

Johnny Cash, The Christmas Guest

It happened one day near December's end,
Two neighbors called on an old friend.
And they found his shop so meager and lean
Made gay with thousand bows of green
And Conrad was sitting with face a-shine
When he suddenly stopped as he stitched a twine
And he 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 fern.
The table is spread and the kettle is shined.
And over the rafters the holly is twined.
Now I'll wait for my Lord to appear
And listen closely so I will hear
His step as He nears my humble place.
And I'll open the door and look on 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.
So 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 at his door.
Like the vision he had had a few hours before.
So he ran to the window after hearing a sound
But all he could see on the snow covered ground
Was a shabby beggar whose shoes were torn
And all of his clothes were ragged and worn.
But Conrad was touched and he went to the door
And he said, "You know, 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 Conrad noticed the time of day
And wondered what made the 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 lady with a shawl of black
With a bundle of kindling 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 slipping away
And the Lord hadn't come as he said he would.
Then 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'd 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 the little girl glad.
So he called her in and he 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 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
And three times I came to your lonely door.
I was the beggar with bruised, cold feet
And I was the woman you gave something to eat.
I was the child on the homeless street.
Three times I knocked, and three times I came in.
And each time I found the warmth of a friend.
Of all the gifts, love is the best.
And I was honored to be your Christmas Guest.