

NEW WORLD NEWS

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London Tourist Board

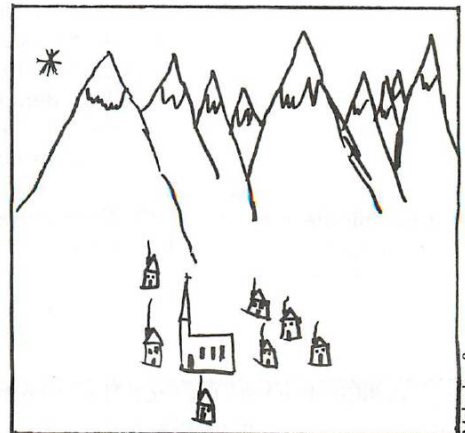
PEACE ON EARTH?

At Christmas we celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace. As weapons get deadlier, the quest for peace becomes more urgent. But calling for peace does not create it; it depends on more than banning weapons. It takes determination on all sides. It is a symptom of good relationships.

War is always a possibility while there is injustice, lack of trust between people, lack of accountability of governments for their actions.

The arms build-up by NATO and Warsaw Pact countries is causing great worry in Europe and elsewhere. If, despite the complexities and suspicions, current talks between the USA and USSR did lead to a withdrawal of Pershing, SS 20 and other missiles, fear would be eased. Welcome as this would be, it would be tragic if people or governments stopped working for peace as a result. If peace is to be secure, a shared horror of nuclear war needs to be replaced by common interests and trust.

Christ offers a way forward. He can empower each person to deal with the basic causes of war in his own nature—ambition, hatred, insecurity. He will also enable each one to become a peace-maker, to disarm suspicion, to attract others to walk the way of peace. Such a spirit, already blowing on both sides of the Iron Curtain, does not respect man-made obstacles, and can touch the policy-makers.



Malcolm, 9

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SEASON'S OFFER

by Brian Boobbyer

JESUS SPENT 90 per cent of his life at home. His first miracle was at a wedding feast. His last words from the Cross were a request to John to make a home for His mother. He evidently believed in families.

Many families my wife and I know have problems. Some of our married friends, people in their forties, are separated or separating—with all the anguish that involves. This is, I think, partly due to a yearning for lost years, a feeling that life has passed them by and some important ingredient has been missing. The women want to look young and exciting again. Men want to show they can still make fresh conquests.

Christ offers us a chance to start again with the same person, instead of starting again with someone else. This requires a new vision of the future based on the hope that things can change. This, in turn, depends on a growing spiritual life. Saint John says that if we do not develop a close relationship with God we become like dry sticks. What basis for unity have two dry sticks? Without change, self-willed and proud personalities are bound to drift apart.

For most people, Christmas means going home. A good motto for such homecomings could be 'look back in wonder'. There is plenty to wonder at if your heart is open. For the fortunate, there may be memories of childhood Christmases. But all can wonder at the story of the first Christmas. God speaks to a teenage girl. She believes what He says. When her child is due she hunts desperately for a room in which to bear it. God entered the world in an astonishing, unforeseeable way.

The next step is to look forward in hope. You can find inspiration from a book, a piece of music, a picture, the sky, a skein of wild geese, a friend. But the vision of hope is best fed by a fresh look at Christ's own life, in all its simplicity.

Christ took up His calling as a boy. Benedict was 17 when he walked out of *decadent Rome* into the hills. Francis of Assisi was in his twenties when he answered God's call, Saint Paul in his thirties, Abraham 'growing old'. Whether we are young, middle-aged or old, God's promise is the same. The past can be faced and finished. Christ told us that the truth would make us free. We need no longer stay the same. Any person, any marriage, any relationship can be reborn.

Christmas offers the vision of a new world that is so compelling that it can silence those voices that say, 'It is too late. It is too difficult, what's the use?' The voice that spoke to Mary, the wise men and the shepherds still speaks today. ■

HARMONY IN A FLAT

by Hilary Belden

SITTING OVER two rather tepid coffees, a social worker and I talked about the family. 'Can't you think of another word for it?' he asked. 'In my field, the nuclear family is seen as a disaster, because it so often warps and distorts people's lives. What you're talking about is different from that.'

