

# THE ANGEL AND THE GIFTS



I'M DRINKING HOT CHOCOLATE AND PUTTING TOGETHER A LEGO CASTLE WITH MY COUSIN AND GOOD FRIEND, BORIS TUGGLE. MY PARENTS HAD GIVEN THE CASTLE TO ME FOR CHRISTMAS. I WAS SO EXCITED BY THE GIFT THAT I DID HANDSTANDS AND NEARLY KNOCKED OVER THE CHRISTMAS TREE. OPENING CHRISTMAS PRESENTS IS THE BEST, WHICH BRINGS ME TO MY STORY.

THIS CHRISTMAS SEASON IS ONE I'LL NEVER FORGET. IT ALL BEGAN ON THE FIRST DAY OF DECEMBER.

I SAW MY FIRST HONEST-TO-GOODNESS, REAL ANGEL! SHE WAS JUST LIKE THE ONES YOU SEE IN PICTURE BOOKS, WITH A LOVELY GOWN AND LARGE REGAL-LOOKING WINGS.

I WAS BRUSHING MY TEETH WHEN SHE APPEARED IN THE MIRROR OVER THE SINK. I TURNED AROUND, AND THERE SHE WAS, SMILING AND LOOKING ANGELIC.

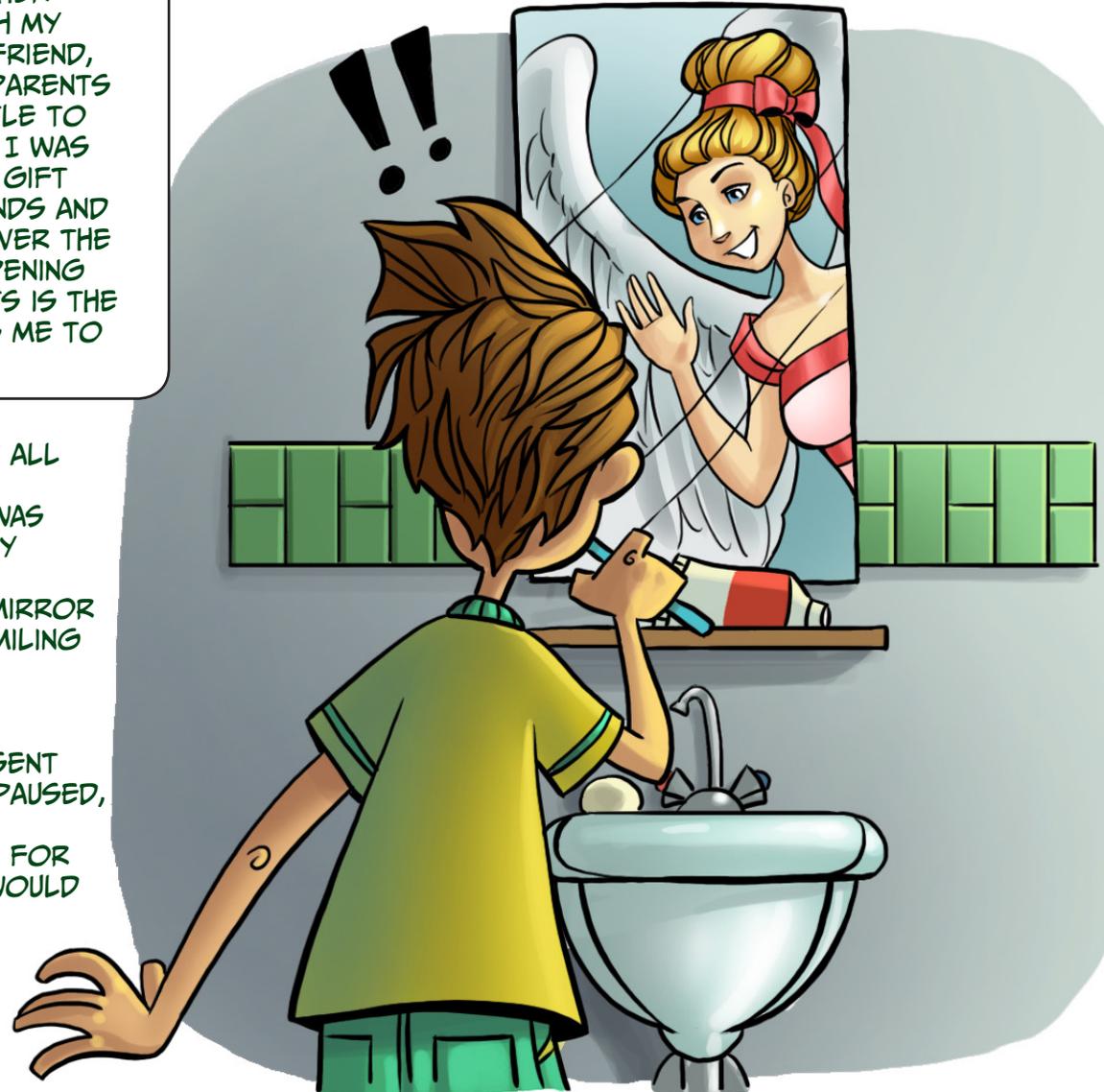
"HELLO," SHE SAID IN A SOFT, WHISPERY VOICE.

