

## "Don't be stressful" Christmas Eve Service Message

This is a famous Chinese story that I heard from my father when I was a boy:

An elderly Chinese peasant farmer had a horse that he loved very much and depended on for almost everything. In the spring when it was time to plant, the farmer would hitch a plow to the horse and break the land. When the fall harvest would come in, the farmer would hitch the horse to a wagon and take his produce to the market to sell. Whenever the farmer had a distance to travel, he would put a saddle on the horse and ride it. Every day, in one way or another, this beloved horse was a big and dramatic part of the farmer's life.

Then, one afternoon a bee stung the horse on its neck. The horse went into a panic and ran away. The farmer ran after the horse as it ran off into the hills, but, of course, the farmer couldn't catch up with the frightened animal. So, at sunset, the farmer had to trudge back home and tell his wife that his beloved horse had run away.

Now, they lived in a small provincial village. And so, quickly the word spread that the farmer had lost his horse. For the next several days, whenever the farmer met any of his neighbors, they would say, "Sure sorry to hear about your bad luck in losing your horse," and he would just shrug his shoulders and say, "Bad luck, good luck; who's to say?"

Well, lo and behold, six days later his horse returned from the mountains with five wild horses that it had met. The farmer was able to corral all six of the horses and, of course, word spread quickly throughout the village. For the next several days, whenever he met anybody, they would say, "Sure glad to hear about your good luck getting all those horses." The farmer would just shrug his shoulders and respond, "Good luck, bad luck; who's to say?"

The farmer's son was excited about their new horses. He quickly began to try to break them so that his family could sell them for a big profit. But one of the horses bucked him off, and the son's leg was broken in three places. Word spread through the little village; and so for the next several days, whenever the farmer would meet his neighbors, they would say, "Sure sorry to hear about your bad luck, your boy getting hurt." Again, the farmer would just shrug his shoulders and respond, "Bad luck, good luck; who's to say?"

Two weeks later, a war broke out between the city and states of interior China. The army came through conscripting every able-bodied male under the

age of  
fifty to go and fight, and, of course, the farmer's son would have been in  
that category had the accident not happened. Because he had a broken leg, he  
didn't have to go, and that turned out to be very fortuitous because every  
villager who was conscripted wound up being killed in the war. And the old  
farmer  
said, "Good luck, bad luck; who's to say?"

We heard the message, from today's scripture readings, "Do not be afraid,  
Mary", "Do not be afraid Joseph, son of David," and to the shepherds "Do not  
be afraid, for I bring you good news of great joy." We heard today also, "Do not  
be afraid" in another way: "Don't be stressful, because you are accepted as  
children of God." We are living in an age of uncertainty. But don't be stressful.  
"If God is for us, who can be against us?" In other words, "If you are accepted  
by God, who can reject you?" You are accepted, not rejected by God. This is the  
best Christmas gift, that you are accepted as children by God by your believing  
in Him.