I am a single woman sharing my airy, Victorian flat with three other single women, like me in full career and in their early thirties. One is half-Scots, one half-Maltese and the

other an Afrikaner. Alarmingly there are also four cats. This week we sustained a cracked wrist, waved off friends to India and Australia, helped organise a West End first night, did an intensive week of an MA course, completed a film strip for the Bible Reading Fellowship, kept the accounts department going in a major travel firm, made about 200 cheese straws, had lots of friends in and out and...

For us to live harmoniously, for the days to be part of a growing pattern of love rather than merely exhaustingly full, there has to be a way to make the family, something that creates peace.

We all take time alone in the early mornings to pray and listen in the inner silence, to be in God's presence and reflect. At some point every fortnight we try to be together and share the thoughts we have written down at such times.

So we hear about problems and their later solutions, about apologies made and action taken, about the minor miracles. We get to know each other's friends by name—a colleague with a desperately sick wife, a couple with marriage difficulties, a brother or parent, a nun or a black South African politician. If they ring up or arrive we can all welcome them. In a commune, as my brother once commented, you need an agreed policy on friends. 'Otherwise you get inconsistent. Some invite people up; others ask them to leave!'

Travelling companions

We hear about the personal issues and life choices which face each of us—but only as far as each person wishes to describe them. This is sharing confidence, not forcing it. We share the understanding we are finding of God and His love and healing. And—most important—we pray together, both at these times and at others.

This pattern of love and truth is what 'the family' is to me. People need acceptance. Without it they cannot find healing for the past, or grow or learn to love. As John Taylor writes in *The Go-Between God*, people 'find their identity and their role only when someone else sees them with love'. 'It is useless to call for repentance or commitment unless we have first of all given acceptance,' he continues.

We each need love and can measure each other's need of it by our own. We begin to discover that because God loves us and lovingly created each of us, we can love Him and the people He sends us. In every relationship, whether it begins with a sense of rapport or a feeling that so-and-so is 'not my sort of person', there comes a time when I have to pray for the free, accepting, warm love that person needs—and that they may feel it. Loving asks more of us than we can give—more, sometimes, than we are willing to give. But it is given to us as we pray and it is not, in the end, an effort. We learn to love by loving and love brings joy.

From this comes a harmony, even an ease, over cooking, cleaning, money and bills, taking cats to the vet or ourselves to the airport, receiving guests, accepting our daily routines and our life crises.

Acceptance in love, listening and sharing, prayer; for these we need each other. The exchange of strength and need, pain and joy, support and weakness make up the pattern of love and home. They create a family whose relationships are close but not closed and which is open to the world outside its boundaries.

Every person is alone. Yet we are called to mediate the love of God to each other, to accompany each other along the road of the journey of the soul. For that we make the family. ■

ROOM FOR TV, TALK AND VIOLIN

by Mary Lean



The Mackay family—left to right: Anne, Lewis, Neil, Ivy and Moira

I MET THE MACKAY family in Wimbledon after their church's St Andrew's Day service. Lewis Mackay, who is an elder, was wearing his kilt in honour of Scotland's saint; his family were slightly bleary-eyed after a late night dancing for the Scots of Staines. With St Andrew behind them, they were already discussing Burns Night on the way home.

11-year-old Neil lit the first candle on the Advent wreath and we sat down for lunch. There were three generations present—Lewis and Anne Mackay and their two children have lived with his mother for the last 12 years. Over lunch we talked about the church, Neil's football match and 14-year-old Moira's dancing the day before. Kathleen Hill-Williams, the sixth member of the household, told us about her childhood as an early white settler in Kenya.

When we sat down after the wash-up the morning's sermon was on Anne Mackay's mind. The minister had described a recent incident in a London school, where the headmistress had discovered that two of her pupils had been turned out of their home for the weekend to make room for their mother's boyfriend. 'But it's all right,' they told her, 'we've got our phone box.'

'Imagine the unbelievable insecurity of a child who's turned out whenever the boyfriend turns up,' said Anne. 'Home should be a place where a child can be itself, know that it is loved, somewhere it is totally secure and can talk things out. I still remember my own home as the happiest place I knew of—and that's what we try to create here. It's what every child ought to have.'