"UH..." WAS ALL I COULD MANAGE IN RESPONSE.

"BOBBY"—THAT'S MY NAME, BY THE WAY—"I HAVE BEEN SENT WITH A HEAVENLY CHRISTMAS ASSIGNMENT FOR YOU." SHE PAUSED, BUT I DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING, SO SHE CONTINUED.

"IN HEAVEN WE'RE PREPARING A SPECIAL PRESENTATION FOR JESUS THIS YEAR, FEATURING GIFTS FROM CHILDREN. WE WOULD LIKE YOUR HELP.

"YOU WILL NEED TO GATHER ALL THE PRESENTS THE CHILDREN IN YOUR AND YOUR COUSIN BORIS' FAMILY WANT TO GIVE JESUS. MAKE A LIST OF THESE, AND PRESENT THEM TO HIM ON CHRISTMAS. THIS, OF COURSE, INCLUDES YOUR GIFTS TO JESUS AS WELL."



I WAS PRETTY EXCITED ABOUT THIS ASSIGNMENT, BUT THERE WAS JUST ONE PROBLEM. "HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO COLLECT PRESENTS WHEN WE AREN'T ALWAYS ABLE TO HOLD THE PRESENTS WE GIVE TO JESUS?"

THE ANGEL GAVE ME A GOLDEN PEN, A NOTEPAD, AND A KEY ON A LEATHER STRING. "ALL YOU NEED TO DO," SHE EXPLAINED, "IS WRITE DOWN IN THIS NOTEPAD THE PRESENTS YOU SEE THE CHILDREN GIVE TO JESUS, AND THE PRESENTS WILL GO STRAIGHT TO A SPECIAL GIFT ROOM. IF YOU WANT TO 'SEE' THE PRESENTS, HOLD THE KEY IN YOUR HAND AND CLOSE YOUR EYES. YOU WILL BE TRANSPORTED TO THE GIFT ROOM, WHERE YOU WILL BE ABLE TO SEE THE PRESENTS THAT YOU'VE COLLECTED. THAT'S A SPECIAL PRIVILEGE THAT COMES WITH THIS JOB.

"SO, WILL YOU DO THIS FOR US?"

NOW, LOOKING BACK, I CAN THINK OF ALL THE DIFFERENT WAYS I COULD HAVE SAID YES, SUCH AS "IT IS AN HONOR," OR "ABSOLUTELY," OR "YOU BET!" OR EVEN "MY SOUL DOETH MAGNIFY THE LORD," WHICH IS MARY'S LINE IN THE BIBLE. BUT INSTEAD, STILL BEING SOMEWHAT DUMBFOUNDED BY THE ANGEL'S APPEARANCE, I JUST NODDED MY HEAD IN AGREEMENT.

