outlook on life changed.

Ross used to be a reserved, self contained kind of person...before the ring. He never made much “to-do” about Christmas; that had become sort of routine. A few years ago when he and his wife, Sue Carol, had their first Christmas together, she had suggested having in a few other couples for a big, traditional dinner. Ross pointed out that **most** people spent Christmas with their families so there was little use in inviting anyone.

Then, Ross found the ring. It didn't appear to be valuable. Just a heavy gold band, greatly worn, and engraved with a wreath and a few symbols. He took the ring to a jeweler friend hoping to learn something about the engraving and perhaps, its worth. The jeweler looked at it for a long time and finally said, “Nothing much to it. All you can get for it is the value of the gold. If you like, I'll weigh it and give you a few dollars for it.” Despite the apparent disinterest, Ross sensed that the jeweler was very excited about the ring. Ross simply said, “No, it isn't mine. I found it and I think I should wait and see if someone claims it.”

Ross put an ad in the paper and waited. While he waited, he went through the usual pre-holiday routine. He made a duty visit, complete with card and candy to Aunt Bertha. She received him graciously, as always. He lingered on a bit longer than usual when she invited him to stay for a cup of tea. Her words seemed to reflect more than courtesy. She might have been pleading for company.

THE RING

—2—

Ross realized that Aunt Bertha was lonely. Why had it not occurred to him before? He stayed for tea and wound up doing something most unusual for him. He invited Aunt Bertha to Christmas dinner. He apologetically explained to Sue, “I don’t know what got into me. I just had this urge to do something for her.”

Sue was delighted.

The next day his boss called him into the office to present a bonus check. Ross could almost read the boss’s mind. He seemed embarrassed to give anything so impersonal as a check, hoping that Ross and the other employees would forgive a lonely old man who just didn’t know what sort of gift to buy. Actually, the employees were quite pleased to receive a bonus check.

Unexplainably, Ross invited the boss to Christmas dinner. The older man was surprised and pleased, but hesitated, and said that he usually took a few kids from the orphanage to a restaurant for Christmas dinner. Ross replied, “That’s great but I bet they’d love a real old fashioned, home cooked Christmas dinner,” and he invited them all! “What in the world am I doing?” he thought. But he was happy.

On Christmas day, a stranger came to the house. He was a young man, a bit dark complected, and spoke with a Middle-Eastern accent. He had lost a ring and had come to claim it. No, he had not seen the ad in the newspaper. He just knew that the ring was here. He described the ring exactly, and said, “It has been in my family for many generations and I prize it highly. I am prepared to give a generous reward.”

THE RING

—3—

Ross felt almost stunned, with a sense of loss. He hated to part with the ring. It seemed as though so many good things had happened since he found it. But, he said, “No, please don’t offer a reward. Wearing the ring has been ah...well...an experience...a privilege. I really can’t explain it, but I feel like I’ve already been rewarded.” The stranger looked at him seriously, then, with a strange little smile, he slipped the ring on his finger and changed the subject.

“Have you heard about the Christmas legend of the Magi’s gold? No one knows what became of the treasure that the kings brought to the stable so long ago. Some say that part of it found its way into the hands of a goldsmith, who fashioned a most unusual ring. Those who wear the ring can see into the hearts and minds of other people and good things happen.” Then, with a polite “Thank you”, a nod and a smile, the stranger was gone.

Did I say earlier that Ross was a reserved, self contained young man? You should see him now! He works for his new uncle. Actually, the boss married Ross’s Aunt Bertha. His house is a welcome haven for kids from the orphanage from one Christmas to the next along with old and new friends. And, the feeling seems to be here to stay. Ross can look into anyone’s heart...because his own heart is open to one and all.

What Shall We Give the Children?

—1—

What shall we give the children?

In the twilight of the year,
the faces of the children grow luminous.
Rosy with cold, arabesqued with snowflakes,
leaning into the wind, or drowsing before the fire,
their eyes large, they look and listen,
as if they glimpsed the peripheries of miracles
or heard a soundless music in the air.
From the innocent kingdom of implicit belief
to that uncomfortable arena
where the implacable mind battles the intractable heart,
the faces of children at Christmas are lighted
with visions of things to come.

What shall we give the children?

It seems certain that they will travel roads
we never thought of, navigate strange seas,
cross unimagined boundaries and
glimpse horizons beyond our power to visualize—
what can we give them to take along?
For the wild shores of **Beyond**,
no toy or bauble will do.
It must be something **more**,
constructed of stouter fabric discovered among
the cluttered aisles and tinsel bargain counters of experience,
fashioned from what little we have learned.
It must be devised out of responsibility and profound caring—
a home made present of selfless love.

What Shall We Give the Children?

—2—

What Shall We Give the Children?

Attention, for one day it will be too late.

A sense of value, the inalienable place
of the individual in the scheme of things,

with all that accrues to the individual—

self reliance, courage, conviction,

self-respect, and respect for others.

A sense of humor—laughter leavens life.

The meaning of discipline. If we falter at discipline

life will do it for us.

What Shall We Give the Children?

The will to work. Satisfying work is a lasting joy.

The talent for sharing, for it is not so much

what we give as what we share.

The love of justice. Justice is the bulwark against violence
and oppression and the repository of human dignity.

The passion for truth, founded on precept and example.

Truth is the beginning of every good thing.

What Shall We Give the Children?

The power of faith, engendered in mutual trust.

Life without faith is a dismal dead-end street.

The beacon of hope, which lights all darkness.

The knowledge of being loved beyond the demand of

reciprocity, praise or blame—

for those who love and are loved are never lost.

What Shall We Give the Children?

—3—

What Shall We Give the Children?

The open sky, the brown and green earth,
the leafy tree, the golden sand, the blue water,
stars in their courses, and the awareness of them.

And, the awareness of

Birdsong, butterflies, clouds and rainbows.

Sunlight, moonlight, firelight.

A large hand reaching down for a small hand,
impromptu praise, an unexpected kiss,

a straight answer.

The glisten of enthusiasm and a sense of wonder.

Long days in which to be merry —

and nights without fear.

What shall we give the children?

The memory of a good home.