

THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama

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December 2019

This Month's Cover

Our cover this week is *The Martyrdom of Saint Stephen* by Giovanni Andrea de Ferrari. Its date is unknown, although it is believed to have been completed sometime around 1650. It is oil on copper, and was originally an altar piece. We could not find its dimensions; altar pieces tend to vary greatly in size. It is displayed in the Ligurian Academy of Fine Arts in Genoa, Italy. It depicts the stoning of Stephen by the angry crowd. The Bible says that the stoners “laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul” (Acts 7:58b). He is depicted at the left seated on the coats. Watching from heaven are God the Father and Jesus Christ, and the brilliant light behind them depicts the Holy Spirit. Beneath them are a pair of *putti* (“baby angels”), a common device in Italian Renaissance and Baroque religious art. It is interesting to note that the murderous crowds are dressed in 17th century Italian garb, while the bystanders are in 1st century Judean robes.

Saint Stephen (c. AD 5- c. AD 34), whose feast is December 26, was the first recorded Christian martyr (Acts 6:5-7:60). Stephen may actually be a title rather than a name, as *Stephanos* in Greek means “the crowned one.” It is generally accepted that the young man who presided over his stoning was Saul of Tarsus, who eventually converted and became Saint Paul.

Giovanni Andrea de Ferrari (1598-1669) was a Genoese artist of the Baroque period. He was a prolific painter who mainly did altar pieces, and was one of the chief influences in the development of the Italian Baroque style. As a young man he was trained as a student of literature, turning to art as an adult. He first studied under Bernardo Castello, but during that period he also studied intensely the works of Sir Anthony van Dyck. He later studied under Bernardo Strozzi. He was so strongly

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influenced by Srozzi that it is easy to confuse the work of the two men. The main difference is that Ferrari uses lighter applications of paint, his heads are distinctly like those of van Dyck, his hands are more tapered, and unlike Srozzi he frequently paints tightly rolled sleeves. He had a number of students who went on to become famous artists. He died in Genoa in 1669.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

There are not many of us left who tenaciously hang on to the observance of Advent and refuse to celebrate Christmas until it is Christmas. We live in a society that starts selling Christmas paraphernalia in late September and celebrates Easter all through Lent, to the extent that many think purple is an Easter color. To add insult to injury, there are more people who associate jolly obese Santas and egg-laying bunnies with these feasts than those who worship Jesus Christ in them. I am coming more and more do to understand what it must have felt like in ancient Judea, watching the pagan Greek culture increasingly pervade the rich traditions of Judaism.

Having said that, let me wish you a merry Christmas. When I say that, though, be assured that I am not wishing that you *are having* a merry Christmas. I am wishing that you *will have* one when the time comes. We have to think about Christmas before it comes, because any celebration that has great importance requires careful preparation in advance. We cannot wait until it is here to start getting ready for it, so we are very aware of the approach Christmas during Advent. That is, after all, what Advent is all about—the approach of Christmas—but there is a big difference between preparing for something and celebrating it.

So what does the Advent preparation for Christmas entail? Its primary focus is on self-examination to make us increasingly aware of why it was necessary for God to send his incarnate Son into the world to save us from our sin. While it is not as deeply penitential a season as Lent, it is nonetheless a time for us to recognize our failings and our need for Christ. Lent focuses intensely on atonement for our personal, individual sin,

while Advent focuses on the collective sin of all mankind and our hopelessness without God.

In one of my favorite Star Trek episodes, Spock says, “You may find that having is not always as pleasant as wanting. It is not logical, but it is often true.” When we celebrate Christmas all through Advent, by the time Christmas actually comes we are often so tired of it that we are glad to have it over with. As long as it doesn’t get in the way of the spiritual aspects of Advent, there is nothing wrong with also carrying on the necessary secular preparations for the joyful celebration of a very happy festival. Just remember that we should be only preparing for the festival, not celebrating it prematurely. Remember also that while there is nothing intrinsically wrong with Christmas trees and Santa Claus, they are only symbols of some aspects of Christmas, and are not “the reason for the season.”

