

## Canada's first Christmas carol



Father Jean de Brébeuf, S.J., a missionary, composed what is believed to be Canada's first Christmas carol about 1641.

Brébeuf arrived in New France in 1625, hoping to bring salvation to the Indians. After roving with the Montagnais for five wintery months, he departed for the Georgian Bay and Lake Simcoe region, home of the Huron Confederacy. His work was difficult. Only complex political negotiations convinced the Hurons to take him on the gruelling voyage to their country. Later, when plagues ravaged the natives, some threatened to kill Brébeuf and his colleagues, suspecting that they had created the diseases through witchcraft. The Iroquois, hereditary enemies of the Hurons, captured Brébeuf in 1649 and put him to death.

The new-found faith of the converts no doubt consoled Brébeuf throughout these trials. In 1642, he noted with pleasure that "The Indians have a particular devotion for the night that was enlightened by the birth of the Son of God.... Even those who were at a distance of more than two days' journey met at a given place to sing hymns in honour of the new-born Child." One of the hymns was Brébeuf's own *Jesous Ahatonhia*. An interpretation of the carol by J.E. Middleton is reproduced at upper right.

'Twas in the moon of winter time when all the birds had fled,  
That Mighty Gitchi Manitou sent angel choirs instead.  
Before their light the stars grew dim,  
And wand'ring hunters heard the hymn:  
"Jesus, your King, is born;  
Jesus is born;  
In Excelsis Gloria!"

Within a lodge of broken bark the tender Babe was found.  
A ragged robe of rabbit skin enwrapped His beauty 'round  
And as the hunter braves drew high,  
The angel song rang loud and high:  
"Jesus, your King, is born;  
Jesus is born;  
In Excelsis Gloria!"

The earliest moon of winter time is not so round and fair  
As was the ring of glory on the helpless Infant there.  
While Chiefs from far before Him knelt,  
With gifts of fox and beaver pelt.  
"Jesus, your King, is born;  
Jesus is born;  
In Excelsis Gloria!"

O children of the forest free, O sons of Manitou,  
The Holy Child of earth and heav'n is born today for you.  
Come, kneel before the radiant Boy  
Who brings you beauty, peace and joy.  
"Jesus, your King, is born;  
Jesus is born;  
In Excelsis Gloria!"

## Wartime project now vital transportation link

The Federal Government recently dedicated a national historic monument and plaque at Contact Creek, British Columbia to commemorate the completion of the 1,523-mile Alaska Highway 35 years ago.

### Canada/U.S. project

The highway, built by the United States, under agreement with Canada, as a joint defence project after the outbreak of war in the Pacific, stretches from Dawson Creek, British Columbia through the Yukon to Fairbanks, Alaska. In 1946, Canada assumed exclusive control of the Canadian section, paying the U.S. Government \$108 million for airfields, flight strips, telephone systems and buildings along the route.

According to Ernie Robin, superintendent of the National Historic Parks and Sites, northern British Columbia area, "There are longer highways in Canada and ones that were built through more difficult terrain, but the amazing aspect of the Alaska Highway is that it was built in such an unbelievably short time [the roadway was cleared in only six months].

"It is important not only as a wartime defence measure but because of the impact the highway has had on the development and economy of the North.

"The major population centres of the

Yukon grew up along the highway. The road is a vital transportation link today and much development in the North would have been impossible without the route."



(Above) Chairman Dr. Margaret E. Prang (Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada) addresses some 70 guests before the unveiling of a plaque commemorating the completion of the Alaska Highway, 35 years ago.