

## The Story of the Christmas Guest

*Adapted by Helen Steiner Rice from an old German Legend*

It happened one day at the year's white end;  
Two neighbors called on an old-time friend.  
They found his shop, so meager and mean,  
Made bright with a thousand boughs of green.

And Conrad was sitting with face a-shine,  
When he suddenly stopped as he stitched a twine,  
And said, "Old friends, at dawn today,  
When the cock was crowing the night away,

"The Lord appeared in a dream to me,  
And said, 'I'm coming your guest to be.'  
So I've been busy with feet astir,  
Strewing my shop with branches of fir.

"The table is spread and the kettle is shined  
And over the rafters, the holly is twined.  
And now I will wait for my Lord to appear,  
And listen closely so I will hear  
His step as He nears my humble place,  
And I open the door and look in His face."

So his friends went home and left Conrad alone,  
For this was the happiest day he had known.  
For long since, his family had passed away,  
And Conrad had spent a sad Christmas Day.

But he knew with his Lord as his Christmas Guest,  
This Christmas would be the dearest and best.  
He listened with only joy in his heart,  
And with every sound, he would rise with a start.

And look for the Lord to be standing there,  
In answer to his earnest prayer.  
So he ran to the window after hearing a sound,  
But all that he saw on the snow-covered ground...

Was a shabby beggar whose shoes were torn,  
And all of his clothes were ragged and worn.  
So Conrad was touched and went to the door,

And he said , "Your feet must be frozen and sore.  
I have some shoes in my shop for you,  
And a coat that will keep you warmer, too."

So with grateful heart, the man went away,  
But as Conrad noticed the time of day,  
He wondered what made his dear Lord so late,  
And how much longer he'd have to wait.  
When he heard a knock, he ran to the door,  
But it was only a stranger once more;  
A bent old crone with a shawl of black,  
A bundle of branches piled on her back.

She asked for only a place to rest,  
But that was reserved for Conrad's Great Guest.  
But her voice seemed to plead, "Don't send me away,  
Let me rest for a while on Christmas Day."

So Conrad brewed her a steaming cup,  
And told her to sit at the table and sup.  
But after she left, he was filled with dismay,  
For he saw that the hours were passing away.

The Lord had not come, as He said He would,  
And Conrad felt sure he had misunderstood.  
Out of the stillness, he heard a cry,  
"Please help me and tell me where am I?"  
He stood disappointed, as twice before,  
But shook off his sadness and went to the door.

It was only a child who had wandered away,  
And was lost from her family on Christmas Day.  
Again Conrad's heart was heavy and sad  
But he knew he should make this little girl glad.

So he called her in and wiped her tears,  
And quieted all her childish fears.  
Then he led her back to her home once more.  
But as he entered his darkened door,

He knew that the Lord was not coming today  
For the hours of Christmas had passed away.

So he went to his room and knelt down to pray,  
And he said, "Dear Lord, why did You delay?"

"What kept You from coming to call on me?  
For I wanted so much Your face to see."  
When soft in the silence, a voice he heard:  
"Lift up your head, for I kept My Word.

"Three times My shadow crossed your floor,  
Three times I came to your lonely door.  
For I was the beggar with bruised, cold feet.  
I was the woman you gave to eat.  
And I was the child on the homeless street."