Dr Mackay, like his wife one of five children, also had happy childhood memories. His father owned a field behind their home in Edinburgh and they often played wild hockey games there on Sunday afternoons. His medical practice in inner London brings him into contact with those whose home lives are not so idyllic. 'I deal with alcoholism, children at risk, drugs, down and outs, old people who live alone, largely without friends,' he said. 'The welfare system is well-meaning and comprehensive but will never be large enough to cope with everyone's problems.'

If some of his patients had grown up in families which encouraged them to face up to difficult decisions and to take responsibility for their own lives, they would not be ill now, he believes. 'A large number of the patients coming to me are the feckless, irresponsible, self-concerned type.'

He deals with many single-parent families in his surgery. 'I believe that marriage is important,' he said. 'But as a doctor, I cannot reject patients who do not conform to my beliefs. What matters is whether people are responsible and

at peace about their affairs—and few of these people seem to be. Poor health is often the outcome of a dissatisfied life.'

At the same time, he feels that society should be aware of the cost of family breakdown. 'We know how many deaths alcohol causes a year, how much unemployment, how many road accidents. We know roughly how much death and morbidity smoking causes. Now we're beginning to add up how much broken homes cost in purely financial terms—separate houses, children fostered and so on.'

The Mackays regard their own packed semi-detached as an example of what can be done. When they moved in with Mrs Mackay senior, they converted the loft, making room for the family of five and usually one other person. 'There must be a lot of houses in Britain with large, dark, dusty attics which could be converted to help our housing problems,' said Lewis, conjuring up a picture of the nation's nuclear families scouring the highways and by-ways for occupants for their upper rooms. 'People miss a tremendous lot if they just live with their own blood and interests,' said Anne.

Of course, they have to work things out. They have one small living-room between them. 'We just have to learn that we can't all do exactly what we like in it all the time. We have to decide when to have the television on, when to talk, when the violin gets practiced...' But that, Anne Mackay believes, is what family life is all about. 'A family is by far the best place for people to learn how to be unselfish. And I believe that maturity means being unselfish.'

They see their marriage and family as God's gift to them. 'I think that this has meant that we haven't tried to grab things for ourselves out of our relationship,' said Lewis. 'Trouble begins when you think you have rights. When I feel it's my right to relax with the paper at the end of a long day, it's precisely the point that Moira wants to talk to me.'

In spite of their convictions, the Mackays don't offer a pat formula for family success. Life is a process of continual growth and change, Lewis believes, and as such it can't be easy. He feels the same about the ethical decisions he has to make in his practice—not just the life and death ones, but also routine dilemmas like 'Does this patient really need a visit in the middle of the night?' He finds such decisions difficult. 'But this is what the Cross is about,' he said. 'One is meant to suffer with people.'

'The temptation in life is to look for results—"something good happened because I did this". But that isn't the real test. It is whether my patients, family and I are learning to love and to look outside ourselves.'

YOUNG CHRISTMAS

We print below some of the letters and drawings which we received after asking children to write about Christmas; their family; what they felt had been the most important thing that had happened to them this year; and what they would like to happen next year.

OUR FAMILY LIVE in Newcastle, which is in England. My brother and I go to West Jesmond School, and Daddy spends half of his time at his desk. We are four. At Christmas we go sledging and carol singing. The most important thing that happened to me this year was when I had my birthday. I had a party and we played football. I think kindness and faithfulness in God makes a family happy.

Richard, 8½, Newcastle upon Tyne



us standing in front of the house
Peter, 6, Newcastle upon Tyne

AT CHRISTMAS WE DECORATE the house with a crib, a Christmas tree and other decorations. We have a wooden crib with a straw roof and straw for the floor with little plaster people. The crib is to remind us of the day two thousand years ago when Jesus was born. We also give and get presents and cards and I think that is the best thing about Christmas.

Margaret, 8, Manchester

THIS YEAR we are going to fetch our Christmas tree in the forest. On Christmas Eve we will have porridge in which there is an almond. The one who gets the almond, receives a marzipan pig as a prize.

We also go to church on Christmas Eve, but I find it hard to sit quietly.

Astrid, 5, Baerum, Norway

THIS YEAR WE went to a place called Stavern. People from Norway, Sweden and Denmark were together there, grown-ups and children. We had many games. I think the whole family enjoyed being there. And if you want to know why, it is because we found many new friends.

