

Blogging toward Christmas: Vital hope

By [Thomas G. Long](#)

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*For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page, which includes Long's current *Living by the Word* column as well as past magazine and blog content. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.*

[In my lectionary column on Luke 2:1-4](#), I focus on the theme of hope. Whenever I think about hope, I remember the story of Rabbi Hugo Gryn. He was the senior rabbi at the West London Synagogue when he died almost ten years ago. He was famous throughout England for his popular radio program, *The Moral Maze*, and his frequent television appearances on the BBC. He was witty, warm in personality, a wise counselor, a rich resource of Jewish tales. He was considered by many to be the most beloved rabbi in Great Britain.

When he was a teenager, Hugo Gryn, his parents, and his brother were among the Jews living in Beregovo, Czechoslovakia who were rounded up by the invading German army and deported to Auschwitz. The family was deeply devout, steeped in orthodox Judaism—and even surrounded by the horrors of the camp, they managed somehow to huddle secretly in a corner of the barracks to observe the Jewish festivals.

One Hanukkah, young Hugo was shocked when his father, lacking the necessary candles for the festival, instead took a precious bit of margarine—part of their meager food allotment—and used it as fuel for the lights. When Hugo protested that the shouldn't waste their only margarine by burning it, his father reminded him that Hanukkah was about hope. "You and I know we can live for up to three weeks without food," he said. "You can't live properly for three minutes without hope."