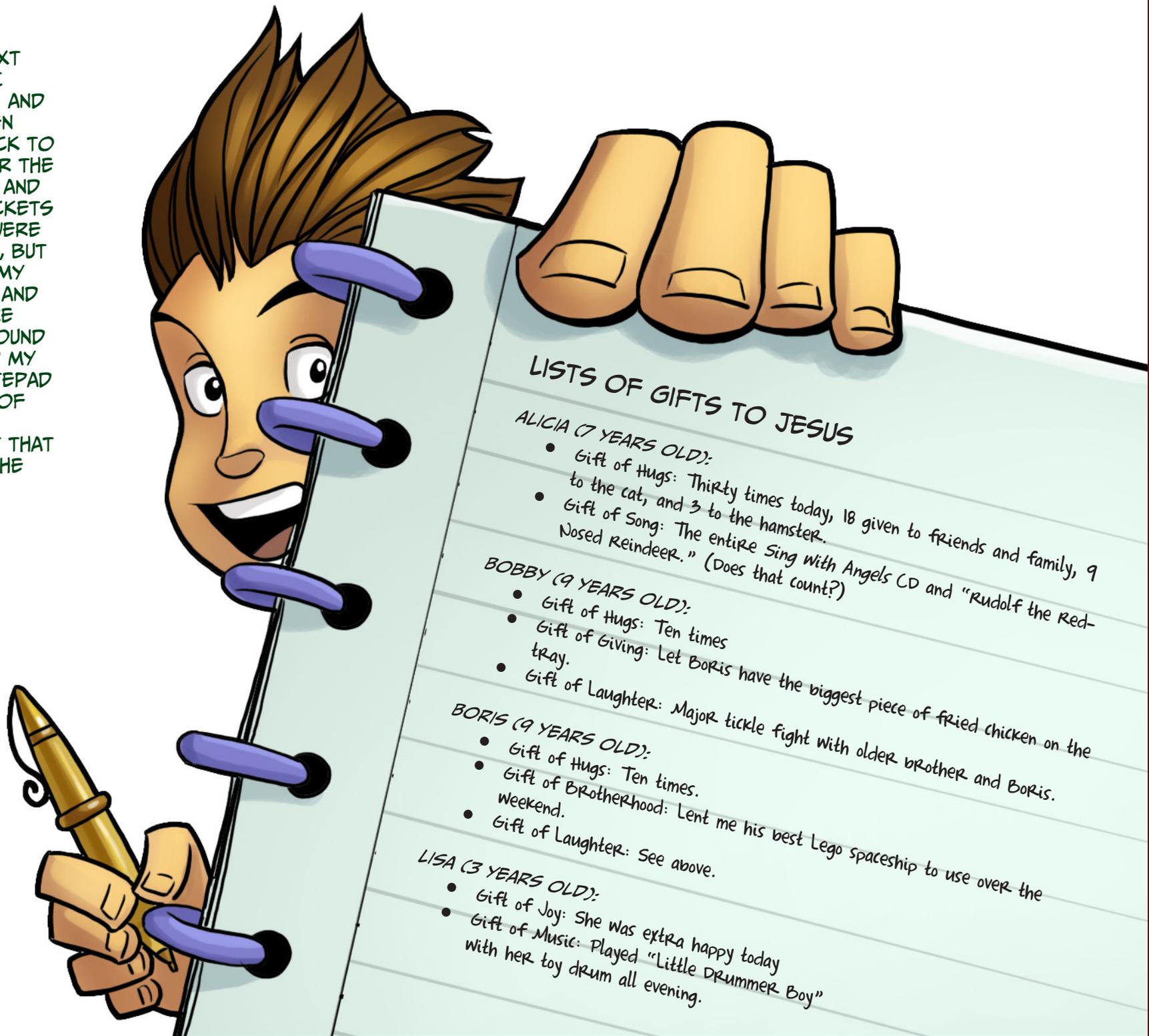
THE ANGEL SMILED AT ME. "I'LL SEE YOU ON CHRISTMAS DAY," SHE SAID. WITH THAT SHE VANISHED.

I FELT TINGLES ALL THE WAY TO MY TOES. I PUT THE KEY AROUND MY NECK, STUFFED THE NOTEPAD AND PEN IN MY POCKET, AND HEADED FOR BED.



