

A rhyme for Christmas Eve

Fr. Nick Smith

There is a day, my Dad would say,
That we should mark each year;
A day which he thought ought to be
especially revered.

And that was when, yet once again
he'd tell his favorite tale,
which some believed and some perceived
as quite beyond the pale.

He told of when he kept an inn
in that hometown of mine;
He was so proud about the crowds
who found his place so fine.

As usual, the place was full
the night he told about;
and he'd explain about who came
and how he'd turned them out.

A couple sought a place they thought
they could stay overnight;
but sadly found that all around
there was no place in sight.

And matters worse, my dad would curse,
the girl was ripe with child!
What craziness, to go like this,
Through wilderness so wild!

In any case, the only space
which he could make for them
that had four walls was in the stalls
that serviced Bethlehem.

Then late that night, he caught the sight
of shepherds in the street
without the sheep they were to keep
or so he would repeat.

The shepherds raved and all behaved
as if they could be drunk
a ragged band who ranted, and
to tell the truth, they stunk!

But they maintained, as they explained,
to all who cared to hear,
angels on wing, with news to bring,
had filled them with such fear.

That frightful news, so filled with clues,
was welcome after all;

Turns out, they said, it was instead
to humankind a call.

That message clear, Dad said each year,
should make us all be thrilled,
for on that day, that special day,
were prophecies fulfilled.

I was so small, I don't recall
too much of which Dad told,
but seems to me in memory
some men showed up with gold!

And something too, twixt me and you,
about a moving star,
but long ago, so I don't know
and can't think back that far.

I can't be sure just what is pure
and truthful that Dad told,
but though so small, I still recall
the strangers in the fold.

We all were sad to lose my Dad,
some years ago it's been,
but on that day, let come what may,
we gather once again

To tell his tale, it's never stale,
And he would want us to.
Familiar though it seems to grow
It binds us all like glue.

It might just be the mystery
that so intrigues us all:
What has become of those random
strangers in the stall?

A boy was born, that is foresworn,
no phantom of tall-tales,
and he would be, well let's just see,
some thirty years on scale.

And there is one who deeds has done
which have left many thrilled;
I wonder now if he somehow
those prophecies fulfilled.

He claims to be God's Son, says he,
Messiah to the earth;
And if he were, that might for sure
explain the mystery birth.

And, Oh, how glad would be my Dad
that his tale had such worth!
that one we doubt, the one about
the couple who gave birth.

The inn was sold, so I've been told,
no family there resides;
The stables, too, were built anew,
But mystery abides.

The family's gone, they've all moved on,
And I like all of them;
but once each year, be far or near,
we come to Bethlehem

To ponder fresh, there in the flesh,
what history has concealed,
and pray that we might someday see
the mystery revealed.

Before the day he passed away
my Dad spent lots of time
researching all the shepherd's call
a prophesy could mime.

He read the scrolls with lofty goals
and met with scribes and priests;
learned prophet's names and all their claims,
or most of them at least.

In his own mind he sought to find
a reason he could keep,
to find why those shepherd guys
would ever leave their sheep!

What had they heard? What mighty word
had caused them to desert
and run to see nativity,
and nonsense loud to blurt.

To his surprise, I now surmise,
he found that our hometown,
that hidden gem, our Bethlehem,
was scheduled for renown.

And that's because for there it was
a savior should be born,
a masterpiece, a Prince of Peace
unto a world forlorn.

So, what he found, that old bloodhound,
was while we all had slept,
God's will was done, a victory won,
God's promise had been kept.

Now, as for me, I seldom see
the connections he discerned;
but I'd take his word, and what I've heard
to add to what I've learned.

The prophet's names are all the same
to me I must admit;
and history just baffles me,
I just can't deal with it.

But just last week I heard him speak,
that Jesus who's around,
and he made sense, a little dense,
but mostly near the ground.

Now, could it be that it is he
who born was in our shed?
Whom shepherds saw there in the straw
and to whom kings were led?

His welcome words which I have heard
could come from such a one;
and if it's so, I'd like to know
before the time is done.

This awful place must hate the grace
with which he shows his love;
his thoughtfulness and gentleness
just fit him like a glove.

I fear that they will find a way
to silence him for good;
cut short his life with sword or knife
or something made of wood (?)

But as he lives and counsel gives
about God's Holy dream,
my soul is moved and then improved
to hear his every theme

That couple who my father knew,
while we had not a clue,
in stable stayed, and surely made
A lovely dream come true.