Father Rick Losch

Christmas Flowers

Each year St. James’ Church offers the opportunity to remember loved ones through donations to the Altar Guild, which provides poinsettias and other decorations in the Church for Christmastide. If you wish to make a donation for this –In Memory of, In honor of, or In Thanksgiving for – envelopes with forms are available at the back of the Church or you may print this information clearly and mail it along with your contribution to Carolyn Patrenos, President, St. James’ Altar Guild, Post Office Box 399, Livingston, Alabama 35470. Checks should be made payable to St. James’ Altar Guild. Because of the increased costs for these flowers and decorations, we ask for a minimum donation of \$40.00 for memorials. The publication deadline for inclusion in the Christmas bulletin is Wednesday, December 18th. Your donation is tax deductible.

Hiram Patrenos

Teaching a child not to step on a caterpillar is as valuable to the child as it is to the caterpillar. –Bradley Millar

Annual Parish Meeting

Our Annual Parish Meeting will be held on Sunday, December 8th immediately following the 11:00 a.m. service. Reports of various parish organizations will be made and two new Vestry members will be elected to replace Roy Underwood and Ethel Scott, whose terms expire December 31st. They will not be eligible for re-election to the Vestry for one year. Other members of the Vestry are Hiram Patrenos and Madelyn Mack whose terms expire on December 31, 2020.

To be eligible for nomination and service on the Vestry, one must be:

- an active confirmed communicant in good standing at St. James' (communicants' names are printed in bold type in the parish directory);
- frequent and regular in worship attendance;
- a supporter of the work of St. James' by an annual pledge to the operating budget;
- willing and able to attend Vestry meetings and perform the work expected of a Vestry Member. Vestry meetings are normally scheduled after Sunday services on an "as needed" basis.

Hiram Patrenos

Services and Activities for Christmas

On Saturday, December 21st at 1:00 p.m. the Altar Guild and volunteers will prepare the Christmas decorations to be put in the church following the morning services on Sunday, December 22nd. Volunteers should be sure to bring their hand clippers, gloves and wear casual clothes.

On Sunday, December 22nd, the 4th Sunday of Advent, at 11:00 a.m. we will celebrate the "Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols" as developed and celebrated at King's College, Cambridge annually since 1918. This service was adapted from an Order drawn up by E.W. Benson, who was later Archbishop of Canterbury. Immediately following this service, we will complete the decoration of the church.

Our celebration of Christmas will begin on Tuesday, December 24th, Christmas Eve, with our traditional Christmas Eve Mass at 5:30 p.m. Father Losch will be the celebrant and our nursery will be open for this service. Immediately following the service, we will have our parish Christmas party in the parish house. You are asked to bring your favorite hors d'oeuvre and your favorite wine to share.

Hiram Patrenos

Every Member Canvass

We have begun our Every Member Canvass. Pledge cards are available on the table at the rear of the Church. Please prayerfully consider your commitment to St. James'. The Vestry needs this information so that it can budget appropriately for the upcoming year. If you have any questions regarding our parish finances, please do not hesitate to speak with a member of the Vestry or our Treasurer, Hiram Patrenos. Pledge cards are available on the table at the rear of the church and may be placed in the alms basins or mailed to St. James' Church, Post Office Box 446, Livingston, Alabama 35470. Please prayerfully consider your commitment to St. James', its mission and work and return your card no later than Sunday, December 8th.

Hiram Patrenos

Wilmer Hall Christmas Contribution

St. James' will be making a special gift to Wilmer Hall for its Christmas needs this year. Last year because of your generous contributions, we were able to contribute \$1,250.00, and we hope to be able to make that same gift this year or perhaps an even larger one. Envelopes are available on the table at the back of the Church and contributions should be made payable to St. James' and designated for "Wilmer Hall Christmas." Envelopes may be placed in the Alms Basins or given to Hiram Patrenos. So that we may forward our contribution to Wilmer Hall in time for use this Christmas, the last day for making a contribution is Sunday, December 1st.