I wish that I could become a better soccer-player, then maybe my team will win our league. This year we were second.

Sigurd, 8, Baerum, Norway

HELLO, my name is Lindy and I am almost 10 years old. I have a family of four—Mother, Father, and younger brother.

Every Christmas we have a family breakfast, sometimes it consists of bacon and eggs. After breakfast we open our presents and write down who they are from so we can write 'thank you' letters to them.

The most important thing that happened to me this year was going to Caux and Mountain House.* And while I was there I thought how nice it would be if Prince Charles and Princess Diana would like to come to Caux and came.

Lindy, 10, Staines

*The MRA conference centre in Switzerland.

My name is Gerald Muchopa.
I am 6 years old and my sister Jean is 3 years old.
Christmas is a time to give presents to our family and friends.

Gerald, 6, Zimbabwe

I WANT PEACE in Northern Ireland for the benefit of the people living there and for the businessmen who have to go into Central Belfast. As England have finally qualified for the World Cup Finals in Spain next year, I want England to do well. I want Altrincham, our local football team, to retain the Alliance Premier League title and hopefully qualify for Division Four as they have come so close to doing in past seasons. I want the Pope to come to Manchester next year on his tour of Britain without any terrorist problems.

Peter, 10, Manchester



Sam, 5, Romford

ONE DAY before our half-term holiday near the end of break, just as I had finished playing my last game of marbles, the whistle blew. I lined up with the children of my class with the marbles in my hand. Suddenly one of the girls in my class came up to me and when I was not looking she knocked all the marbles out of my hand. They were all scattered everywhere, so the children rushed to get as many as they could. But one girl gave them all back to me.

On the way in I got angry with the girl who had thrown my marbles. So I hit her and she hit me back and we started fighting. Then we had to go to service. There I thought about saying sorry to her and so I did. She did not say anything, but at least I was glad I had. The next day we were friends again.

Esther, 11, Bristol

There are Four of us in our family mummy daddy Me and Michael. At Christmas we are going to granny's but this Christmas is going to be an unhappy Christmas because of grandpa but we will try and make granny happy. Well again about grandpa but also really the important thing is to help other people which I enjoy doing. Mostly that it is going to be a happy year of 1982 and also I thout about dononk my freind and his mummy and daddy because there divorcing. And last I think to be kind and generous to other people.

Andrew, 8, lives in Birmingham. His grandfather died last month.

I THINK that a happy family is made by being nice and sharing and talking to God when you have problems.

Ross, 7, Staines

A happy family is everybody being good. there are 4 in my family.

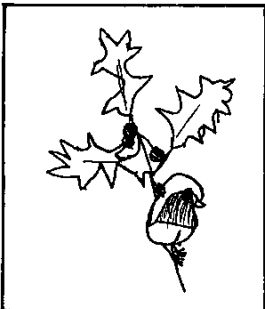
Christopher, 5, Cheshire

THERE ARE four in our family. I am nine, my brother, Douglas, is six and we have a Mum and Dad. At Christmas time we go to our Grandparents' home in Scotland. We open our presents in the morning, have a turkey dinner and then sing carols round the Christmas tree and watch the candles go out one by one. The last one becomes the star over the crib.

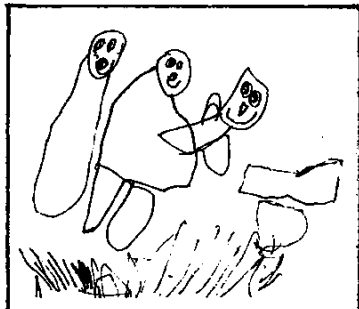
The most important thing that happened this year is when we moved to a new home in Manchester. It's the first time we've lived in a city.

I think brotherly love makes a happy family. When I think about what Douglas wants to do instead of just what I want to do, then we get on better together.

Malcolm, 9, Manchester



Douglas, 6, Manchester



Robert, 4, Manchester

MY FAMILY host people. We sing Christmas songs. My birthday was on 27 October 1981. I want to learn about nature. Being together makes us happy.

Catherine, 6, Virginia, USA

WE ARE A FAMILY of five including Granny. At Christmas we usually invite friends and relatives for the day. This year we are inviting an African family who came last year.

