

APPOINTMENT IN BETHLEHEM

(From the Walther League Messenger, December 1948)

For years he had been too busy. Life started crowding him when he was a high school sophomore. There were the classes. There was the extra work in the laboratory. He belonged to the band. He played on the basketball team. Then, when he graduated from high school and went to the state university, he was even busier. He earned his board and room by waiting on tables. He sang in the University Glee Club. His classes and reading assignments seemed to grow heavier each year.

After his graduation, he was still busy. The depression years and the war years kept him so busy that actually he had no time to wonder about the swift passage of time. He had moments when he was thankful he could keep busy. But there were other moments, when he was alone, when he couldn't sleep nights, moments when he wondered what he gained by leading a crowded life. He wondered if he was losing something. Those were the moments when he wasn't too proud of his filled appointment book.

Occasionally he found himself growing irritated with people who always seemed to have time to stop for a chat, to play with children, to go on picnics, to become thrilled about the recurring festivals of the year. He wished people appreciated the fact that he was a busy man.

But then, one night, something happened to him. He was alone. One of those lonesome moments, which he was beginning to fear more and more, came to him. He couldn't sleep. He got out of bed. He wandered into the living room. As he sat in a chair staring at the outline of a Christmas tree against the street light, he recalled the evening before. The family had decorated the tree. He remembered the laughter of the children. He remembered that he was annoyed because he was busy trying to get a newscast about a European crisis.

Sadly he remembered how someone--his wife or one of the children--said: "Come on, let's sing some Christmas carols." He had said, "Can't you see I'm busy right now?" So they sang around the piano. He remembered, too, that he was a trifle annoyed at someone's off-key singing. He remembered that he had forgotten the joy of the group around the piano. He was busy thinking about his problems.

In these moments of reflection, huddled in an easy chair, he reassured himself that he had always been busy. And suddenly, in the clarity which comes during those

lonesome hours, he saw the strangeness of his life. He remembered that he had always been busy, but that he had never been really happy. He had never discovered friendship. He had never learned to really love anyone. He had never discovered the glories of an intimate relationship with God. He remembered again the prayers he had learned when he was a boy. He recalled the joy he experienced, as a boy, in the quiet hours of worship in his church. He remembered the radiance of his annual pilgrimage to the manger in Bethlehem. When did he last make that pilgrimage? He had forgotten long ago.

These thoughts and many more came to that busy man during the early hours on the day before Christmas. They came to him clearly, precisely, suddenly. And, because he was a man of action, and because he still believed in doing things promptly and efficiently, he hurried over to his desk. He found his appointment book under a pile of wrapping paper. Once upon a time he would have been irritated by the clutter of paper and ribbons. Now, for a moment, he held the paper and smiled. He almost stroked this Christmas paper fondly. Carefully he put the paper aside. He picked up his appointment book. He opened it. He turned on the desk light and picked up his calander. Underneath the dates DECEMBER 24-25, he wrote: **APPOINTMENT IN BETHLEHEM.**

(Submitted by Alice Flake, P. G. M.)