Hiram Patrenos

Why a “Midnight” Mass for Christmas

Why do we call our Christmas Eve Mass a “Midnight Mass” when almost nowhere is it celebrated at midnight? For centuries in both the Catholic and Protestant Churches, the first service of Christmas was at midnight, because in most people’s minds that was the beginning of the day. By all Western calendars for millennia the legal day began and ended at midnight. However, because of the very ancient Jewish tradition, which strongly influenced early Christian tradition, the liturgical day begins at sundown. Starting in the Middle Ages the Church slowly drifted into observing liturgical days as the same as civil days, beginning at midnight. After the Reformation most Protestant Churches retained that, while the Roman Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran Churches started drifting back to the ancient practice of beginning the liturgical day at sundown. The Christmas Eve Mass, which is liturgically the first Mass of Christmas Day, remained at midnight in many regions, while many others celebrated it earlier. The name “Midnight Mass,” however, seems to have stuck. In recent decades many parishes have celebrated it at 11:00 p.m. This was something of a compromise, because in most places that meant that it was not over until after midnight, and thus in a sense it fell on Christmas day even if that day didn’t start until midnight.

The majority of parishes today, in order to accommodate the elderly and families with young children, have either moved their Christmas Eve service to early evening, or have both an early and a late service. As long as it starts after sundown (which is no problem in December in the northern hemisphere), it is still liturgically on Christmas Day.

As an additional bit of trivia, in the very early Church Christmas was not considered one of the major feasts of the Church year. It ranked very far below Easter. Over the centuries it became more and more important as both an ecclesiastical and a secular feast, until today, when in many people’s eyes it is equal to or even more important than Easter.

Richard R. Losch+

Be Wordly Wise

Sabbath

Most Christians consider the Sabbath to be a day dedicated to worship, prayer, and focusing on God, but that is not how it was seen when it originated thousands of years ago. Genesis says that on the seventh day, when Creation was complete, God rested. The Jews saw that day as a day given by God to mankind as a day of rest and refreshment. As such it was particularly grievous to sin on that day, which should be kept pure as an act of thanksgiving to God. This is what is meant by “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” The natural reaction under such circumstances was to worship God on that day, but that was seen as the result of the day, not its primary purpose.

Almost every culture in the world counts the passage of days in cycles (what we call weeks). The Mesopotamian cycle was six days, the Roman eight (the *nundinum*), and the Jewish seven. The Jews were the only people to establish the last day of the cycle as a day of rest, with strict laws on how to observe it, including rest for slaves and domestic animals. These laws regulate what kinds of work may and may not be done on a Sabbath. Most other cultures used their cycles simply for the counting of time and the scheduling of repeating events.

In most languages the days of the cycle are named for gods or important things¹. In Hebrew, however, the days have no names. Sunday is First Day, Monday is Second Day, etc. Thus Saturday is Seventh Day,² in Hebrew *Yom Shabat* (יום שבת). Obviously, we get the word Sabbath from *Shabat*.

The Hebrew word for seven, *shabat*, comes from the same

¹ Sunday is Sun Day, Monday is Moon Day, Tuesday is Tyr’s Day (the Norse god of war), Wednesday is Wotan’s or Odin’s Day (the Norse king of the gods), Thursday is Thor’s Day (the Norse god of thunder), Friday is Frigg’s Day (the Norse fertility goddess), and Saturday is Saturn’s Day (the Roman god of sowing crops).

² Literally “Day Seven.” Unlike the other days, which are called First, Second, Third, etc., Saturday does not have the ending (*ti*) that would make it Seventh (*Shabati*), but is simply Seven (*Shabat*).

root as the words for rest and sit. Judaism also designates other holy days as Sabbaths, days of rest. We do the same thing today when we establish other days than Sunday (such as Christmas) as Holy Days (we commonly call them holidays), on which many people are released from their regular work.

The earliest Christians, who considered themselves a sect of Jews, observed the Jewish Sabbath, and also observed Sunday as the day of Jesus' Resurrection. As the two diverged as separate religions, Christians dropped the observance of the Jewish Sabbath and deemed Sunday to be their primary holy day. It was observed as a day of worship more than as a day of rest, although the term Sabbath remained attached to it.

Richard R. Losch+

The Origin of Santa Claus

Santa Claus as we know him today is the invention of the college professor Clement C. Moore, the cartoonist Thomas Nast, and the storyteller Bret Harte. In 1823 Moore wrote the classic Christmas poem *A Visit from Saint Nicholas* ("Twas the night before Christmas...") for his children. He based the "jolly old elf" on two rather disparate characters, Saint Nicholas of Myra and the Norse god Odin. The name "Santa Claus" does not appear in the poem, as it did not yet exist.