We think that in order to make a happy family it is important for parents to stick together peaceably and stay together and not get divorced and so leave their children.

Andrew, 11, and Heather, 9, Birmingham

STAR IN THE GLOOM

by Alan Thornhill

IT WAS THE first Christmas after the Second World War. The lights were on in London again. My heart was soaring. I was home. Best of all I had become engaged to be married, and I was madly in love. I had been asked to speak at a special carol service in a big South London Church. The decorations were all up, the Mayor was to be there in full regalia. It was a festive occasion.

At lunch that day my fiancée and I had our first real row. As I look back on it, it was not so serious. At the time it seemed an utter disaster. It was as though a beautiful gala balloon had been punctured, and simply hung in tatters. We had tea together and tried to make things up. Nothing would come. Not a spark of life or love. Gloom hung heavy. Joy was dead. The notes I had made for my sermon were like so many hieroglyphics on paper. The words were there but where was the tune? My Christmas message was dry as dust in my throat. The clock ticked on. It was time to start to the church. 'It's no good,' I said bitterly, 'I can't speak. I've nothing to say.'

There was a long silence. Time was running short. Then Barbara looked up and said, 'Perhaps this is your Christmas message.'

'Oh yes,' I said bitterly. 'Some message! Why don't you give it?'

'But isn't this what Christmas is about?' she persisted. 'Flatness, sogginess,' I said. 'A pretty heavy Christmas pudding.'

'Exactly,' she said. 'When everything was dark and dismal in the world, Christ came.'

I thought of my Roman history. Gilbert Murray, the great historian, had talked about 'the failure of nerve' beginning in the Roman Empire just about that time. Divisions and disillusionment.

Very soon I was in that London pulpit. I abandoned all my notes and simply told the truth—the story of a couple facing their first row. Then I told them what Barbara had said, and I spoke very simply about light in darkness, and how the gloom highlights the Christ. Even as I spoke the Christmas star was rising again in my own heart.

I don't know what the Mayor and others made of it all. But a young couple came up to us after the service. 'We just want to tell you,' they said, 'we got engaged today. You have given us something for our whole marriage.' Later they asked me to marry them. They and their family are among our closest friends.

FOR THE BLIND

by Pat Duce

IT WAS AN old, old trick. So old that, hopefully, no one would remember it. The box on the counter was labelled 'For the Blind'. It was the Boss's idea. She was smart and about as compassionate as a rattlesnake. Jo was no angel of mercy herself. It had been her inspiration to stick on it the picture of the man with the white stick.

And it worked. Hardly a day went by without the cheerful rattle of coins—the odd small change the busy shoppers couldn't be bothered with; the sometimes generous giving—'I had a blind brother'; the schoolboy with his hand poised at the ready to pick out his favourite crisps, checking it halfway and dropping in his coin instead; the young mothers guiding their offsprings' fingers to the box, keen for the small lesson in unselfishness to be learned to the full. Not so many of those, thought Jo cynically.

The Boss was gratified. Jo was amused. Suckers, she thought as she heard the familiar tinkle and plop. They'd better hurry up with their giving. She regarded the blindless window and remembered the hot sun all summer. And now Christmas was on them again—more work, but more spending.

One evening just before closing time when the weary shoppers had departed, arms full of last-minute purchases, Jo noticed that the last customer in the shop seemed to be having some difficulty in keeping his eyes off the box. Presently he came over and leaned his elbow on the counter, shoving the box a little so that it rattled. Oh, no you don't, thought Jo, taking up a facing position behind the counter.

'Can I help you—sir?' she asked with exaggerated politeness when she saw the state of the man's clothes.

He leaned closer. 'I'm a CG. Do you know what that is?' he whispered hoarsely.

'Sure,' said Jo, who didn't want to know. All she wanted to do was get rid of the guy and go home.

'A compulsive gambler,' said the man.

So what? thought Jo, shifting her gum to the other side of her cheek.

'I've been at it ever since I was a kid—and now I damn well want to stop it, more than anything else in the world. But I can't.'

Jo half-turned uneasily towards the Boss's ante-room. She never liked it when the Boss hovered around her like a blinking helicopter, but maybe this time she wouldn't mind too much.

She began to move away. The man slammed his hand down on the counter, making her jump. 'You're going to listen to me,' he said fiercely. 'I've got to tell someone.'