WHEN I WOKE UP THE NEXT MORNING, FOR AN INSTANT I FORGOT ABOUT THE ANGEL AND THE ASSIGNMENT I HAD BEEN GIVEN, BUT IT ALL CAME BACK TO ME AS I WAS DRESSING FOR THE DAY. I RAN TO MY PAJAMAS AND LOOKED THROUGH THE POCKETS ... THE PEN AND NOTEPAD WERE GONE! I STARTED TO PANIC, BUT WITHOUT THINKING I STUCK MY HAND IN MY JEANS POCKET, AND THE PEN AND NOTEPAD WERE THERE ALREADY. I LATER FOUND THAT WHENEVER I CHANGED MY CLOTHES, THE PEN AND NOTEPAD WOULD ALWAYS BE IN ONE OF THE POCKETS.

I BEGAN MAKING MY LIST THAT MORNING. I'LL SHOW YOU THE FIRST PAGE.



## LISTS OF GIFTS TO JESUS

### ALICIA (7 YEARS OLD):

- Gift of Hugs: Thirty times today, 18 given to friends and family, 9 to the cat, and 3 to the hamster.
- Gift of Song: The entire *Sing With Angels* CD and "Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer." (Does that count?)

### BOBBY (9 YEARS OLD):

- Gift of Hugs: Ten times
- Gift of Giving: Let Boris have the biggest piece of fried chicken on the tray.
- Gift of Laughter: Major tickle fight with older brother and Boris.

### BORIS (9 YEARS OLD):

- Gift of Hugs: Ten times.
- Gift of Brotherhood: Lent me his best Lego spaceship to use over the weekend.
- Gift of Laughter: See above.

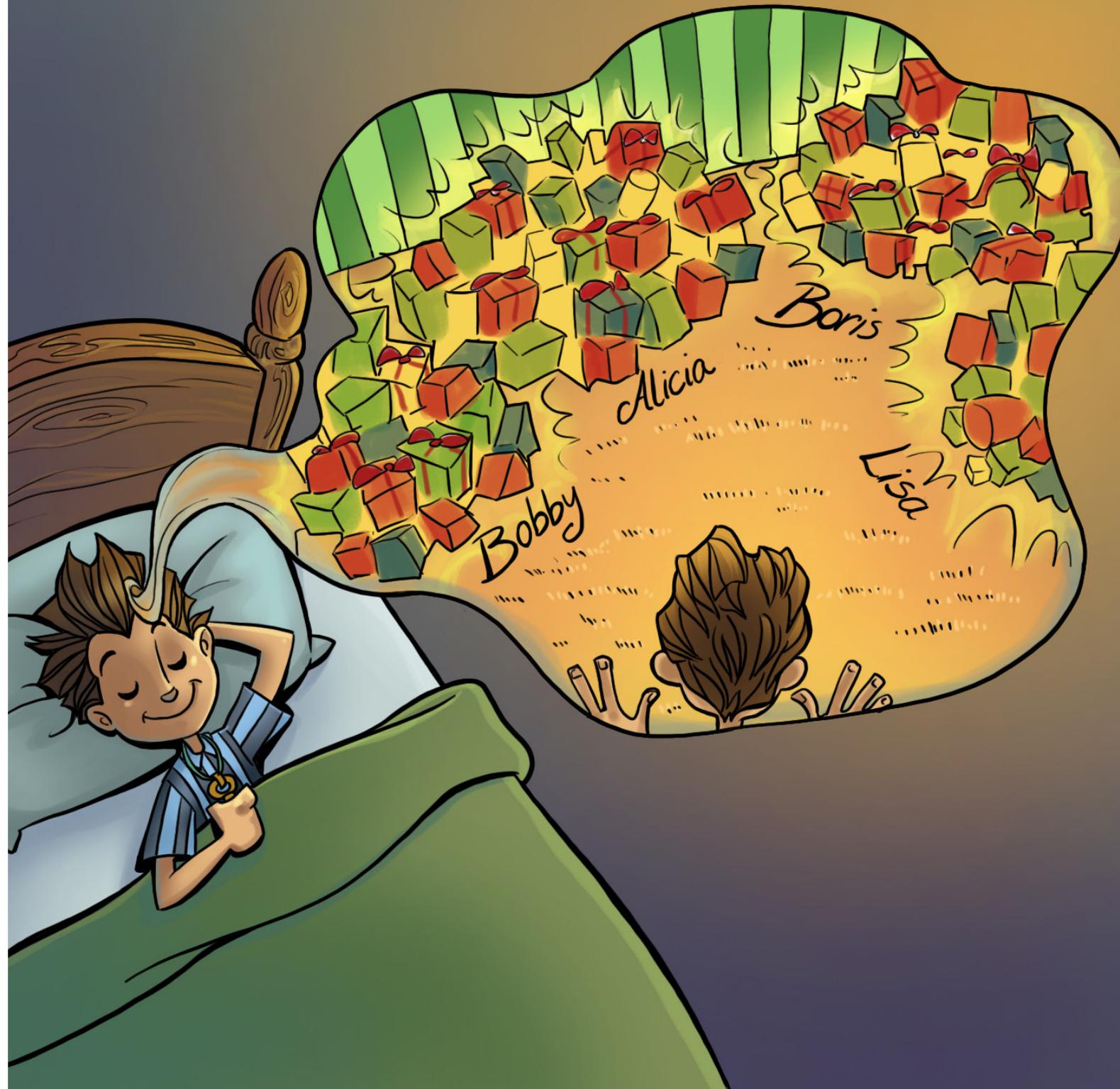
### LISA (3 YEARS OLD):

