

This/*Yesterday* morning, our children prepared for their Christmas Program which will be held tomorrow/*later this morning*. 44 years of chaotic program practices have led me to expect the inevitable Christmas miracle.

This year's program will be great.

The children will be adorable; they will know their lines and the Nativity story will be told.

Children are such an important part of the Christmas message and experience, so I thought it would be appropriate to share with you a Prayer for Children which reminds us that not all children have happy childhoods and that child neglect and children in poverty is everyone's problem:

1991|By Abigail Van Buren.

Dear Abby: As staff of the Exchange Club Center for the Prevention of Child Abuse of Southern Minnesota Inc., we would like people to know that America's national disgrace and most chilling crime is turning into an epidemic! A total of 2.4 million reports of child abuse and neglect were recorded by the nation's child welfare system last year. Child abuse continues to get worse, and our response as a nation has not always been the most effective. According to recent estimates, up to 5,000 children die each year as a direct result of abuse by a parent or guardian. More than 50 percent of the victims are less than a year old! Abby, please publish this prayer to show that child abuse is everyone's problem, and that we need to work together to break the cycle.

A Prayer for Children

``We pray for children who put chocolate fingers everywhere, who like to be tickled, who stomp in puddles and ruin their new pants, who sneak Popsicles before supper, who erase holes in math workbooks, who can never find their shoes.

``And we pray for those who stare at photographers from behind barbed wire,

who can't bound in the street in a new pair of sneakers, who never go to the circus, who live in an X-rated world.

``We pray for children who bring us sticky kisses and fistfuls of dandelions, who sleep with the dog and bury the goldfish, who hug us in a hurry and forget their lunch money, who cover themselves with Band-Aids and sing off-key, who squeeze toothpaste all over the sink, who slurp their soup. ``And we pray for those who never get dessert, who have no safe blanket to drag behind them, who watch their parents watch them die, who can't find any bread to steal, who don't have any rooms to clean up, whose pictures aren't on anybody's dresser, whose monsters are real.

``We pray for children who spend all their allowance before Tuesday, who throw tantrums in the grocery store and pick at their food, who like ghost stories, who shove dirty clothes under the bed and never rinse the tub, who get visits from the tooth fairy, who don't like to be kissed in front of the carpool, who squirm in church and scream in the phone, whose tears we sometimes laugh at, and whose smiles can make us cry.

``We pray for those whose nightmares come in the daytime, who will eat anything, who aren't spoiled by anybody, who go to bed hungry and cry themselves to sleep, and who live and move, but have no being.

``We pray for children who want to be carried and for those who must, for those we never give up on and for those who don't get a second chance. For those we smother . . . and for those who will grab the hand of anybody kind enough to offer it. `` - Ina J. Hughes

We do not live in a perfect world.

For every child fiercely loved by parents, there is another child neglected.

For every young and hopeful couple celebrating their first Christmas together, there is another widow or widower who grieves the death of their life partner.

For every family with gifts piled high under the tree, there is a family who will go without.

For every warm and safe home, trimmed with evergreen there's another crowded shelter or spot saved under a bridge.

And we are not perfect people.

Communally we are responsible for those neglected children, those impoverished families and those battles over boarders and power.

We are not a perfect people

Not one of us can live up to our own best expectations.

The question is: Are we willing to face the truth of a fallen and sinful world?

This was the issue in all of our readings today.

Down through history, Israel, the early Christians and us, we are all less than perfect...so what are we to do?

We are to prepare the way for the Lord.

During Advent we sing *the Kyrie*. Kyrie means “**Lord**” and refers to the piece of liturgy that repeats either in Greek:

Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison or in English *Lord have Mercy, Christ have Mercy, Lord have mercy.*

Those are the words used in the ancient world by the crowd as an emperor or king approached.

They are good words as we prepare for the coming of Christ the king, born in a manger.

Lord have mercy is perhaps the simplest and yet most comprehensive of all prayers.

When words fail us in the face of great joy or great tragedy, *Lord have mercy* is enough.

To beg God's mercy is to ask for the coming of God's kingdom.

To proclaim God's mercy is to lift up Christ's promise of hope.

Lord have Mercy.

These are words that mark our Advent waiting.

Waiting is good for the soul.

It puts space in our calendars.

It opens up our lives and makes room for the good news.

Lord have Mercy gives meaning to the wait.

It acknowledges that we do not live in a perfect world and points to what will be completed and perfected when Christ does come.

Repeat after me these advent words:

Lord have Mercy...Christ have Mercy...Lord have Mercy.

This is the waiting song of Advent

This is the good news of the gospel.