Why me? thought Jo, but shrugged her shoulders in reluctant acceptance.

'All I've got left is this £5 note. My wife left me this morning and this time I know it's for real.'

Jo's insides curled. Heck, this was a sweet shop, not a marriage guidance centre. She opened her mouth to say something, but shut it again. The impact of the despair opposite was like a body-blow.

'But I'll tell you a funny thing,' the man went on. 'I was standing outside the shop just now, just as the rain was starting. Suddenly I heard someone say, "If you give that last £5 to the first charity you see, I will cure you so you'll never want to gamble again. Test me and see for yourself." A sort of bargain, like. I looked round but there was no one near just then. The rain came down heavier, so I came in here and the first thing I see is your charity box there.'

Yuk, thought Jo. A religious nut case? She sneaked another look at the man. No, definitely not religious.

There was a sudden stillness in the shop. Even the swish of traffic on the wet roads seemed to have receded into the background. All that could be heard was the needling stabs of rain on the window and the strident voice of the Boss telephoning in the ante-room.

'How do you know it'll work?' asked Jo, and wished she hadn't.

'I don't. But it's a gamble—and it *could* be my last.' A faint twinkle showed for a moment in the dull eyes. Jo suddenly thought of a long-ago Christmas and a stable, and someone who had promised to set captives free...

The man straightened up from his confidential, elbow-on-counter position and the tension in the air burst like a bubble. There was a sharp intake of breath, a rustle as a note was inserted in the slot of the box. Then with dignity he



walked quickly to the door, opened it. The bell tinkled and he was gone.

Something seemed to go out of the atmosphere with the shutting of the door. But something else had come in. Damn, thought Jo. The box on the counter grinned at her smugly, a small piece of the note still showing at one side of the slot, like a tongue stuck out at her. An unfamiliar seasaw occupied her mind for a full sixty seconds.

Then, her mind made up, she grabbed the box, snatched up her coat, half-ran out of the door, calling over her shoulder, 'Back in a minute, Boss'—out into the street amid the sights and sounds of Christmas, with the rain now turning to snow.

Splashing through the puddles, she pushed her way among the crowds, up the High Street, swearing comprehensively to herself as she jogged along. Like a silly puppet on a string, she thought humourlessly. A little snake of doubt wriggled in her mind as she thought of the inevitable day of judgment with the Boss—but she smacked it on the head and it withdrew.

Thrusting through the door of the Charity Shop for the Blind so roughly that it bounced back and caught her on the heels, she banged the box down on the counter and shouted at the astonished receptionist, 'There you are—have the darn thing' and shot out again.

Nut case, thought the receptionist. 'Thank you,' she called. 'Very much,' she added when she felt the weight of the box. 'And a Merry Christmas to...'

But Jo was far away by then, the second captive to be set free that day. The Boss would get over it—given time. Meanwhile, for the first time since she didn't know when, Jo felt good inside. Real good. And she'd like to keep it that way.

© Pat Duce ■

FAMILY CHRISTMAS QUIZ

Answers that can't be provided by one of the family may be found in poetry and hymn books, the Bible, encyclopaedias and in *Christmas*, published by Blandford Press.

Please send answers to New World News Christmas Quiz, 12 Palace Street, London SW1E 5JF to arrive by January 27. The prize for the first—or most—correct solution opened will be a copy of *Gavin and the Monster*, the story book by Hugh Steadman Williams, and a free three months' subscription to *New World News* for yourselves or a friend. Good luck!

1. Complete the following Biblical quotations associated with Christmas (King James Version):

- 'The....also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid'
- 'And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped Him in....clothes'
- 'But thou, Bethlehem...., though thou be little among the thousands of Judah'
- 'Thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their....'
- 'And the light shineth in darkness; and the darknessit not'
- 'The people that....in darkness have seen a great light'

2. In which century

- was Jesus born?
- did Good King Wenceslas live?
- were Christmas trees first seen in Britain?
- were Christmas cards first instituted?
- was Christmas Day abolished?