- Gift of Joy: She was extra happy today
- Gift of Music: Played "Little Drummer Boy" with her toy drum all evening.

THAT'S HOW I STARTED, AND THAT EVENING I LAY DOWN IN MY BED, HELD THE KEY TIGHT, AND CLOSED MY EYES. I SAW A BIG ROOM. IT HAD WOOD-PANEL WALLS AND CEILING, AND IT SMELLED LIKE A CEDAR FOREST. THERE WAS A SOFT CARPET ON THE FLOOR. IT WAS WARM AND THERE WAS LIGHT COMING FROM ALL THE PRESENTS THAT BRIGHTLY LIT THE ENTIRE ROOM. IN EACH CORNER OF THE ROOM WAS A PILE OF PRESENTS, AND WOVEN INTO THE CARPET AT THE FOOT OF EACH PILE WAS A NAME: "ALICIA," "BOBBY," "BORIS," "LISA."

THERE WERE ALL KINDS OF PRESENTS IN THAT ROOM. SOME OF THEM WERE IN BOXES; SOME WERE WRAPPED IN PAPER AND TIED WITH RIBBON. SOME OF THE PAPER AND BOXES WAS SPARKLY, AND SOME HAD PATTERNS. I THOUGHT, *WOW! I WONDER IF WE'LL BE ABLE TO FILL THE WHOLE ROOM UP BY CHRISTMAS.*

ON THE WEEKENDS WE WENT OUT FREQUENTLY TO SPREAD CHRISTMAS CHEER. WE PERFORMED SONGS AND DANCES IN HOTELS, IN CONCERT HALLS, IN ORPHANAGES, AND RETIREMENT HOMES. I SPENT A LOT OF TIME WRITING ON MY NOTEPAD, AND EVERY NIGHT I WOULD VISIT THE STORAGE ROOM. THE PILES OF PRESENTS WERE GROWING, BUT THE ROOM GREW BIGGER TOO, SO THERE WAS ALWAYS MORE SPACE.



AFTER ABOUT A WEEK, I BEGAN TO NOTICE WHICH PRESENTS REPRESENTED WHICH GIFT.

