

Then they went to remind Darius the king about the prohibition: "Did you not sign a decree, O king, that for thirty days, whoever makes a petition to anyone, divine or human, except to you, O king, shall be cast into a den of lions?" The king answered them, "The decree is absolute, irrevocable under the law of the Medes and Persians."

To this they replied, "Daniel, one of the Jewish exiles, has paid no attention to you, O king, or to the prohibition you signed; three times a day he offers his prayer." The king was deeply grieved at this news and he made up his mind to save Daniel; he worked till sunset to rescue him. But these men pressed the king. "Keep in mind, O king," they said, "that under the law of the Medes and Persians every royal prohibition or decree is irrevocable." So the king ordered Daniel to be brought and cast into the lions' den. To Daniel he said, "Your God, whom you serve so constantly, must save you."

To forestall any tampering, the king sealed with his own ring and the rings of the lords the stone that had been brought to block the opening of the den.

Then the king returned to his palace for the night; he refused to eat and he dismissed the entertainers. Since sleep was impossible for him, the king rose very early the next morning and hastened to the lions' den. As he drew near, he cried out to Daniel sorrowfully, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God whom you serve so constantly been able to save you from the lions?"

Daniel answered the king: "O king, live forever! My God sent his angel and closed the lions' mouths so that they have not hurt me. For I have been found innocent before him; neither have I done you any harm, O king!"



► REFLECTION: The Persians have conquered the Medes. As king of the Medes, Darius has to do what the Persians say. Daniel's enemies maneuver Darius into a trap. Darius must either cast Daniel into a den of lions or face punishment from the Persians. Darius is admitting he is powerless when he says to Daniel, "Your God must save you." The night is Daniel's trial, and a trial for Darius too. It is the night, with all its dangers and unknowns, in which the earnest friendship of Daniel and the king *and* the bond of God's love for the Jews will be revealed in splendor. At dawn, everyone will learn that Daniel is in the LORD's den.

There is no quiet like that of the night before Christmas. Sitting by the tree, we've done all we can. We are helpless. We think of the people named on stockings, of their joys, sorrows, glories and lights. We think of what we hope for them. Christmas, for many of us, involves a sudden return to a basic realization, a fundamental fact: *we love these people*. This night *is* different from any other, *doing to us* what no other night does, because in this night the voice of God will be heard plainly, out loud, telling us what He really thinks. It will be His *own* voice and, to our surprise, the thin, sharp cry of a newborn baby.