

A Christmas story

Because this story was originally a brief sound-bite for a radio show, and it had been edited to the bone. I have added a little muscle to the bones of the story to make it a bit more readable. This is my own adaptation of a parable told by Paul Harvey, a well-known radio commentator in days past.

“The Christmas Story . . . the story of God being born in a manger, and all that, is unacceptable to many contemporary thinkers. Mostly, I think, because they seek complex answers to questions whose answers are often utterly simple. For the cynics, the skeptics and the unconvinced I submit a modern parable.

The story begins with a modern man; much like us. He was not a Scrooge. He was a kind, decent, man; generous to his family, upright in his dealings with other men. But he could not believe the stories that churches proclaim so boldly at Christmas time. He simply could not swallow the Jesus story—about God leaving His throne in heaven and coming to earth as a common man. It just didn’t make sense to him, and he was too honest to pretend otherwise.

“I’m truly sorry to upset you,” he told his wife One day, “but I can’t go to church with you on this Christmas Eve—I would feel like a hypocrite. I will stay home; but I’ll wait up for the family to return.”

He stayed . . . They went . . .

Shortly after the family drove away, snow began to fall. He watched at the window as snow flurries gradually developed into a raging blizzard, he turned from the window, settled into his fireside chair. And began to read his newspaper. Moments later he was startled by a thudding sound . . . Then another . . . then another. At first he thought someone must be throwing snowballs against his living room window; but when he went to investigate he found a flock of birds huddled miserably in the snow. They had been caught in the storm, and in a desperate search for shelter had tried to fly through his large picture window.

Well . . . he thought . . . “I can’t let the poor creatures lie there and freeze.”

He remembered the barn where the children stabled their pony. That would provide a warm shelter if he could direct the birds to it. After quickly putting on his coat and galoshes he tramped through the deepening snow and opened the barn doors wide. As he had hoped, the warm light from the barn doors beckoned enticingly through the swirling snow.

But the birds did not come.

Thinking that food would entice them toward safe shelter; he hurried back to the house, fetched breadcrumbs, and created a crumb-trail to the yellow-lighted wide-open doorway of the stable by sprinkling them on the snow; but to his dismay the birds ignored the breadcrumbs and continued their helpless floundering in the snow.

He tried catching them. He tried shooing them into the barn. He tried everything he knew; but the birds scattered off in every direction—except to the warmth of the barn.

As he paused for a moment to consider their plight, he realized that the birds were frightened—they were afraid of him. “To them,” he reasoned, “I must be a strange and terrifying creature. Every move I make—however well meant—tends to frighten them . . . confuse them; and because they fear me they refuse my efforts to help them find shelter. If only I could think of some way to let them know that they can trust me” . . . he thought . . . “If only I could ease their fears and help them understand that I am trying to help them.”

But how?

And then a sudden notion came unbidden to his mind: “If only I could be a bird myself”, he thought. “If I could be a bird—for a time—I could mingle with them, speak their language and tell them not to be afraid. Then I could show them how to reach the safety of the warm, lighted, barn . . . for I would be one of them . . . and seeing me as one of their own, they would see . . . and they would understand.”

At that very moment, the Church bells began to ring. Above the sounds of the wind and through the swirling snow the church bells pealed the glad tidings of Christmas.

He stood there—for the first time fully aware of the timeless reality that had escaped him until now—and as he listened reverently to the bells playing *Adeste Fidelis*. . . Oh, come all ye faithful . . .

And he sank slowly to his knees in the blanket of snow.