

December 23 **Charlotte Diggs (Lottie) Moon** Missionary in China, 1912

Born in Virginia in 1840, Charlotte Diggs (Lottie) Moon was the child of pious and affluent Baptist parents. Precocious in schooling, she received an MA in Classics, thereby earning one of the first graduate degrees awarded a woman in the South. She had a gift for languages, learning first the biblical and Romance languages—and then later, and famously, Mandarin. Lottie Moon's piety lagged behind her learning, and through her teens she remained indifferent to her Baptist heritage. During a revival at age eighteen, she experienced a powerful conversion and devoted the rest of her life to Christ. After college, Moon taught school in Alabama, Kentucky, and Georgia, one of the few occupations open to educated women in the South. Another vocation became available to her when Southern Baptists began to appoint women as foreign missionaries in 1872, and the following year, at age 33, Moon accepted an appointment in China. Moon settled in Northern China and continued her work of education for girls. She soon became restless in teaching, and she began evangelizing among adults, particularly women. Her supervisors disapproved of her initiative, but Moon quickly gained credibility because of her ease in relating, woman-to-woman. Lottie Moon's ceaseless correspondence with Baptist women in the United States, seeking their support and encouraging would-be missionaries, was instrumental in the denomination's burgeoning missionary movement. She appealed to women for a special offering for missionaries at Christmastime in 1887. Her influence led to the formation of the Women's Missionary Union in 1888, which continues the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering as a hallmark of Southern Baptist practice. On arriving in China, Moon remained aloof from the Chinese, thinking them her cultural inferiors. Over time, however, she found a deep respect for Chinese culture, adopting not only their language but their dress and customs. As she wrote, "It is comparatively easy to give oneself to mission work, but it is not easy to give oneself to an alien people. Yet the latter is much better and truer work than the former." Lottie Moon died on Christmas Eve, 1912.

Collect O God, in Christ Jesus you have brought Good News to those who are far off and to those who are near: We praise you for awakening in your servant Lottie Moon a zeal for your mission and for her faithful witness among the peoples of China. Stir up in us the same desire for your work throughout the world, and give us the grace and means to accomplish it; through the same Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Lessons

Ruth 1:15–19a

She said, “See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.” But Ruth said, “Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die— there will I be buried.

May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!”

When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her. So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem.

Psalm 148:1–6

1 Hallelujah! Praise the Lord from the heavens; *praise him in the heights.

2 Praise him, all you angels of his; *praise him, all his host.

3 Praise him, sun and moon; *praise him, all you shining stars.

4 Praise him, heaven of heavens, *and you waters above the heavens.

5 Let them praise the Name of the Lord; *for he commanded, and they were created.

6 He made them stand fast for ever and ever; *he gave them a law which shall not pass away.

John 1:29–33

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.” And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’”