

A CHRISTMAS CHANGE OF HEART

*The freezing, humble home of the Han family
taught me the true meaning of Christmas.*

By Janice Porter Hayes

The frozen air attacked my missionary companion and me as we picked our way along the empty sidewalks of Seoul, Korea. We must have made quite the sight in our heavy coats, scarves, and clunky, plodding boots.

Sister Kelly raised a hand at a passing bus driver, waving as she croaked, “Merry Christmas!” into the frosty air.

I looked at her and laughed. “You’re a million miles from home, frozen, and homesick. And still you can say, ‘Merry Christmas?’ You’re crazy.”

She smiled. Dodging an icy patch that covered the sidewalk, she said, “Just wait until you meet the Han family. They’ll cheer you up.”

I shrugged, burying my face into the folds of my scarf. For the past month, biting winds had swept across Korea, freezing everything in their path. Sidewalks emptied as people stayed indoors. Because of the weather, our teaching appointments were canceled. And with the holidays around the corner, my homesickness grew.

The streets narrowed, then disappeared into muddy trails as we picked our way along. I was unused to the poverty that now surrounded us.

“We met the Han family in the marketplace,” Sister Kelly

said, leading me down a narrow alley. “I’ve only been to their house once, but I know it’s down this way somewhere.”

I couldn’t help comparing our current situation to what I knew back home. I could imagine my family gathered around an enormous Christmas tree, fireplace blazing, our kitchen table heaped with food. Just two months in the mission field, I could still smell the turkey in the oven and hear the squeals of my siblings as they opened their Christmas toys.

“The Han family is so open to the Spirit,” my companion continued. “It just flows from them! They’ve accepted the gospel and loved us as no other people I’ve ever met.” She glanced at me and smiled. “They’ll love you too, you’ll see.” Slipping an arm through mine, Sister Kelly dragged me around a corner, stopping where a cluster of huts seemed to shiver in the biting wind.

The air smelled of boiling rice and kimchi. We crept down the alley, slipping on mud and ice. “It’s over here,” my companion said, pulling me forward. We stopped before one of the huts. A dull light shone from inside, and the wind rattled the thin outside door.

“This is it?” I managed to say.





My companion nodded. She put out a mittened hand to knock on the door but shook her head as I started to remove my scarf. “Better keep it on,” she said, smiling as the door opened. “We’ll probably have to sit outside.”

“Outside?” I stopped as the door slid open, forcing myself to smile into the faces of the people who grinned at us from inside the hut.

Sister Kelly hugged Sister Han and their two children. They laughed together, Brother Han booming, “Merry Christmas!” in halting English.

Sister Han took my hand, smiling deep into my eyes. Her face glowed as she maneuvered us into their tiny one-room home. I smiled back, already feeling warmer.

Brother Han attempted to shut the door, but the small room would not hold all of us, so we sat in the doorway near their outdoor cooking pot. He loaded my shoulders with blankets.

I held my hands toward the small portable gas heater, their only piece of furniture. Sister Han handed me a bowl of oranges and a plateful of biscuits.

LIGHT
By Elin Roberts

*In the beginning,
God called for light,
And the stars were made
according to His word.
They are here tonight,
flecks of silver and gold—
And once again heaven’s
voice is heard.*

*But this is a new star—
Its light will never dim.
Others fill the sky tonight,
But this one leads to Him.*

The author lives in Texas, USA.

Stumbling over my Korean, I attempted to thank her for her offering. Suddenly, I wasn’t thinking of that loaded kitchen table anymore.

“You are sick for home?” Sister Han looked at me with concern. She studied me for a moment before whispering,

“We are glad you are here.”

I looked into her face, then into her husband’s. Their home was too small for a Christmas tree. They had no presents crowding the floor. There was no music, no turkey, no tinsel or bows. All their worldly possessions were crammed into the shelves that lined one wall of their home.

As I studied my surroundings, the pains of homesickness left me, replaced instead by visions of another humble place, a stable that was small and unadorned, where animals and shepherds felt at ease.

I took Sister Han’s hand, holding it close between my own. A spot had been cleared on their crowded shelves. In this spot was a miniature manger scene made of plastic; beside it sat a picture of the Savior. Gazing at the picture, I realized how comfortable He must be in these surroundings.

“I’m glad I’m here,” I whispered. “Merry Christmas.” ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.