

GABRIEL'S QUEST

The Empty Manger

Lesson Link: Jesus fulfills all God's promises to His people.

The Nativity was a foreshadowing of the Eucharist. Jesus' humble Birth reveals to us what His mission on earth will be—to give Himself to take away our sins and to give Himself to us in the Eucharist, out of love.

It had been almost three weeks since Gabriel last spoke to his dad. His father was doing a special job with the army somewhere on the other side of the world. When Gabriel heard the words "special job," he knew it meant "top secret."

Gabriel was worried. *What if something bad happens to my dad?* he thought.

Some of the people around him said not to worry. They said he must trust in God. Others said they were praying for him.

The days passed, and there was no word from his dad. Gabriel began to wonder, *What good is all this praying?*

Advent arrived, and Sister Teresa asked for a few students to give up recess to help Mr. Norm. He was putting up Advent and Christmas decorations in the old chapel. Gabriel said he would help. He didn't feel like playing anyway.

Gabriel walked into the old chapel. No one was there. He went to the nativity set up near the front. The large characters were in place, except the figure of the baby Jesus wasn't in the manger.

Gabriel slid into one of the old pews and waited. The room was quiet. Gabriel thought about his father.

There was a loud *bang* at a side door. Mr. Norm came in with a ladder. He saw Gabriel and said, "I have to replace a light bulb."

Mr. Norm put up the ladder. He climbed to a fixture high on a side wall and changed a light bulb there. He came down again and flipped a switch on the wall. The light shone on the manger.



"Have you heard anything about your father?" he asked Gabriel.

"No, sir," Gabriel said.

Mr. Norm sat down on a pew in front of Gabriel. He turned sideways to talk. "It's hard being in the military," he said. "I pray for our soldiers all the time."

"Does it do any good?" Gabriel asked.

"It sure does," Mr. Norm said. "Don't you think so?"

Gabriel shrugged.

Mr. Norm pointed to the nativity scene. "You see that manger?" he asked.

Gabriel nodded.

"It looks empty. But, back in the days of Jesus, it was filled with prayers," Mr. Norm said.

Gabriel looked at the manger. "I don't understand," he said.

"For years, all the people of Israel were praying for a Savior to come," Mr. Norm explained. "They prayed and prayed. And one night a young maiden gave birth to a baby and put Him in a manger. His Birth told them that God had heard their prayers. God answered their prayers through Jesus."

"Does that mean God will answer my prayer and bring my dad home safe?" Gabriel asked.

Mr. Norm was quiet for a moment. Then he asked, "Do you believe that God loves you?"

"Yes," said Gabriel.

"Do you believe He loves you no matter what happens?" asked Mr. Norm.

"Yes," said Gabriel.

Mr. Norm pointed to the manger again. "That manger is an answer to prayer." Then his finger moved to a large crucifix hanging on the wall behind the altar. "That cross is an answer to prayer too. Jesus went to both places because He loves us."

Gabriel lowered his head a little. It was a lot to think about.

Mr. Norm said, "Only God knows what will happen to your dad. God is there while your dad serves our country. God knows what He is doing. God loves your father more than you do. Have faith in that."

"But I want my dad to come home," Gabriel said. He felt like he might cry.

"God knows that. But faith isn't getting what we want in prayer. It's believing in God's love no matter what happens." Mr. Norm gave Gabriel a small smile. "Some people didn't believe the baby in the manger was an answered prayer. They didn't understand how their Savior had to die on the Cross. But both teach us how God answers prayer."

Mr. Norm patted Gabriel on the shoulder. Then he went back to his ladder.

Gabriel looked at the empty manger. He bowed his head and prayed.

Questions:

1. **Why would Gabriel ask, "What good is all this praying?"**
(Answers may include because he was scared for his dad, he didn't see an answer right away, and he didn't see God doing anything.)
2. **Have you or someone you know asked this question?**
(Answers may vary.)
3. **How did Mr. Norm answer Gabriel's question about praying?** (Answers may include seeing that God answers all prayers in Jesus, it is good and makes a difference to pray, and all God's answers are from love even when they are not what we want.)