3. In which country would you say this at Christmastide?

- Schöni Wienacht
- Bara Din Mubarrak Ho
- Hyvää Joulua
- Ikresmesi Emnandi
- Il-Milied It-tajeb
- Buon Natale
- Geseënde Kersfees
- Nadolig Llawen

4. In which country would you eat this at Christmas?

- rice porridge
- mince pies
- spiced beef
- mattak
- snapdragon
- kutya
- Christpsomo

5. In which language was each of these carols first written?

- Hark the Herald Angels sing
- Rocking Carol
- Silent Night
- O come all ye Faithful
- Brightest and best of the sons of the morning
- O come, O come Immanuel

6. a When will the Coptic Church celebrate Christmas this year?

- What day will Christmas fall on in the year 2000?

7. In which book or play

- did an old man learn about Christmas from three ghosts?
- was it always winter, but never *Christmas*?
- did a crippled boy go to Bethlehem with three kings?
- were two cousins helped by the White Knight?

8. From whose Christmas carol or poem do the following lines come?

- 'Nor did it occur to one of us there
To doubt they were kneeling then'
- 'But, oh! Father Christmas, if you love me at all'
- 'Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse'
- 'All meanly wrapped in swathing bands'
- 'Statesman with your promise,
Rich man with your power'
- 'Behold a silly tender Babe'
- 'Earth stood hard as iron'
- 'But the Saxons were keeping Christmas
And the night was stormy as well'
- 'It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent'
- 'A cold coming we had of it'
- 'And girls in slacks remember Dad
And oafish louts remember Mum'

'Christmas', published by Blandford Press, is available from Grosvenor Books, 54 Lyford Road, London, SW18 3JJ, price £2.95, with postage £4.15. ■

MONSTER OPENING KNIGHT



First point to the monster—Matthew Ryan and Thick Wilson as Gavin and the monster

de Wolf



'Won't you spare me some of your time?' Debbie (Frances Ruffelle) asks her mother (Joan Heal)

de Wolf



Hodel

HUGH STEADMAN WILLIAMS' new play, *Gavin and the Monster*, with music by Kathleen Johnson, opened with a roar at London's Westminster Theatre on November 17. Several thousand schoolchildren have already seen the musical—and according to Eddy Stride of the *Church of England Newspaper* the monster was not the only source of noise. When he arrived, Mr Stride was met by 'earsplitting conversation from hundreds of schoolchildren'. The commotion before the curtain went up made him wonder how order would be restored for the performance. However, he need not have worried: 'From the monster's first appearance to the end of the afternoon the pace, colour, lighting effects, dialogue and song/dance routines kept everybody attentive.'

Keith Nurse, the *Daily Telegraph* reviewer, writes that Thick Wilson's performance as the 'blue-faced ogre with giant youngster-grabbing claws' has the sort of wit and flair that makes the evening for kids and adults alike.

Guardian reviewer, Stuart Wavell, agrees, 'Thick Wilson's roaring monster keeps the children riveted while the parents are trying to work out the symbolism.' Director Denise Coffey and the author gave his party a lot to think about on their way home. 'A whizz-bang production,' comments Mr Wavell.

Matthew Ryan plays Gavin, 'a decidedly weedy-looking little boy who suddenly becomes wonderfully brave when his pretty cousin is kidnapped by a huge, fat, scaly green monster' as Emma Blake explains in the *New Standard*. Cousin Debbie (Frances Ruffelle) has run away from her parents—a delightfully dotty professor (Sam Kelly) and his scatty wife (Joan Heal). She spends much of the play a prisoner in the monster's underground cave. However, all is not lost. The swashbuckling White Knight (Roy Alexander) arrives. He is fully qualified, having studied A-level damsel-rescuing and other essentials at knight school, and gives Gavin a sword for his rescue mission.

Despite the attentions of two monstrosities (Elaine White and Ann-Marie Gwatkin), Gavin eventually fights the monster. A school child wrote after seeing the show, 'My favourite part of the play was when Gavin killed the monster with the White Knight's sword and smoke went everywhere.' Then comes the unexpected 'sting in the tale' which we are keeping secret—and which contains a message.

Mr Stride is 'glad that basic decency and respect for others has been so attractively presented'. He feels that the multi-racial nature of the cast is one of its great assets.

At a first-night reception after the musical, Mr Williams said that he had tried to produce a play to which children from inner-city areas would relate. 'My wish is that this play can have some part in bringing light, hope and joy to such children and their families over this Christmas season.' ■

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