

The story of the Christmas Poinsettia

Many, many years ago, in a little village in Mexico, there were two children, a brother and a sister, called Maria and Pablo. They were so poor that they barely had enough food to eat. Their clothes were ragged and worn, and they walked barefoot because they couldn't afford any shoes.

All through the season of Advent Maria and Pablo watched the festivities, processions and parties. But nobody invited them to join in. When they went to church they saw the big manger being set up, and heard all the children being invited to bring a present for the Holy Child on Christmas Eve.

The village children chattered excitedly about the best present to bring, and ran off to gather up their money and buy something very special. Maria and Pablo had no money to buy a gift, so they just stood and listened.

Christmas Eve arrived, and Maria and Pablo set off early to church, to make sure that they could get a good seat where they could at least see the Christ Child in the manger, even if they didn't have a present to give Him. Maria sobbed as she walked along the dark and dusty road, and Pablo tried to comfort her.

Then, a soft glowing light shone through the darkness, and the image of an angel appeared in the sky above them.

"Do not be afraid! You can take a present to the Christ Child! Gather some of the weeds growing here, and take them to decorate the manger. Any gift given with love is precious to the Saviour of the World!"

Maria and Pablo stood, rooted to the spot in confusion, as the light faded and the angel disappeared. Gradually they came to their senses, and gathered armfuls of the lowly weeds growing beside the path, which the angel had shown to them.

They arrived at the little church before anyone else, and started to decorate the manger with the humble weeds. They were still busy at their task when the other children arrived with their expensive presents.

When they saw what Maria and Pablo were doing, the children jeered and laughed at them.

Maria and Pablo felt tears of shame welling up in their eyes, when something incredible happened!

Suddenly, the weeds burst into bud, and bright red flowers with petals that looked like radiant stars, gently unfurled. Everyone was amazed by the beauty of the fragrant flowers. They realised that a gift of love is dearer to Jesus than the costliest present money can buy.

Ever since that day, Poinsettia flowers have been used as Christmas decorations. They are a symbol of the true meaning of Christmas – God's loving gift to us of his precious son.

(Based on traditional tales)