

C Davis Fogg

Electric Jesus

Baby Jesus' big blue eyes, clicked wide open like those of a ventriloquist's dummy on opening night. They swung from side to side scanning this new and puzzling world that he was supposed put straight or at least save from its own foibles. He was an unwilling captive in a huge painting of the nativity scene, rimmed with blinking Christmas lights that seemed to float magically like a space ship over the altar. Jesus' diaper was dappled with many brilliant white Christmas lights. A hundred tiny points of electric stars twinkled in the painted midnight-blue sky surrounding the scene. Mary and Joseph gazed with glowing love and amazement, oohing and aahing at their little surprise. A stern guardian angel, massive wings folded, kibitzed. The large, glistening six-pointed star of Bethlehem hung in the sky guiding the three magi who were late for the gig. The smelly animals did what animals do. A life-size carving of Jesus on the cross loomed above the serene picture. His head was down on one shoulder, soulfully looking at his infant self thinking: "Mini-me, you don't know what you've gotten yourself into."

La Parroquia is a massive seventeenth century church, dominating the central square (El Jardin) of San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. It was gussied up for Christmas, with the usual wreaths, flowers and white ribbons decorating its walls and pews. Extra platoons of votive candles gave a warm glow to the cavernous

interior. The long altar was strewn with a lush carpet of a thousand blinking white Christmas lights inviting the parishioners that would soon fill the church for the joyous celebration. Strands of red, green and purple lights edged the altar, flashing and streaming like the Times Square ticker tape when the stock market has run amuck.

The congregation filed in for the dusk service. There were kids, barely kept under control; a number of gringo worshipers were interspersed with the Mexicans. A few wandered in and out, choosing to get a small dose of religion and then get on with whatever they were to do for their celebration at home. The priest was accompanied by a somewhat competent electric guitarist belting out “O Come All Ye Faithful” in a wavering, breaking, falsetto voice.

Tired of being a prisoner to convention, and wanting to get on with the job—walking on water, water into wine, multiplying the fishes and so on, Jesus decided to bolt. Hopping over the side of his crib, he slithered down the green spiral-lighted cross on the altar, hopped off the altar, diaper lights flashing, and landed on the chancel floor on his hands and knees. Raising his head like a turtle and gooing and drooling as only a baby can, he lined up escape routes.

Startled by the Hollywood histrionics, the priest fell to his knees spilling red wine all over his white Christmas vestments. An altar boy fainted while another chugalugged the second chalice of wine. The electric guitarist broke into “O Holy Night” with a samba beat. In the meantime, half the congregation weaved, chanted, prayed prostrate or whizzed around their rosaries at the latest of miracles. The other half panicked and headed for the exits. Sensing bedlam, Jesus skittered on his by-now-well-packed diaper down the center aisle, throwing off sparks like a Fourth of July sparkler. He rushed through the heavy, carved,

oaken doors and tumbled down the centuries-worn granite steps onto the cobblestone entrance to the town plaza. He ended his routine with a standing finish, arms stiffly out, Olympic style. He was precocious.

Having only associated with angels, beasts and people in funny white ghost outfits, Jesus took his time in sizing up the twilight scene. The square was thronged with residents, kids, families, vendors and tourists, some taking in the sights, others staking out their places for the midnight fireworks. A mariachi band played “Silent Night.” Crawling through the crowd, he was almost hit by a couple of hundred bobbing and weaving colorful balloons strung onto sticks carried by over-fed vendors. Four tourists, looking up at the magnificently lit church tower tripped on him, and a kid dropped hot taco sauce on his head. Three lean “dogs of the street” came over, took a smell and licked his face. Ugh. Jesus miraculously crawled his way under the forest of legs and feet toward the Promised Land of the relatively peaceful town garden. Hoisting himself up on his legs again, he toddled up the garden stairs and streaked like hell toward the relative calm of the street in back of the square.

He no sooner sat down to rest and rethink his game plan when a jolly deep-throated “Ho, Ho, Ho” with a Spanish lilt split the air just behind him. “ My God, my Father, Mom full of grace, what now,” Jesus thought. Slowly, a creaky oversize wooden farm cart, pulled by an old, wise, donkey, clattered in from the distance. It carried a man dressed in a red suit with fuzzy white beard, a floppy hat, and bundles of festively wrapped boxes in the back. The driver said: “Stop”. The stubborn donkey, with half the world under his belt and a cold-infected nose that blushed red-red, stopped dead in his tracks almost throwing Santa over the front of the cart. Jesus flashed “Hi” with his lights, trying to appear politically correct and friendly to this traveling circus.

Santa said: “ Christ, I never expected to see you here. Today’s not your day. It’s mine. I have to sprinkle presents among all of the little urchins throughout the world in honor of *your* birthday—remember, the naughty and nice stuff is out the window because, in today’s PC world, everyone is supposed to be number one, el-primero, gets a ribbon and a trophy, and passed with honors in school. So my load has doubled. By the way, I’m on piecework pay, so disappear. Come back tomorrow.”

“I didn’t ask to be here my friend. As a matter of fact, Mom and Dad weren’t expecting me. They hadn’t a clue and I guess didn’t know about safe sex. And if that wasn’t enough, I fell out of the nest with a wet diaper and a bundle of battery-driven electric firecrackers dragging down my rear.”

“What’s a baby like you doing alone during Mexican Midnight Madness anyway?”

“Parents are blitzed. Catatonic. Just came to Bethlehem, coach class on the redeye. Cramped, no food, and the service sucked.”

“Anyone else who can look after you? I’ve got to get on with my job, keep the little brats happy, and get paid.”

“Maybe Grandpa”

“Who’s Grandpa?”

“You call him God down here.”

“Call him. Use my cell.”

Bzzz.bzzz. bzzz. beep. “This is God. Leave a message at the sound of the beep. I’m sorry because of the high call volume that I can’t answer your call. But leave a message and I’ll answer your concerns and prayers every Sunday, Friday, or six times a day as the case may be. Often, however, you can find the definitive answer your prayers and concerns in the FAQ list on our help line: 1-800-HERESGOD.”

“Looks like a no go with God”

“ Well, I’ll stick around for a while kid. Let’s work this ‘who owns the day’ thing out. Why not repair to Mama Mia’s. They have 2 for 1 margaritas on Christmas Eve, five bars, and a hell of a loud DJ. That’ll blow our minds. We can think more clearly.”

“Fine”

Santa lifted Jesus onto a bar stool and hefted himself, with a huge sigh and grunt, onto the next stool. Battery low, Jesus got the bartender to plug him into an outlet while Santa ordered the drinks. Santa quickly downed a beer glass full of pistol-power margaritas; Jesus sucked his from a salt-crusted baby bottle.

Well, as the evening went on and the midnight services commenced at La Parroquia and twenty drinks had been served to the dynamic duo, they struck a deal. They would take the booty, skip town, and flog the presents. This will become their own Christmas tradition and no one need ever know.

Last seen, Jesus was sitting next to Santa on the rickety wagon as they drove out of town. His diaper flashed: “Merry Xmas to All and to All a Good Night.”