Clarion Review

General

The Promise of Christmas: The First Christmas

Dana A. Lagmay
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Two Stars (out of Five)

The Promise of Christmas successfully brings together the birth of the Christian savior, Jesus Christ, with the secular-pagan Santa Claus mythos.

The story begins in Tobolsk, Siberia, in 1 BC. Prince Ezra of Arabia is on a quest to find solace after the death of his beloved Andrea. While in a mountain pass, an avalanche buries the prince. He loses his way in the snow and darkness. With the last of his strength, he finds shelter in a cave. When Ezra wakes up, he discovers the cave is inhabited by Herald (seemingly an earlier version of Santa Claus), a bear named Boris, and Hannah, a girl from a nearby village who visits Boris and Herald often. As Ezra recovers, Herald explains that according to prophecy, Ezra could be the prince who must deliver a gift to a king of peace. The gift is a box built by ancient cave dwellers from the materials of a fallen star sent by God.

Grateful to Hannah for giving him food and drink, Ezra accompanies her home. Feeling indebted to her, he attends to chores such as cleaning the stables and feeding the horses. Ezra and Hannah fall in love, but she is promised to a young man named Ivan, whose father, Adolph, a wealthy fur trapper, is in a business arrangement with Hanna's uncle, Igor. Ezra pays his dues to Hannah and returns to Arabia with the box.

To take the gift to the future king of peace, Prince Ezra and his father, King Caspar, follow a giant star glowing in the east. During their trip, they meet two wise men also bearing gifts for the newborn king. They decide to travel together. Overcoming incredible obstacles, the foursome completes its mission. Prince Ezra returns to Tobolsk to tell Herald of his success delivering the box. He encounters more intrigue and difficulty as he searches for Hannah to ask her to be his wife and princess.

Lagmay has a wonderful ability to tell an original story and to create dynamic characters. The characters are three-dimensional and readers will quickly become emotionally involved.

They may even find themselves cheering for Prince Ezra, Hannah, and Boris.

Regardless of the author's talent, the lack of editing slows the narrative and at times brings it to a halt. The novel suffers from the overuse of certain words like innocence, awe, and peace. On one page alone, the word peace is used fourteen times. The narrative is also written in the present tense, one of the most difficult to maintain because it is a writer's inclination to switch tenses in the way someone would when telling a story verbally. Transitioning back and forth between tenses creates awkward sentence structure that is detrimental to the novel and to the credibility of the writer. All of this could have been avoided with proper editing.

The Promise of Christmas juxtaposes the secular-pagan Santa Claus with the birth of Jesus Christ brilliantly. An entertaining tale, Lagmay's novel has the appeal of the poem "'Twas the Night Before Christmas" and the power of the story of the nativity. With proper editing, this and Lagmay's follow-up novels—there is a teaser at the end of the book for a sequel—could become a part of the twenty-first century's collective understanding of Christmas.

Lee Gooden