

intended for his hosts. Mr. Peters removed the red ribbon and tied it around the lamb's neck. "Now the lamb qualifies for a Christmas lamb."

Just then Mother came to the door. "Mary, do you think you can join us for dinner?"

"Yes! I feel better already." Mary jumped out of bed and carried the precious lamb into the dining room.

As the family and Mr. Peters gathered around the dinner table, Father asked Mary if she would like to tell the Christmas story.

"Many years ago," Mary started, "Jesus, who is the Son of God, came as a lamb to earth. He was born in a humble stable and grew up to manhood. Jesus died as a lamb and took away the sins of the world. The red color of the ribbon signifies the blood that Jesus shed to take away our sins."

Mr. Peters smiled at Mary as tears made their way down his weather-beaten face. "I never realized the significance of the Christmas lamb before. For years I thought it was simply a tradition for good luck. How could I have missed it?"

"It's easy to miss," said Father. "We sometimes get so caught up in the excitement that we forget WHO the season is for—the true meaning gets lost in all the wrappings."

During dinner, Mr. Peters told how he had gone out to the barn that morning because his ewe was crying and in distress. He had been surprised that the lamb was to be born so early. He had expected the lamb to come in a few more weeks. His concern for the ewe kept him by her side until the lamb was born. He became sad when he told how there was nothing he could do to save the ewe. The ewe died and he knew he couldn't leave the little lamb alone. He was almost ready to call

and cancel dinner, but decided at the last minute he could just as easily bring the lamb with him as long as he kept him warm and snuggly.

"Now I know why this all happened. Mary needed a Christmas lamb to touch." He smiled, wiping his tears from his weather-beaten face. "And, I needed the Christmas Lamb to touch me today—and He did, very deeply! Now I understand the true meaning of the Christmas Lamb!"

[At the same time, singing was heard in heaven when the angels rejoiced over another lamb who was brought into the fold. The Great Shepherd found his precious lamb that was lost for so many years!]

After an awkward silence, Mr. Peters cleared his throat and changed the subject, "This little lamb will need lots of care. He needs to be bottle-fed and kept very warm. I have too much other work on the farm to be able to be with him all the time. Mary, would you like to take care of him? Would you be his shepherdess and feed, comfort, and care for him?"

"Yes! Yes! I will! I will love him very much. I will take very good care of him! I will keep the red ribbon around his neck to remind me of Jesus' precious gift. And I will name him, umm.... '**Scoompie**' [meaning '*precious*' in Romanian].

"Scoompie is my very own precious little Christmas Lamb!"

"Thank you! Thank you! Thank you, Jesus!"

**"Unto you who believe, He is precious"**  
**(1 Peter 2:7).**

Written by Dottie Connor Bingham with Jennifer Buck

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## Scoompie, The Precious Little Christmas Lamb

Christmas was fast approaching. It was less than a week away. The Romanian village was in its usual Christmastime rush of activities. Storefronts were decorated with glitter and garlands. Ana and her mother were shopping for her younger brother and sister, Dan and Mary. After finding the perfect gifts, Ana paid with her own money and they both left the store.

"Oh, Mother, look! There's a little white lamb. And it has a red ribbon around its neck. May I go touch it, Mother? Please!"

"We'll both go. I'd like to touch it too. I haven't touched a lamb yet this Christmas," her mother said. [Now it is the custom in Romania to touch a white lamb wearing a red ribbon before Christmas. Since it is unusual for a lamb to be born before Christmas, they consider this lamb to be very special. The red ribbon is added to keep away 'evil' and the people believe that touching this lamb would bring in a healthy and prosperous new year.]

Ana and her mother made their way to the man holding the little white lamb at the street corner. By now a large crowd had gathered with other people wanting to touch the lamb too.

"Mother, he is so soft and fuzzy," said Ana as she held his tiny head in her hands. The lamb

let out a soft "baa" and Ana giggled with delight.

When they arrived home, Ana ran into the house to tell the rest of the family that they had already touched a Christmas lamb. Her father smiled as he listened, and Dan and Mary asked about the red ribbon.