Saint Nicholas (AD 270-346) was the Greek bishop of Myra in what is now southern Turkey. There are countless legends about him, but one of the most famous tells of how he saved a man from having to sell his three daughters into slavery in order to pay his debts to thieves who had cheated him. Nicholas dropped three bags of gold down the man's chimney, providing him with the means to pay his debts and save his daughters. The daughters had washed their stockings and hung them by the fire to dry, and a bag of gold fell into each. This is why stockings are hung by the chimney at Christmas today, and why Moore in his poem had "Saint Nick" come into the house via the chimney. The three gold balls on a pawnbroker's shop represent those three bags of gold. Another legend of St. Nicholas tells of an evil butcher who killed some little boys,

planning to mix their tender flesh in with his meat. Nicholas learned of it in a vision, had the butcher arrested, and miraculously brought the boys back to life. Because of this legend, St. Nicholas is the patron saint of schoolboys. His feast day is on December 6, and on that day in much of Europe gifts are given to schoolboys. Schoolgirls get gifts a week later on December 13, the Feast of Saint Lucy of Sicily.

Santa's red suit was based on the red gown traditionally worn by bishops. The style of the suit, including the fur trim, boots and hat, is that of the winter clothing worn by many men in the far northern European countries, who also ride in reindeer-driven sleighs. The suit, pipe and pot-belly were creations of Moore, as was the bag of gifts. St. Nicholas was associated with gift-giving because of the gifts of the bags of gold and the gifts that were given to schoolboys each year on his feast.

The other figure that Clement Moore drew upon in his poem was a rather unlikely one—the Norse god Odin or Wotan, the king of the Germanic gods. On the night of the Winter Solstice, Odin rode through the skies searching for heroes who had been killed in battle during the past year. He brought them to Valhalla, the great hall of his castle, where they would feast forever. He was accompanied by a demon, Schwarz Piet (“Black Pete”), who sought out and slew cowards. Odin's annual ride was on his eight-legged steed Sleipnir. Sleipnir's eight legs were Moore's inspiration for there being eight reindeer. Brave boys and girls would wait up on that fearful night in hope of seeing Odin. Because Sleipnir got tired on that hard ride, they would leave sugar or hay in their shoes to refresh him. If they had been good (brave), Odin would thank them by leaving gifts in their shoes. If they had been bad (cowardly), Schwarz Piet would leave a rock in their shoes.

On Christmas Eve Santa rides through the night sky seeking good children, for whom he leaves gifts. This is clearly reminiscent of Odin's ride seeking heroes. In the Germanic countries children still leave their shoes out with candy or hay for the reindeer, and Schwarz Piet still accompanies *Vater Weihnacht* (“Father Christmas”) to leave lumps of coal in the shoes

of the bad children. In most other countries nowadays, children hang their stockings instead of leaving out their shoes. Today in many countries children leave snacks and milk for Santa.

The image of the modern Santa Claus was completed when the New York cartoonist Thomas Nast published a drawing of him in *Harper's Weekly* on January 3, 1863. Up to that time pictures of St. Nicholas had usually depicted him as a tall thin man, often in modified bishop's robes. Nast was clearly influenced by Moore's poem.



The Dutch name for Saint Nicholas is Sint Nicolaas, but in the Netherlands and Flanders he is better known by a familiarization of his name, Sinterklaas (roughly equivalent to “Saint Nick”). He was so known by the Dutch settlers of New York (New Amsterdam). Many Dutch settlers moved west with the early pioneers, and they brought their legends, including their Christmas traditions, with them. In 1868 Bret Harte, the chronicler of the Old West, wrote a short story called “How Santa Claus Came to Simpson’s Bar.” He had heard the many stories told by the Dutch from the east, and was familiar with the name Sinterklaas. He apparently had never seen it written, however, so he spelled it the way it sounded to him—Santa Claus.

Santa Claus was now complete. Clement Moore gave him a description, Thomas Nast gave him a picture, and now Bret Harte had given him a name.

