

Snapshots : Lottery – Christmas here and now, and there and then



Christmas is about Jesus – born in poverty, but bringing hope. Christmas now looks a lot different to Christmas then – the shepherds and Wise Men worshipped in a stable – we in a chapel, but Jesus is still in the centre, and we have the same hope now that they had then. Different...but the same.

Christmas 1941 was different again. Sister Laureta of the Heart of Jesus¹ spent it with her mother and sister and other Polish exiles in Kazakhstan. She had just found out about the amnesty for Poles and the army of General Anders², and she decided to make Christmas Eve special. All the ingredients were the same as ours at Szymanów this year – a Bible reading about Jesus' birth...carol singing...traditional Polish dishes...the exchange of Christmas greetings. Sister Laureta though had two surprises up her sleeve – the news of the amnesty ... and a lottery: *"A surprise lottery! Every ticket got a prize. Tobacco for the men, and for the women – needles, thread, pins, writing paper, pencils, envelopes..."* She told them that night that she was going to join the Polish army – and she did.



Sister Laureta of the Heart of Jesus



Szymanów

¹ Sister Laureta of the Heart of Jesus (Sophie Wilczynska) – 1898-1985. A defender of Lviv in 1918/19. Joined the Congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception in 1924. Deported to Siberia in 1940, she joined the Polish army of General Anders in February 1942, travelling extensively as part of her military service. She returned to Poland in 1947, and resumed life in the convent after a 7year absence.

² The Polish Army in the East was created in the Soviet Union after Russia joined the Allies, but evacuated in March 1942, to Palestine, and came under British command. General Anders was released from prison in Moscow, and appointed Commander of the Army by Sikorski.

The whole point of a lottery is risk – you buy a ticket, but you might not get a prize. Sister Laureta’s lottery was a bit different – no risk and everyone a winner. I wonder how she looked at the future that Christmas. Did she see risk, or did she see it like her own lottery – because Jesus gives hope, and God is love, trusting Him means you don’t lose. You might get pins when what you actually wanted were some envelopes, it’s true, but you don’t get left with nothing. Sister Laureta hadn’t been thrilled about ending up in Kazakhstan in the first place: *“Didn’t You have anywhere else to dump me, apart from Siberia?”* (to God), but she came to see the sense in being there in that place, with those people at that time.

In the Bible it says: *The people that lived in darkness have seen a great light; on those who lived in a country of shadow as dark as death a light has dawned.*³ This is Jesus – He is always light in a dark place – for the shepherds, the Wise Men, Sister Laureta and the people around her, and for us. At Christmas, the light comes on, the star appears in the sky – we can follow it ... or not – take the lottery ticket, or leave it in the basket.

³ Matthew 4:16; Isaiah 9:1 (New Jerusalem Bible)