THE REAL CHRISTMAS

The Christ Child wasn't born in the winter; He was born in the summer. Joseph wasn't a poor man; as an artisan, he was a man of modest means. He wasn't so inconsiderate and improvident as to take Mary on a long journey over the mountains as she was about to give birth to a child. They had been in Bethlehem for months before the birth. The stable was not actually occupied by animals. At the season when the animals were out to pasture -- as they would be in the summer -- the shelters were cleaned and regularly used for human habitation.

For all these assertions the German scholar H. W. van der Vaart Smit makes a strong case in his slight volume entitled, Born in Bethlehem and subtitled "Christmas As It Really Was."



BLESSED

Christmas Wishes

As one reads, the myths surrounding Christmas drop away -- the cold, dirty stable in which Mary and Joseph, arriving within hours -- or minutes -- of the birth of the Child, were forced to take refuge because of the greater coldness of the innkeeper in Bethlehem; the manger filled with harsh straw; the ox and the ass providing warmth for the Child against the bitter chill of a December night.

The first reaction is one of rebellion. The scholar must be wrong -- though his reasoning is good and his authorities are sound. Rebellion brought to rein by reason turns to emptiness. If this is all true, with our fantasies swept away, what is left of Christmas? The heralding angel's good news to the shepherds? No need to question the miracle. The wise men from the East? Astronomers suggest several theories regarding the star.

So we have the angel and the shepherds; we have the Magi. We
(continued on the back page)

About Books.....

ONE JOY SUGGESTS ANOTHER Anyone disposed to invest in a book entitled Joy* -- a selection of the Spiritual Book Associates, the Catholic Library Foundation and the Catholic Digest Book Club -- should be warned not to expect any great profundity in the volume. Actually, if a person is interested in this particular emotion, he would be well-advised to re-investigate C. S. Lewis' Surprised by Joy, written ten years ago, rather than to plumb the un-depths of this new Sheed and Ward publication. An excellent recommendation, no doubt, for the tired housewife, the Weaver volume contributes nothing to raising the intellectual standards of our Catholic spiritual writing in this country.

Speaking of "joy", C.S. Lewis says, "Only when your whole attention and desire are fixed on something else, does it arise. It is a by-product. Its very existence presupposes that you desire, not it, but something else." It is an error, he says, to seek it, or to attempt to produce it. "The more one tries to produce it, the more one frightens it away." -- A reader would look a long time before finding an insight of comparable value in such a book as this of Fr. Weaver's.

C. S. Lewis in Surprised by Joy describes the "joy" (or "thrill") he experienced when he first encountered the writings of G. K. Chesterton. "I had never heard of him at the time," he says, "and had no idea of what he stood for, but he made an immediate conquest of me... I didn't need to accept what Chesterton said in order to enjoy it. His humor was the kind I like best -- not 'jokes' imbedded in

the page like currants in a cake, but the humor which is not in any way separable from the argument, but is rather the 'bloom' on the dialectic itself. The sword glitters not because the swordsmen sets out to make it glitter, but because he is fighting for his life and therefore moving it very quickly."

"For the critics who think Chesterton frivolous or 'paradoxical'" says C.S. Lewis, "I have to work hard to feel even pity; sympathy is out of the question. Moreover, strange as it may seem, I liked him for his goodness -- even though the liking had nothing to do with any attempt to be good myself. I felt the charm of goodness as a man feels the charm of a woman he has no intention of marrying. It is, indeed, at that distance that its charm is most apparent."

In reading Chesterton, Lewis, who was an atheist at the time, found that "I didn't know what I was letting myself in for. A young man who wishes to remain a sound Atheist cannot be too careful of his reading. There are traps everywhere -- fine nets and stratagems. God is, if I may say it, very unscrupulous." Joy, likewise, he indicates, is something a person doesn't know he's letting himself in for. It is a fine net, a stratagem, left in one's path by an unscrupulous God.

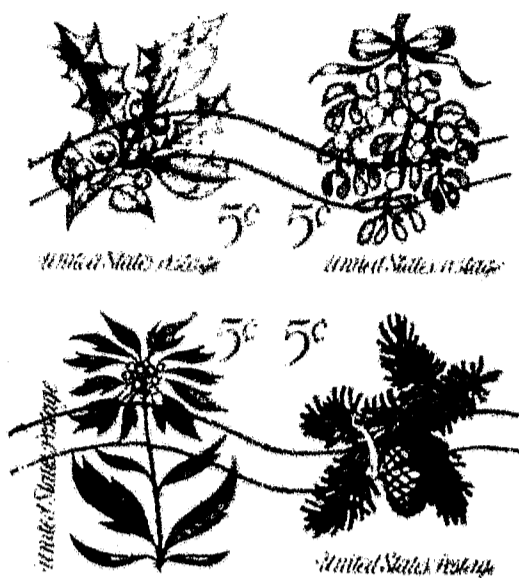
--Claude L. Boehm

*Sheed and Ward, 1964, \$3.95

MUCH ADO ABOUT A POSTAGE STAMP

(With Some Justification)

Driven by a strange hygienic ideology, the Post Office Department is printing so-called Christmas stamps for the coming season that would do justice to the Druids, the Communists in the Kremlin or any other atheists you want to mention.