Richard R. Losch+

The Epistle is Online

The last seven years of *The Epistle* are now online. Go to <http://rlosch.com> and click on the “Epistle” tab at the top. You can read it online or download it as a .pdf file. This is an easy way to share articles with others.

Richard R. Losch+

*Don't accept your dog's admiration as conclusive evidence
that you are wonderful. —Ann Landers*

No Room in the Inn

Saint Luke tells us that Mary “brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.” (Lk. 2:7 KJV). Even though Luke gives details about the date,¹ he tells us almost nothing about Jesus’ physical birthplace. Over the centuries, because of the influence of European farming practices, the image developed of a wooden stable on the edge of town, where Mary and Joseph were forced to take shelter amid the animals because the inn was full. In modern times scholars have come to understand that in ancient Judea there were no such stables, and postulated that the animals must have been kept in caves. From this idea emerged the multitude of paintings and drawings of the Holy Family surrounded by animals in a cave, even though the traditional Nativity Scene still tenaciously clings to the thatched stable. However, habitable caves in the region of Bethlehem are not common. If we examine the facts of the culture of Palestine in the first century, we must conclude that Jesus was born in neither a stable nor a cave. Although he was surrounded by animals, it is almost certain that he was born in a house. To muddle the tradition further, it was not because there was no room in the inn. There were no such things as inns in Judea in those days. If we examine the Greek text we see that tradition has wedded us to a very weak translation. Luke tells us that there was no room in the *accommodation* (*katalumati*, καταλυματι), not in the inn.

Travel in ancient times, even under the best of circum-

¹ Saint Luke gives many details about the dating, but some of them are inaccurate. He says that Quirinius (Publius Sulpicius Quirinius) was governor of Syria when Jesus was born (Lk. 2:2). Quirinius was not made Governor Legate of Syria until the Tetrarch Herod Archelaus was exiled in AD 6, and it was then that he carried out the census ordered by Augustus. However, long after Jesus’ birth, when the Holy Family was in Egypt, Archelaus was still Tetrarch of Judea. This is why they were afraid to return to Bethlehem, and went to Nazareth instead (Matt. 2:22). At the time of Jesus’ birth (which was sometime between 6 BC and AD 1) Quirinius was leading military campaigns in Galatia and Cilicia (modern Turkey).

stances, was arduous. By Jesus' time the Romans had built a system of roads throughout Europe and the Middle East that made travel considerably easier. We must remember, however, that while they were a marvel of technology at the time, by modern standards they were very rough. Only older women and the weak and elderly traveled in carts, and these had no spring suspension. Every cobble of those hundreds of miles of roads was a jolt, regardless of how many cushions there might be in the cart. Most people walked, and only the rich rode horses (or donkeys in the Middle East¹). The very rich rode in cushioned litters carried by slaves, but even with that luxury it was still a long, boring, dusty and unpleasant ride. There were no inns along the way or in the towns. The closest thing to it were "public houses," *publica*, where one could buy food and wine (both usually very bad), and spend the night. Spending the night generally meant sleeping on the floor or, if it were a very luxurious *publicum*, sharing a bed with one or more other people. The rich would arrange in advance to be housed in the villa of some friend or, often, of a total stranger. Aristocrats loved hosting other aristocrats, with whom they could exchange fine gifts and share the latest gossip. If you were not of "the 1%," however, the best you could expect was to share a bed with someone who may not have washed in weeks. In town, likewise, there were no inns. The poor could pick up a little extra money by letting travelers stay in their homes and sharing a bit of their food. That was the extent of the usual accommodations. Travelers would sleep on the floor just as their hosts did. Beds were a luxury for the rich. Some might have a straw mat to lie on, but even that was not common. They slept on their robe in mild weather, and wrapped up in it in the cold.²

¹ In the Middle East horses were symbolic to most people of their Roman oppressors. The people, often even kings, refused to use them, preferring donkeys. Only charioteers and military leaders in battle used horses.

² Most people owned only three garments—a loincloth, a knee- or ankle-length tunic, and a robe that was rather like a blanket. Owning more clothing than that was a sign of wealth.