"It had a red ribbon on it and was the cutest little lamb I have ever seen. Mother got to touch it too."

So, said her father, "you beat us this year. Well, don't you worry! I'm sure we'll find a Christmas lamb to touch very soon." He gently pulled Dan's ear and patted Mary on the head.

Mary began to cough and lay down on the couch. "I don't know if I'll be able to touch a lamb this year. I haven't been outside for a long time. What if I don't get better by Christmas?"

Mother felt Mary's forehead. "She still has a fever. Shall we call the doctor?"

Father shook his head. "He gave her some medicine for the cough, but he doesn't know the cause. She's been sick for a long time."

Mary had fallen asleep and her father gently picked her up and carried her to her bedroom.

Later that week Dan went with his father on the train into town. On the way, Dan saw that one of the passengers was holding a newborn white lamb with a red ribbon around its neck. He was so excited. "Father, may I go touch the lamb?" His father nodded.

Dan asked the man if he could touch his tiny white lamb.

"Why certainly," he said with a twinkle in his eyes. "Come sit with me. My arms are tired and I would very much like you to *hold* him for awhile."

Dan tenderly held the lamb. He stroked the contented lamb until it fell asleep.

When Dan got home that night he told his family about the lamb. He sat on the couch and showed his sisters how he had cradled the lamb in his arms.

Dan and Ana laughed and talked about the lamb, but Mary began to cry. "I'll never get to touch a lamb before Christmas," she coughed. "I'll never get better. How will I ever get to touch a Christmas lamb?"

"Come," said Father. "Let's pray for Mary right now."

"Dear Lord, You know how sick our Mary is. We ask that you make her better soon. Let her cough go away and help her be able to play without getting so tired. And Lord, one more thing—please let her touch a lamb before Christmas. We ask this in Your Name. Amen."

Christmas was now only two days away. Mother and Father were talking and praying late into the night about Mary. "What can we do to cheer her up? I don't think she will be able to touch a lamb this year. What else can we do?" Father asked.

"Why don't we invite Mr. Peters, our neighbor down the road, over for Christmas dinner? Mary loves him, and this will be his first Christmas since his wife passed away last spring."

"That's perfect," said father. "He'll be able to cheer up Mary, and he won't be alone for Christmas."

It started to snow the next morning as they started decorating the tree. It snowed all that day and the drifts were getting deeper. Father was afraid that Mr. Peters would not be able to trudge through the blizzard in time for Christmas dinner tomorrow.

"Let's not tell the children that Mr. Peters is coming," he said to Mother. "That

way they won't be disappointed if he can't make it."

Christmas morning came. Dan and Ana quickly checked under the tree for presents. Mary was still not feeling well. She cried and slept all morning.

Mother prepared the turkey dinner. She set an extra place for Mr. Peters and one for Mary. "Just in case," she said to herself.

About an hour before dinner there was a knock at the door. Ana greeted the visitor, "Oh! Mr. Peters, I didn't know you were coming. I'm so happy. Merry Christmas!"

"Do come in! Ana's father joined her at the door. "We were afraid the blizzard was too bad for you to make it."

Mr. Peters stepped out of his snowshoes. "It will take more than snow to keep me away from Christmas dinner with your family."

Father led their guest into the kitchen to see Mother. "Please go see Mary—she'll be delighted to see you."

Mr. Peters knocked on Mary's door. Mary, may I come in?"

"Yes! Is that you, Mr. Peters? Come in!" Mary sat up in bed and smiled for the first time all day.

"Mr. Peters, what is in your coat? It's moving!" She began to giggle. Mr. Peters unzipped just the top of his jacket and out popped a little lamb's head. Mary clapped her hands and said, "Oh! It's a lamb! It's a white lamb. I get to touch a lamb!"

Mr. Peters unzipped the rest of his jacket and a very tiny lamb wobbled onto Mary's bed.

"He's so soft. But, he doesn't have a red ribbon! He's not a Christmas lamb." Mary fell back on her pillow disappointed that it was not the right lamb.

"Now, hold on, little one," Mr. Peters said as he pulled out a package from his pocket