Printed in red and green on a white background, the four holiday issues will display a poinsettia, holly, mistletoe or pine cone. Resembling the stickers used to decorate bundles, they constitute pagan symbols for the most sacred religious occasion in the Christian world.



I can just see the self-righteous smirks on the faces of the little men who dreamed up this insult as they proudly tell one another, "This way we won't affront anyone." Well, they affront

me.

I know that taking a stand on any religious issue is supposed to be as dangerous as smoking on a keg of powder, but I am going to run the risk because I have such a deep feeling of respect for the majority of Americans. You cannot convince me that fine people of the Jewish, Moslem or Buddhist faiths, or even honest non-believers, are ungenerous enough to deny those of the Christian faith the right to use real Christmas stamps.

What sends my blood pressure up is the stupidity and cowardice of government officials. They are stupid because they are affronting most Americans, since Christians out-number all others by a huge margin. They are cowards because they are temporizing, trying to please everyone.

If they carried this policy to its natural conclusion they would never issue a conservation stamp because it might hurt the feelings of those who would destroy forests and pollute streams, or a space stamp because some buffoon is against interplanetary exploration or a Lincoln stamp because some red-necked woolhat in the South is still unreconstructed.

There is no reason why the government of a Nation that dates every document by the Christian calendar should suddenly jump into bed and pull the covers over its head because it is afraid it will hurt the feelings of a small minority. I know that my many Jewish friends would no more object to using a Christian stamp at Christmas than I would if the post office issued a special Hanukkah stamp. I simply refuse to believe any large element of our people is that intolerant.

But there is another point to be considered. No one says use a Christmas stamp or else. The regular Washington stamp is always

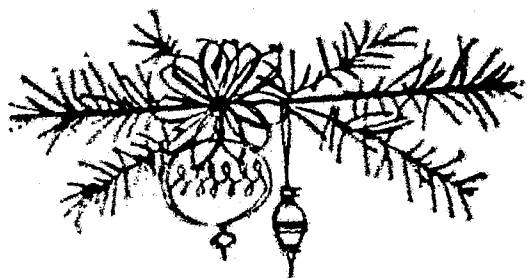
available, and so are many commemoratives.

While we are dealing with this growing gutlessness of government toward all minorities - and it is nothing else - let's remember that by using mistletoe on a stamp the post office is insulting a majority. Mistletoe was part of the panoply of the pagan Druid religion. The parasite plant was used to make a potion to prevent sterility. Druids practiced human sacrifice with altars decorated with mistletoe and it is one hell of a note when the post office tries to foist this off as something to help mark Christ's birthday.

If there is any time of the year.....when generosity, tolerance, and brotherly love are most marked, it is the Christmas season. It is also - and this must not be forgotten - the holiest day in the year to about 19 out of every 20 Americans.

.....Are we...so afraid of the tenets of our democracy that we think good American citizens who are not Christians are completely selfish, intolerant and a menace to that democracy? I know better.

There is only one decent alternative for the Post Office Department. It must either issue a true religious stamp honoring Christ or it must issue none. To give us a pagan stamp, tied to fertility rites and human sacrifices, is an indecent insult, not only to Christians but to Jews, Moslems and those of all other faiths.



--in the New York World-Telegram and News (Nov. 23, 1964)

--by Allan Keller

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THE REAL CHRISTMAS (continued from the front page)

have Joseph, not a foolish, befuddled old man, but a wise, mature, provident protector of Mary and her Child. But especially we have the world-shattering fact of the Word made Flesh of the Virgin Mary. And this is the true cause of our joy on Christmas.

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"GOD REST YE MERRY, GENTLEMEN" -- "Merry" in the original sense of this old Christmas carol; that is, "blessed" or "peaceful". Be at peace with God before you leave the campus. It isn't a pleasant thought, but accidents sometimes happen on the way home. And Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday of this week are Ember Days. If you eat a meal on campus before you leave on Wednesday, the dispensation applies for that day. It doesn't apply on the other two days.

IN YOUR CHARITY please pray for the repose of the soul of Father John Kelley, C.S.C., who died early Sunday in Holy Cross House. Also deceased -- Mother M. Hilaria, S.S.N.D., and the grandmother of James Conway of Fisher. Ill -- father of Ed Wilbraham of Farley; James Mulligan, '61 (critical); Kathleen Kubaszyk.