

a canadian christmas carol



# jesous ahatonhia

*A Huron Indian Carol (circa 1641)*

by FATHER JEAN DE BRÉBEUF

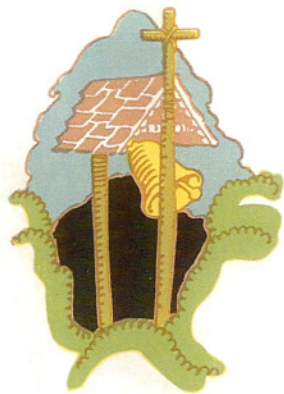
*Text by Robert E. Oliver*

*Illustrations by Stanley F. Turner*

11046

*Canada's Centenary of Confederation 1967*

—ABITIBI PAPER COMPANY LTD.



## foreword

Into the stature of Canada has gone the lives and purpose of a gallant host of good and courageous men whose work in trade, in government and in the Church has left enduring marks on our times.

Their numbers are legion; their courage and sacrifice immortal. Each lent his strength and his judgment to the tasks of the moment. Each deserves a high place in the roster of Canada's heroes.

In singling out Father Jean de Brébeuf, the bold Jesuit who met a flaming stake as his reward for selfless service, we preserve only one glorious, fleeting moment in Canadian history but a moment rare in the annals of courage.

It is particularly fitting, in the nation's Centennial year, that we should remember such men, for they have left us a priceless legacy—inspired ideals, incessant labor, inflexible determination and yet gentle, patient understanding.

We can be grateful indeed that such men were, in truth, fathers of Canada.

PAUL E. ROBERTS, *President*  
Abitibi Paper Company Ltd.



*"Within a lodge of broken bark the tender Babe was found"*

# jesous ahathonhia

*Huron Christmas Carol—circa 1641*

by FATHER JEAN DE BRÉBEUF

ENGLISH INTERPRETATION BY J. E. MIDDLETON



'Twas in the moon of win - ter time when  
in a lodge of bro - ken bark the  
ear - liest moon of win - ter time is  
chil - dren of the for - est free, O



all the birds had fled, That Might - y Git - chi  
ten - der Babe was found, A rag - ged robe of  
not so - round and fair As was the ring of  
sons of Man - i - tou. The Ho - ly Child of



Man - i - tou sent an - gel choirs in - stead. Be -  
rab - bit skin en - wrapped His beau - ty 'round. And  
glo - ry on the help - less In - fant there. While  
earth and heav'n is born to - day for you. Come



fore their light the stars grew dim, And  
as the hun - ter braves drew night, The  
Chiefs from far be - fore Him knelt, With  
kneel be - fore the ra - diant Boy, Who



wand-ring hun - ters heard the hymn; "Je - sus, your  
an - gel song rang loud and high;  
gifts of fox and bea - ver pelt.  
brings you beau - ty, peace and joy.



King, is born; Je - sus is born; in ex-



cel - sis glo - ri - a !"

2. With -
3. The
4. O

The English words are not a translation, but an interpretation by Mr. Middleton. The tune, reminiscent in its opening phrases of "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen," is said to have been sung in France to a carol entitled *Une Jeune Pucelle* (A Young Maiden).



*Hunter Braves and Angels*



*Chiefs from Afar*

## father jean de brébeuf

“I am an ox,” Father Jean de Brébeuf used to say, punning on his name, “and I am fit only to carry loads.”

The strength of an ox indeed was required to carry the burdens borne by this gentle, scholarly giant, who came to Canada after teaching in the Jesuit College at Rouen. He gave of himself unsparingly, often spending his days in physical toil and his nights in devotion, and in the end endured, with forbearance and superhuman fortitude, long hours of torture.

Samuel de Champlain, the statesman-explorer, was quick to recognize the strategic value of Huronia, the verdant land encircling the south-eastern shores of Georgian Bay. He planned to establish there a strong French protectorate, a fur-trading centre that would serve as a counter-threat to the Iroquois and as a bulwark against the possible threat from the English, Dutch and Spanish to the south. The Church, sharing his vision, saw the wilderness becoming the home of a great, new Christian family.

The first missionaries to come were the Recollets. In August, 1615, Father Joseph le Caron celebrated the first Mass in Ontario at the Huron village of Carhagouha, with Champlain assisting. Soon, however, the Recollets found the resources of their Order inadequate for the task. At their invitation the Jesuits took over for all of New France, and Father de Brébeuf became Superior to the Huron mission. Three years later, when the English captured Quebec, the priests returned to France; but by 1634 they were back in Huronia.

Between 1639 and 1649 they established a central home, the Residence of Ste Marie, “The Abode of Peace”, near the mouth of the Wye, just east of





where Midland now stands. Here is the historic heartland of what is now Ontario. Archaeologists estimate the waterworks and canal system of the Fort were the first north of Mexico; and at Ste Marie were founded the first hospital, and the first social service centre in the province. Thousands of Hurons received treatment, solace and spiritual instruction there each year.

To the Hurons, Father de Brébeuf was a familiar and admired figure. They called him "Echon", probably their version of Jean. He could speak to them readily in their own tongue, a tribute to his memory and linguistic gifts, for many a missionary found the language an insoluble barrier. His physical prowess which earned the respect of the Indians also won praise from Father Paul Ragueneau, the last Superior in Huronia, who wrote: "If travelling, he carried the heaviest burden; and in a canoe he plied the paddle from morning to night. When any obstacle was met in the river, he was the first to get into the water and the last to leave it, despite the rigor of cold and ice."

Yet he was a gentle man, whose compassion, wit and common sense shine through one of his letters—a letter shown to every Jesuit leaving Quebec for Huronia. Some excerpts:

"You must really like the Indians. Remember . . . they are your brothers.

“Don’t dally getting in or out of the canoe; and tuck up your gowns so that they will not get wet, and so that you will not carry water or sand into the canoe. To be properly dressed, you must have your feet and legs bare.

“It is well not to ask too many questions, nor should you yield to your desire to learn the language and pass remarks along the way. This can be carried too far. A silent tongue is good equipment at such a time.”

In another letter he referred to the Huron celebration of Christmas. “The Indians have a particular devotion for the night that was enlightened by the birth of the Son of God. They built a small chapel of cedar and fir branches in honor of the manger of the Infant Jesus . . . Even those who were a distance of more than two days’ journey met at a given place to sing hymns in honor of the new-born Child.”

One remnant of the Huron nation, settled at Lorette, Quebec since 1650, has preserved by tradition one of these hymns. It was written, the Hurons say, by Father de Brébeuf who taught it to their ancestors and appeared in a collection of Huron songs and chants assembled by Father Chaumonot. This record was lost and later Father de Villeneuve, S.J., who was stationed at Lorette from 1747 to 1794, wrote down the words as he heard them. The first printed version was in Ernest Myrand’s *Noëls Anciens de la Nouvelle France*.

One stanza of the Indian is reproduced below. To represent an odd vowel sound “ou”, the priest designed a special symbol which looks much like the figure “8” used here.

*Estennialon de tson8e Jes8s ahatonhia*  
*Onna8ate8a d’oki n’on8andask8aentak*  
*Ennonchien sk8atrihotat n’on8andilonrachathath*  
*Jes8s ahatonhia*