




# *A New Day of Faith*

**M**any years ago on a wintry morning, a warm light glowed through the frosty windows of a candy shop. Martin Winckler, an elderly gentleman in his 80s, shuffled past the large glass case filled with jars of colored candies. He unlocked the front door, hung an OPEN sign in its frosted window, and silently gazed outside at the village street.

A blanket of fresh snow covered the road, lampposts, and roofs of every small



*Jesus said to him,  
"If you can  
believe, all things  
are possible to him  
who believes."*

MARK 9:23

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shop along the street, making the snowy village look like a picture postcard.

Standing inside, the candymaker listened to the approaching sounds of jingling bells as people drove their horse-drawn sleighs to work. The music echoed cheerfully through the dark streets.

But no answering notes of joy echoed in the old man's heart. He blinked the unformed tears from his eyes and turned away from his decorated front door. Sighing deeply, he turned his attention to the potbellied stove near the front of his shop.

He bent down slowly onto one knee, pulled open the stove door, and stirred the coals. Reaching into the bucket next to the stove, he lifted out several logs and added them to the flickering fire. After he closed the door, he paused to pet the striped tabby cat at his knee.

"Yes, Sebastian. You appreciate a warm fire too, don't you?" He sighed again and scratched Sebastian's chin and neck. "Ah, my faithful friend. I only wish you could talk to me once in a while. Maybe you know how difficult it is for me to get ready for Christmas—

a Christmas without my Katherine. And now it's time for me to do the one job I've been dreading since her death. I don't want to, but I have to—for the sake of the children—and for my own sake too." Sebastian purred and rubbed his face against Martin's leg,

Martin stood up slowly, gingerly. *Life must go on*, he thought, *even when it seems impossible. It's what she would want me to do.* But setting up the Christmas manger scene had always been Katherine's job, her special delight. Each time he thought of setting it up, in his mind's eye Martin would see Katherine placing each figure just so with her loving hands as she chatted gaily about their Christmas plans. How he prayed for the ache of her absence to subside a little. Yet it remained—heavy as a load of bricks. One moment she had been with him—the next she was gone. The reality of her absence still didn't seem possible.

Reluctantly, Martin walked over to the bottom shelf of the cupboard, pulled out an old wooden chest, and carried it to the shop window. Katherine had already decorated the window with fragrant pine boughs and

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red garlands, not knowing she wouldn't be there to finish by putting out the carved figures.

Gently setting the box down, he took a deep breath and prayed, "Oh God, give me strength to keep going. Somehow." He sighed and squared his shoulders.

Unpacking a hand-carved Nativity, Martin carefully arranged the large painted figures in his store window, just as Katherine had done each and every Christmas for the previous fifty-two years. He positioned the tall figure of Joseph beside the kneeling form of Mary. A shepherd holding a lamb went on the right side, A camel along with three wise men carrying their gifts went on the left.

In the center of the Nativity scene, Martin placed a crude manger along with a baby wrapped in strips of linen cloth, worn from years of use. The old man tenderly touched the baby's tiny hand.

"Ah, Sebastian," he said to his cat, "I wish I could feel the joy of this season. I know I can still give thanks for the birth of my Lord, but Christmas won't ever be the same again. It's just you and me now,"

Sitting on the windowsill, Sebastian purred softly as Martin returned the empty chest to its cupboard, Then he took up the task of refilling all the candy jars, which he had neglected since Katherine's death. Soon the large glass containers overflowed with mints, caramels, butterscotch drops, jellybeans, gumballs, peanut brittle, candied orange peel, and striped candy sticks of every flavor and all colors of the rainbow.

Pausing to stroke the cat's head, the old man smiled a little, thinking of his six-year-old granddaughter, Katie. "You know, Tabby, sweet Katie is a balm to my heart. What a blessing she is to me at this time, I'm glad she enjoys all the candy in my shop . . . well, all except the lemon drops."

Martin's face lit up as he thought of Katie and the other village children. Each child was so unique—with taste buds just as individual! Little Joey's favorite candies were the creamy melt-in-your-mouth mints. Golden butterscotch drops were Jeremy's favorite. Once a week Benjamin brought in his pennies to buy a handful of green jellybeans and two orange-flavored candy sticks. Madeline and her sisters usually chose a

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variety of chocolate drops with soft vanilla and maple fillings, while Jeremiah insisted nothing tasted better than crunchy peanut brittle.

The old man's eyes sparkled with the realization that there was a special joy in knowing every child in the village by name. He even knew all their favorite candies! Now, more than ever, these youngsters were an important part of his life. How empty life would be if he couldn't see them in the days ahead. Perhaps their visits would lighten the Christmas season for him.

Filling the last jar with gumdrops, a glimmer of hope flickered in the old man's heart as he remembered the children's big smiles when he handed out candy treats. For a brief moment the heaviness lifted.

"Do you know all the children who come to my store, Sebastian? Do you think they understand how much I love them? I mustn't forget to add an extra bag of candy to each of the Christmas orders. How I wish I could see those little faces light up when they find the candy surprises I've included for them."

Getting out his long list of holiday orders, Martin looked the paper over carefully and marked a large red X beside the names of all the families with children.

Sounds of laughter from children playing in the freshly fallen snow filtered through the window. The thought of making the children happy sparked a renewed sense of purpose in the old man's heart.

With that he prayed, *Thank You, Lord, for the gift of this store and for over fifty years of work with the people of this village. I want to help these children and be a blessing to them as long as I live. What would I do without their visits?*