

# 'For Always'

## A True Russian Christmas Story, by Will Fish

In 1994, two Americans answered an invitation from the Russian Department of Education to teach morals and ethics (based on Biblical principles) in the public schools. They were invited to teach at prisons, businesses, police and fire departments, and a large orphanage.

About 100 boys and girls who had been abandoned, abused, and left in the care of a government-run program were in the orphanage. One of the Americans related the following story: "It was nearing the holiday season, 1994; time for our orphans to hear, for the first time, the traditional story of Christmas. We told them about Mary and Joseph arriving in Bethlehem. Finding no room in the inn, the couple went to a stable, where the baby Jesus was born and placed in a manger. Throughout the story, the children and orphanage staff sat in amazement as they listened. Some sat on the edges of their stools, trying to grasp every word.

"Completing the story, we gave the children three small pieces of cardboard to make a crude manger. Each child was given a small paper square, cut from yellow napkins I had brought with me. No colored paper was available in the city. Following instructions, the children tore the paper and carefully laid strips in the manger for straw. Small squares of flannel, cut from a worn-out nightgown an American lady was throwing away as she left Russia, were used for the baby's blanket. A doll-like baby was cut from tan felt we had brought from the United States.

"The orphans were busy assembling their manger as I walked among them to see if they needed any help. All went well, until I got to one table where little Misha sat—he looked to be about six years old and had finished his project. As I looked at the little boy's manger, I was startled to see not one, but two babies in the manger.

"Quickly, I called for the translator to ask the lad why there were two babies in the manger. Crossing his arms in front of him and looking at his manger scene, the child began to repeat the story very seriously. For such a young boy, who had only heard the Christmas story once, he related the happenings accurately—until he came to the part where Mary put the baby Jesus in the manger.

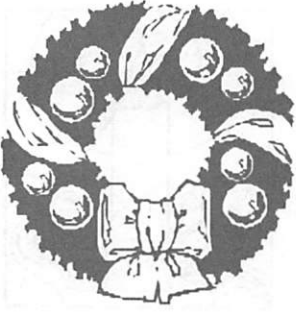
"Then Misha started to ad lib. He made up his own ending to the story as he said, 'And when Maria laid the baby in the manger, Jesus looked at me and asked me if I had a place to stay. I told Him I have no mamma and I have no papa, so I don't have any place to stay. Then Jesus told me I could stay with Him. But I told Him I couldn't, because I didn't have a gift to give Him like everybody else did. But I wanted to stay with Jesus so much, so I thought about what I had that maybe I could use for a gift. I thought maybe if I kept Him warm, that would be a good gift. So I asked Jesus, 'If I keep You warm, will that be a good enough gift?' and Jesus told me, If you keep Me warm, that will be the best gift anybody ever gave Me. So I got into the manger, and then Jesus looked at me and He told me I could stay with Him—for always.'

"As little Misha finished his story, his eyes brimmed full of tears that rolled down his cheeks. Putting his hand over his face, his head dropped to the table and his shoulders shook as he sobbed and sobbed. The little orphan had found finally Someone who would never abandon nor abuse him, Someone who would stay with him—for always."



*"As I looked at the little boy's manger, I was startled to see not one, but two babies in the manger."*





# Out of the Ivory Palaces

an adaptation of a story by James H. Hunter

There was sorrow in heaven. It all seemed so strange to the two little angels. "Do you know," said Ariel to her friend Pax, "I actually saw those things they call tears in Gabriel's eye. Something *terrible* must have happened." "I am sure," Pax replied, "it has *something* to do with those beings down there, the ones that were created on earth." "Yes," agreed Ariel, "The Father loves them *so much*, and yet I heard that they've forgotten Him. Isn't it terrible to think of it?" Pax nodded, "And do you know I heard the strangest story that the Lord Jesus Himself was going down to earth to save them."

Ariel was aghast. "Going to leave us? Going to leave all *this* for those creatures? But what will He *do* down there, dear Pax?" "I do not know. Someone said He was to be *born*." "Born! What's that?" "I've no idea," said Pax. "It seems to be something that happens to humans." Ariel's eyes grew *wider*. "You don't mean He is going to be *like* them, and take the same *body* as they have?" "Apparently that is what it is, but I cannot understand it." Ariel asked softly, "When does this strange thing come to pass?" "I think," said her friend, "it is what they call now—*tonight*."

**"Ariel was aghast.  
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Just then was a great blowing of trumpets, as angels gathered in from the four corners of heaven. Then, a hush as Gabriel stepped forward to speak, "You are gathered to listen to the most wonderful pronouncement ever made in the eternal ages in which we live. Our beloved Lord, the only begotten Son of our Father, has left us." A sob burst from the assembly. "Our Lord has gone to earth to be born as a babe to suffer the *punishment* for man's sins." A gasp rose from the ranks. "Tonight in a little town called Bethlehem His incarnation will be accomplished. By the order of the Father you will accompany me in bringing the good news to the weary world below. We will announce it to a few simple-hearted men, who fear God and believe His promises. Come, let us away."

By the tens of thousands they swept through the heavens—down, down through the still night air. At the sign from Gabriel, they folded their wings and looked beneath them where a few men, dressed in rags, watched their sheep 'round a fire. Suddenly, Gabriel was revealed to them. In awe, the shepherds fell on their faces. When Gabriel spoke, they listened breathlessly: "Fear not, for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; you shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."

Just then all the angelic host were revealed to the shepherds' wide eyes. The entire host lifted their voices and praised God. Ariel and Pax could *not* comprehend the mystery of it all, but the unfathomable love of God for the world caused them to lift their voices again and again. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men." They knew *this* was the song to sing, and with all their power they sang it! The night breeze caught it and bore it heavenward, where it echoed around the Great White Throne.

At the signal from Gabriel, the angels moved upward. "What does it mean, Pax?" asked Ariel, as they sped through the stars. "I cannot say. But it was wonderful, wasn't it? Think of it, going *Himself* to rescue them from their own sin. Oh, Ariel, how glad they must be on earth to have Him there, and how eagerly they will accept such a Savior as He. Surely this night will be celebrated forever.