The reason for Mary and Joseph traveling from Galilee to Bethlehem is not at all clear. While Caesar Augustus did call for a census,¹ it would make no sense to have people go to their birthplace to be counted. The purpose of a census is for taxation or military conscription, and the count would be of no value if it were not taken where the people lived. The most plausible explanation would be that they went to Bethlehem to get married. They were not married when Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. They were betrothed, which was more or less like being engaged, but much more binding. It was customary for a man to bring his betrothed to his family home for the marriage, even if that were a long distance away. We are told that Joseph's family was from Bethlehem, and it is entirely realistic that his parents still lived there. It is therefore reasonable to conjecture that Joseph brought Mary to Bethlehem to be married in his father's home. These were not rich people, however, so their home would have been a typical middle- or lower-class house. That is where Mary and Joseph would have stayed, and where Jesus would have been born.

Now let us consider what such a house would be like. It would have one room, with a flat roof accessible by a staircase on the outside of the house. The roof would usually have a palm-thatched or tent-cloth covering somewhat like a modern picnic canopy, providing it with shade and protection from rain. In mild weather most family activities, including eating and sleeping, would have taken place on the roof.² In the Palestinian climate this would be most of the year. When the weather was bad they moved inside the house. Its single room was divided by a raised earthen platform (wood or tile floored if they could afford it), often layered with straw. This was the

¹ It is universally accepted that the KJV phrase "all the world should be taxed" (Lk 2:1) is a mistranslation. The Greek word is *apographesthai* (απογραφεσθαι), to be "written down," or "registered." It was a census, and it took place in AD 6 in the Province of Syria (which included Judea and most of Palestine), not throughout the whole Roman world.

² David, from his palace, saw Bathsheba bathing on the roof (2 Sam. 11:2).

living quarters. The lower portion had a dirt floor and was where the animals were housed. There might be a donkey, a sheep or two, possibly a cow, and probably several chickens living there. To keep the animals' food hay clean there would be a manger, which was a low feeding box on short legs. Because the house was meant for protection from the weather, there would be only one or two small windows for ventilation, and a door just large enough for the people and animals to pass through. The house would be smelly, stuffy and usually crowded, because most of the family activities took place outside when the weather permitted, which was most of the time.

In December,¹ when the early winter rains forced people inside, Mary and Joseph showed up to move in with Joseph's family during the time of the wedding. The place was already crowded, and "there was no room for them in the accommodations." The only alternative was for them to take a corner of the lower section among the animals, and the softest place for Mary to lay Jesus was in the manger. They may have stayed there for several months, since the journey back to Nazareth would have been very dangerous for a newborn baby. This would explain why the Magi found Jesus "when they had come *into the house*" (Matt. 2:11). The Magi's visit was unquestionably a long time after Jesus had been born. The trip from Persia to Jerusalem would have taken many weeks, and as an official delegation from the Persian emperor they would have been at Herod's palace for at least a few weeks. This also explains why the Holy Family fled into Egypt to escape Herod. Egypt in those days extended all the way into the Negev Desert, not very far from Bethlehem, and yet it was out of Herod's jurisdiction.

This scenario makes perfect sense, and in no way detracts from the significance of the humility of Jesus' birth.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ Despite claims that Jesus was born in the spring or fall between 4 and 6 BC, there is reasonable evidence that he actually was born on December 25, AD 1. See the website <https://taylormarshall.com/2012/12/yes-christ-was-really-born-on-december.html>.

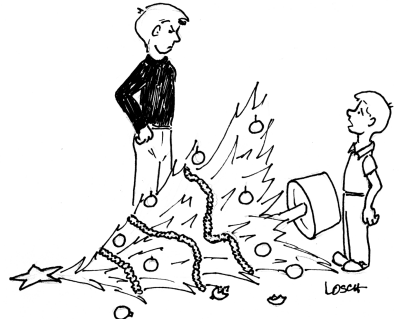
A Touch of Trivia

The next time you sing “Happy Birthday” be aware that it is copyrighted, and has received the highest total royalties of any song in history. Written in 1893 by the Hill Sisters, it has been legally translated into 18 languages. Its copyright, which can no longer be renewed, will expire in 2030. According to Guinness it is the most recognized song in the English language. If you want to use it in a movie or TV show it will cost you between \$5,000 and \$30,000 for permission.

Richard R. Losch+

JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



“Before I tell you what happened, Dad, remember that God will never give you more than you can handle.”



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