- THE GIFTS OF HUGS WERE GENERALLY SOFT AND WARM WHEN YOU TOUCHED THEM, LIKE CUSHIONS.
- THE GIFT OF LAUGHTER HAD SQUIGGLY DESIGNS AND ACTUALLY BOUNCED AROUND.
- THE GIFT OF MUSIC WOULD SWAY FROM SIDE TO SIDE AND WAS ALWAYS WRAPPED IN THREE OR FOUR COLORS.
- THE GIFTS OF PEOPLE WHO CAME TO KNOW JESUS, WHICH REALLY PILED IN TOWARD THE MIDDLE OF DECEMBER, WERE PURE WHITE, WITH GOLDEN RIBBONS, AND SHONE VERY BRIGHTLY.
- THERE WERE SOME I COULDN'T PLACE, BUT THEY WERE ALL BEAUTIFUL! I WAS SURE THE ANGEL WOULD BE SO PLEASED WHEN SHE SAW ALL THE GIFTS WE WERE GIVING JESUS THIS YEAR.

AS BEAUTIFUL AS THIS SIGHT WAS, THERE WAS SOMETHING THAT KEPT ME BACK FROM BEING FULLY HAPPY. I TRIED NOT TO THINK ABOUT IT, BUT IN THE LAST WEEK OF CHRISTMAS, IT MADE ME MORE AND MORE UNEASY.

HERE WAS THE FIRST PART OF MY PROBLEM:

ALICIA HAD, BY FAR, THE LARGEST COLLECTION OF THE GIFT OF THOSE SHE HAD TALKED WITH ABOUT JESUS. I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY, BUT WHENEVER SHE SMILES AT PEOPLE AND MENTIONS HOW HAPPY SHE IS TO HAVE JESUS AS HER BEST FRIEND, THEY ALMOST ALWAYS BECOME VERY ATTENTIVE. I THINK AT THE END, THESE PARTICULAR GIFTS RAN INTO THE HUNDREDS FOR ALICIA. HER PILE OF PRESENTS WAS DAZZLING WHITE.

AND THEN THERE WAS BORIS. HIS PILE OF PRESENTS WAS NEARLY ALIVE WITH WILD BOUNCING, COLORFUL PRESENTS BECAUSE HE WAS ALWAYS LAUGHING AND MAKING OTHER PEOPLE LAUGH. WHEN PERFORMING, HE COULD SING SO WELL, PEOPLE WOULD CRY—IN A GOOD WAY. AND HE MAKES AND GIVES AWAY CARDS AND PICTURES ALL THE TIME. HE REALLY KNEW HOW TO MAKE PEOPLE HAPPY. HIS PILE OF PRESENTS WAS LIKE A MOUNTAIN OF COLORFUL DANCING CHRISTMAS LIGHTS.



I TOLD MYSELF I SHOULDN'T COMPARE. AFTER ALL, THESE WERE ALL PRESENTS TO JESUS! I PROBABLY WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN WORRIED IF THERE HADN'T BEEN SOMETHING THAT SEEMED TERRIBLY WRONG WITH MY GIFT PILE. I NOTICED IT AFTER THE SECOND WEEK. ALONG WITH THE WHITE GIFTS OF PEOPLE WHO HAD COME TO KNOW JESUS, AND THE ZANY LAUGHTER GIFTS AND THE SOFT HUG GIFTS, THERE WERE BROWN PACKAGES IN MY PILE. PLAIN, BROWN PAPER TIED WITH STRING.

AS CHRISTMAS DREW NEARER, I REALLY TRIED TO TALK WITH MORE PEOPLE ABOUT JESUS AND MAKE MORE PEOPLE HAPPY, BUT IT SEEMED TO COME EASIER TO ALICIA TO TALK ABOUT JESUS THAN I DID, AND BORIS ALWAYS SANG BETTER. EVERY NIGHT WHEN I WENT TO LOOK AT THE PRESENTS, THERE WERE EVEN MORE BROWN PAPER PACKAGES IN MY PILE. I WOULD GO TO BED EARNESTLY PRAYING THAT I WOULD GIVE BETTER GIFTS TO JESUS THE NEXT DAY, BUT THINGS DIDN'T CHANGE. I COULDN'T UNDERSTAND WHY MY PRESENTS SHOULD BE SO PLAIN.

