

Timeless Posada also tells story of humanity's search

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By entering into the rituals of the Christmas season, we transcend our busy lives and our worries and enter the world of mystery and salvation.

One ritual available to all San Antonians is *La Gran Posada* at San Fernando Cathedral. The Posada is a re-enactment of Joseph and Mary's search for lodging (*posada*) upon arriving in Bethlehem on the first Christmas Eve. This has been a tradition in our city for more than 250 years.

The community will join Joseph and Mary at 6:30 p.m. Sunday at Milam Park and walk with them to the cathedral, stopping at various places as they seek *posada*.

By walking with the holy pilgrims, the participants in this ritual experience the search for the elusive security and happiness we all long for, the rejection and disappointments of life and, hopefully, acceptance and salvation.

Those who cannot join the holy pilgrims on their journey through the streets of our city can greet them at San Fernando Cathedral on Sunday morning.

During the 8 a.m. televised Mass, the church community will recognize the work of Habitat for Humanity; San Antonio Metropolitan Ministries, or SAMM; Christian Assistance Ministry, or CAM; and the St. Vincent de Paul Society — today's innkeepers that offer *posada*, housing and hope for the homeless.

San Antonians can also view a video of last year's *La Gran Posada* ceremony on Saturday on KLRN at 9 p.m. and again on Dec. 24 at 11 p.m.

The video intertwines the procession with some truly moving stories.

"In heaven's name, I ask for lodging," pleads Joseph at several stops during the Posada.

Arcadia López, who is featured in the video, was a little girl when her family immigrated to the United States to flee the turmoil of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. On their first day in San Antonio, the family searched in vain for a relative. Finally, an older woman — a stranger — invited the tired family to stay in her one-room house.

The father soon found a job, and the family rented an apartment. Arcadia went to school and eventually became a teacher and earned a doctoral degree. López tells her family's story in "*Barrio Teacher*" (Arte Público Press, 1992).

As a little girl, López knew it was getting close to Christmas when her mother took out a treasured oil lantern that was hung outside so Joseph and Mary would know they could find lodging.

“How do I know you’re not ruffians,” sings an innkeeper who rejects the holy pilgrims during the Posada ritual.

Mario Mandujano relates how he felt rejected when, not long after immigrating to San Antonio, he lost his job and his housemates threw him out. He slept in a park for a few days. An acquaintance from work took him in until he could manage on his own.

Again, he felt rejection when the mother of his fiancée disapproved of him and cut herself off from the couple until their first child arrived.

Mandujano, however, was warmly welcomed at San Fernando, where he has become director of *La Gran Posada* and the Passion pageant. Marriage, raising a family, work — life itself — have brought some rough moments, but Mandujano has found acceptance and happiness.

“Enter holy pilgrims. We hadn’t realized who you were,” sings the last of the innkeepers in *La Posada* as Joseph and Mary proceed into the church.

Tina Navarro, another parishioner, talks about her contribution to *La Gran Posada* designing costumes (her profession). She describes how her involvement in the ritual brought her acceptance when she returned after having been away from the city.

But *La Gran Posada* is not just for parishioners. All kinds of people join the holy pilgrims in their search. They become one group as they walk down the streets, holding on to not just a tradition but to something sacred.

La Posada is about searching and finding; it’s about welcome and acceptance; it’s about becoming a part of the community and finding salvation.

Gilberto Hinojosa