

The Christmas Guest

It happened one day at the year's white end,
Two neighbors called on an old-time friend
And they found his shop so meager and mean,
Made gay 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 am 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 many a sad Christmas Day . . .
But he knew with the Lord as his Christmas guest
This Christmas would be the dearest and best,
And 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,
And 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 the dear Lord so late,
And how much longer he's have to wait,
When he heard a knock and ran to the door,
But it was only a stranger once more,
A bent, old crone with a shawl of black,
A bundle of faggots 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 awhile 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
And the Lord had not come as He said He would,
And Conrad felt sure he had misunderstood . . .
When out of the stillness he heard a cry,
"Please help me and tell me where am I",
So again he opened his friendly door
And stood disappointed as twice before,
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 child 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 own 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".

Adapted by: Helen Steiner Rice
From an old German Legend and poem