

The Christmas Crib

Every year in winter one of the little girls was always the first to run to the window, shouting "It's snowing! It's snowing!"

Hand-in-hand, Carmen, Chon and Lolita would go out to the front porch after the first snowfall and stand there in silence, contemplating the white streets, with perhaps a squirrel looking for a buried nut.

And when the snow came, it was soon Christmas. Like all Spanish children, they each wrote to the Three Kings asking for the presents they hoped to get.

Mrs Escrivá brought down the big boxes from the place where they had been gathering dust since last year. They contained the kings, shepherds and other crib figures. The children happily started putting the figures in the best places around the crib. The smallest girl wanted to have them all for herself. "No, Lolita!" the others kept saying. Then, with a mischievous look, she would give up the figure she was clutching in her hand.

Josemaría went out for a walk with his father to collect pebbles, sand and moss for the ground around the stable. Don José seemed to have become a child again himself, as he helped arrange cork for the mountains and silver-paper for the rivers that made the crib's scenery.

The Little Watch-Mender laughed in delight as he saw the angels that the children had decorated the crib with.

"They're giving us little wings!" he said.

And that was not all: there were golden-haired, dark-haired and red-headed angels, some playing flutes, some lyres, and some tambourines.

The day of Jesus's birth was near. When Don José got home from the shop the whole family gathered around the crib. The girls loved lighting candles of different colors and placing them close to the stable, and by the light of the candles, looking forward to seeing Baby Jesus very soon, they sang the carols they had learnt when they were very small.

"Now Mommy's favorite!"

"Yes, yes!" cried everyone.

And Mr Escrivá began:

"Madre, en la puerta bay un Niño...
más hermoso que el sol bello
diciendo que tiene f río
porque viene casi en cueros.

Mother, at the door there's a Child
More beautiful than the radiant sun.
He says that he's freezing with cold
For he has nearly no clothes to put on..."

