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**THE SHEPHERD'S VISIT TO
THE MANGER**

There is no record in Scripture of the shepherds bringing gifts when they came to the manger. We can let our imagination play happily with the thought that they had something with them to offer the Child, or that they came again bringing some present out of the love of their hearts. In one of the old English Nativity plays they brought cherries, a bird, a ball.

What we do know about the shepherds is that they brought themselves to the manger—and with haste. The moment the angels left them, they went straight to Bethlehem to look for their newborn Saviour.

There are twentieth-century folk who are not so simply wise as the shepherds. They become bemused by the angels' song, they stand around dreaming under the Christmas stars, and somehow they never go to the manger at all. Oh, they may send a gift to show their interest, to mark their celebration of the child's birthday—and it may be a substantial gift, perhaps even a sacrifice. But these givers have forgotten—or perhaps they never knew—that we cannot send gifts to the manger; we have to take them. For the first gift must be ourselves. No amount of philanthropy can be a substitute for that.

They are forgetting too, that important as "Christmas giving" may be, Christmas receiving must come first. God is the Christmas Giver. His gift is Himself.

If we were not so used to the story if we were hearing for the first time, it would seem incredible. But it is true. What now seems incredible is that we could refuse the Christmas

Gift—could know about it, sing about it, even imagine that we rejoice because of it, and yet refuse to accept it for our own. This Christmas, let it be different. Let us come to the manger, humbly and with haste, and ask for the Gift that waits to be given:

O Holy Child of Bethlehem,
Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin and enter in:
Be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Emmanuel.

MERRY CHRISTMAS

and a

HAPPY NEW YEAR...

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HAPPY NEW YEAR



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*Ring Out
Glad
Tidings...*

To all the voices raised in song
today, we add our wish that
yours is a Merry Christmas, a
Happy New Year

