

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

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A GIFT OF LIFE

Kathleen R. Ruckman, "A Christmas Miracle" shared the following story in *Focus on the Family Magazine*, December, 1988, 12-133.

In 1910, a terrible plague swept through eastern Czechoslovakia during the Christmas season. It was diphtheria, and it devastated the little Czech village of Velky Slavhov. Nearly half the village contracted the infectious disease, and many of the victims were less than ten years of age. Whenever a member of a family would show symptoms, a large black "X" would be swabbed on the doorpost of the house as a warning that it had been quarantined.

There was an "X" painted on the doorpost of the home of Jano and Suzanna Boratkova. In little less than a week, the young couple, parents of three, found themselves childless. Their oldest child, a five-year-old daughter, had been the first to go. And even as Jano was working in the woodshed, pounding together a coffin for her, his two sons were dying.

As the two young boys breathed their last, Suzanna broke into agonizing sobs. She cleaned and wrapped the two boys for a final time and carefully laid them in handmade pine caskets. She and Jano lifted the coffins onto the wagon and started the slow journey through the biting December cold and the foot-high snow toward the graveyard. They passed by house after house marked with an "X", but they didn't have the strength to offer sympathy or encouragement. They were too wrapped up in their own grief.

The young couple laid their children in freshly-dug graves and struggled through the Lord's Prayer. Then they trudged back to the wagon and returned home. No one was there to meet them. It was too dangerous, for the house was quarantined. It was a frightening, dark little tomb. Little high-heeled brown leather shoes were still lined up against the wood stove, as they usually were when the children were tenderly in bed. But now the beds were empty, the house was cold, the shadows deep and cold.

Jano himself was sick. "I won't see another Christmas," he said, wheezing and coughing. "I don't think I'll see the New Year in, either." He pushed away the soup and bread, for it was too hard for him to swallow. The diphtheria had tied a

noose around his neck, allowing neither food nor sufficient air to sustain him. Suzanna gathered some kindling and lit a fire for the night, sure that her husband was about to die. The snow was starting to fall again, and she paused to gaze through the window. Her mind went to a verse of Scripture – Psalm 121:1. I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord who made heaven and earth.

Suddenly she saw someone approaching, a peasant woman tramping through the snow, a red and purple plaid shawl draped over her hunched shoulders. A kerchief was wrapped around her head, and her long skirt was a bright display of cotton and linen patchwork. In one hand, she held a jar of clear liquid. She approached the house and knocked on the door.

Suzanna cautiously opened the door. “We have the plague in our home,” she said, “and my husband is in a fever right now.” The old woman nodded and asked if she could step inside. She held out her little jar. “Take a clean, white linen and wrap it around your finger,” she said. “Dip your finger into the pure kerosene oil and swab out your husband’s throat, and then have him swallow a tablespoon of the oil. This should cause him to vomit the deadly mucous. Otherwise, he will surely suffocate. I will pray for you and your family.”

Then, having left her folk remedy against diphtheria, she turned and left. Suzanna followed the woman’s instructions, and early Christmas morning, Jano retched up the deadly phlegm. His fever broke, and Suzanna entertained a flicker of hope. There were no presents under the tree that year, but an old woman with her jar of oil was a gift of life. Jano recovered, in time the Lord gave the couple more children. In the 1920’s Jano and Suzanna emigrated to America – with eight children, which included a set of triplets and two sets of twins.

It’s a story that has been handed down through the generations of that family, the little peasant woman who came on Christmas Eve bearing the gift of life. Jesus, too, came on Christmas bearing the gift of life for hopeless, grieving, dying people. He came for Jew and Gentile. He came for you and me.

Luke 2:1-7 (NASB)

1 Now it came about in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. 2 This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 And all were proceeding to Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, 5 in order to register, along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. 6 And it

came about that while they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her first-born son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

So What Does This Mean For Our Lives? Jano and Susanna were blessed with a gift that saved his life. You and I have also received a gift from God, our Heavenly Father. He has offered us eternal life on this restored earth when He sends Jesus back to planet earth in the near future. By accepting Jesus as your Lord and Savior you too can be spared from death (eternal death). Will you accept God's gift to you as we celebrate the birth of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior?

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