AT THE END OF CHRISTMAS DAY, I WAS FEELING GLOOMY. THAT NIGHT, I LAY DOWN ON MY BED AND HELD THE KEY AND CLOSED MY EYES. I HAD COME TO A DECISION. I WOULD ASK THE ANGEL TO GIVE THE PRESENTS TO JESUS FOR ME. I JUST DIDN'T FEEL LIKE I COULD GIVE HIM MY PRESENTS WITH SO MANY OF THOSE DRAB BROWN PACKAGES IN MY PILE.

I SAW THE STORAGE ROOM AND THE ANGEL WAS STANDING IN THE MIDDLE, FLYING AROUND AND LOOKING AT ALL THE PRESENTS.

"MERRY CHRISTMAS, BOBBY," SHE SAID. "IT'S TIME FOR YOU TO PRESENT THE GIFTS."

"WAIT. I..." AS USUAL, I COULDN'T FIND WORDS TO EXPLAIN. SHE WAITED PATIENTLY. "DO YOU THINK ... YOU COULD GIVE THE PRESENTS TO JESUS FOR ME? YOU SEE," I SAID, GOING OVER TO MY PILE OF PRESENTS, "THEY'RE RATHER PLAIN AND ORDINARY LOOKING. AREN'T THEY?"



THE ANGEL LOOKED AT MY PILE, "BOBBY, DO YOU KNOW WHAT THOSE BROWN PRESENTS ARE?"

"WELL, NO," I ANSWERED. "I CAN'T MATCH THEM TO ANYTHING ON MY LIST."

"WELL," SAID THE ANGEL, "I HAVE A SPECIAL LIST OF MY OWN. YOU WERE VERY CAREFUL NOT TO MISS ANY OF THE PRESENTS YOUR FRIENDS GAVE TO JESUS, AND YOU WROTE DOWN YOUR GIFTS OF PEOPLE WON TO JESUS AND LAUGHTER. BUT YOU MISSED WRITING DOWN A FEW VERY IMPORTANT GIFTS YOU GAVE."

"BUT WHY ARE THEY PACKAGED LIKE THAT?" I ASKED.

"THESE ARE THE ONES YOU DIDN'T RECORD, BUT I DIDN'T WANT THEM LEFT OUT. HERE, I'LL LET YOU TAKE A PEEK BEFORE WE GO AND PRESENT THEM." SHE HANDED ME A LIST AND I READ,

### **BOBBY'S SURPRISE GIFTS TO JESUS:**

- ONE MONTH OF FAITHFULLY AND HONESTLY WRITING THE GIFT LIST.
- ONE MONTH OF NEARLY DAILY HELPING ALICIA FIND HER PERFORMING BAG.
- ONE MONTH OF LETTING BORIS HAVE THE WINDOW SEAT IN THE VAN ON PERFORMANCE TRIPS.
- ONE MONTH OF HELPING LISA SERVE HER PLATE AT MEALTIMES.
- ONE MONTH OF...



THE LIST WENT ON AND ON. AS I READ, I LOOKED AT THE PILE, AND I COULD SEE PAST THE BROWN PAPER INTO THE GIFTS. THEY WERE ... WELL, THEY WERE ... WOW!

I TURNED TO THE ANGEL. "I THINK I CAN GO AFTER ALL."

"I THINK SO, TOO," SAID THE ANGEL.

STANDING BEFORE JESUS' THRONE, CLUTCHING THE LIST IN FRONT OF MY FACE, I STAMMERED OUT, "HAPPY BIRTHDAY, JESUS! I PRESENT TO YOU THE GIFTS FROM THE CHILDREN OF THE TUGGLE'S HOUSEHOLDS. ..."

I CAN'T REALLY TELL YOU WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THAT, BECAUSE IT HAD TO DO WITH HAPPY CRYING AND SIMILARLY EMBARRASSING STUFF, BUT NOW YOU UNDERSTAND WHY THIS CHRISTMAS WAS SO UNFORGETTABLE.

GIVING THOSE PRESENTS TO JESUS WAS EVEN BETTER THAN THE LEGO CASTLE AND HOT CHOCOLATE AFTERWARDS ... BUT THOSE WERE PRETTY GOOD TOO.



**S&S link:** Character Building: Values and Virtues: Generosity-1e

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