

Now both life and death are suffused with hope.

During World War II, a group of Maryknoll nuns were interned by the Japanese in a camp in the Philippines. The Japanese guards were kind to the sisters, sharing what little food they had and not restricting them within the camp. They were even given a room they could set aside as a chapel.

One of the Filipinos carved a fine wooden crucifix for the room. Because the Japanese have a great appreciation for prayer and meditation, the guards were most respectful of the sisters and were careful not to disturb them. When Christmas came, some Filipinos carved a whole manger scene for the prayer room. The sisters set up the pieces early in Advent - except for the Christ child. On Christmas Eve, they solemnly placed the child in the manger and spent time in prayer. Throughout the Christmas season, the sisters would gather to pray and meditate before the manger scene.

One of the guards watched all of this with great interest. One day, as the sisters were leaving the room, he stopped one of them. He pointed to the figure of Jesus in the crib, then to the figure of Jesus on the cross and asked, "The same one?" The sister answered

softly, "The same one." Looking again from the manger to the crucifix, the guard said, "I am sorry."

It is easy to welcome Jesus as the innocent, beautiful child of the Christmas story, but far more difficult to welcome Jesus as the humble and humiliated Crucified of Holy Week. In the weeks to come, we shall hear gospels telling of the Holy Family's fleeing the murderous wrath of Herod, reminding us that the Christmas crib is overshadowed by the Holy Week cross...that this holy birth is the beginning of humanity's rebirth in the resurrection. In the weeks ahead, may we travel with the child from Bethlehem to Egypt and from there to Nazareth; may we follow the rabbi from Nazareth to Jerusalem; may we carry the cross with the Messiah along the road to Calvary; may we then rise with him, body and spirit, on Easter morning. For this birth has made all the difference in how we view life and death.

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are suffused with hope.
Have a blessed Christmas.