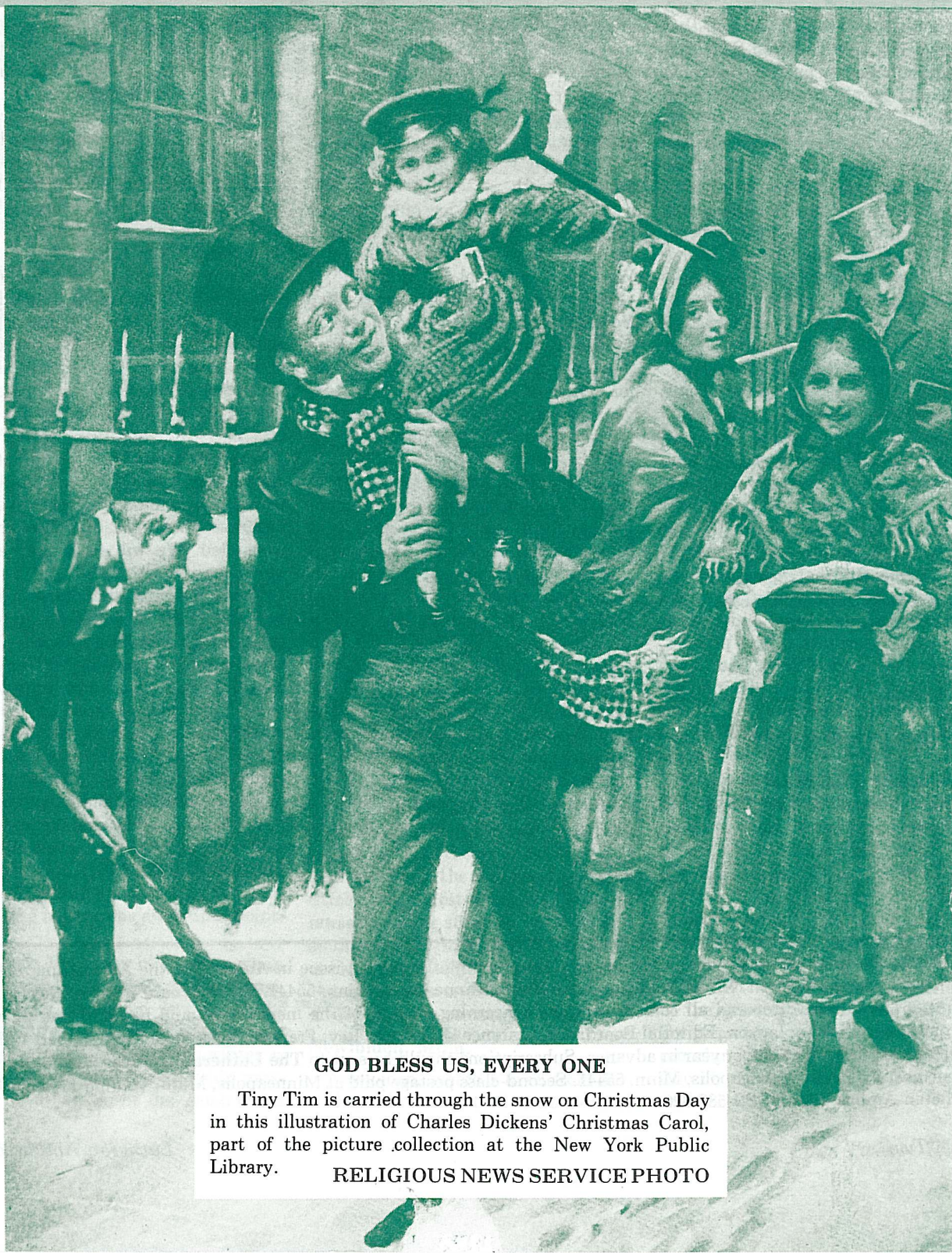


December 11, 1979

The Lutheran Ambassador



GOD BLESS US, EVERY ONE

Tiny Tim is carried through the snow on Christmas Day in this illustration of Charles Dickens' Christmas Carol, part of the picture collection at the New York Public Library.

RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE PHOTO

MEDITATION MOMENTS

God's Greatest Gift

"For God so loved the World, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

This verse is the best known and most often quoted verse in the entire Bible. If the whole Bible were taken away from us and we would have only this verse, we would really have the entire story of salvation. Martin Luther said, "I wish that John 3:16 could be written in letters of gold across the sky so that every believer could read it every day." This verse is easily understood in nearly all languages today.

What was the occasion for God's greatest gift? The world, in the blackness of sin, hopelessly lost and doomed, and alienated from God. Man is infected with the deadly poison of sin. Salvation is God's only remedy for the sin of a lost world. Without this gift there would be no hope. Ephesians 2:12 says, "Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world (NIV)." Because of our sinful nature man goes astray from God. At this Christmastime, once again how we can praise God that we have one of the greatest gifts—that of salvation.

The motive of God's gift was His

great love. "*God so loved.*" That love is measured by the sacrifice that He was willing to make for His people. Love always gives. "God so loved the world, that he gave." In John 15:13, it says, "Greater love hath no man than this."

This love was given for the whole inhabited earth. "God so loved the world." No one is too low or too high to benefit by God's gift of salvation. It is for all. We have a "whosoever Gospel." We have a universal call from God.

Have you received this great gift? You can receive it by placing your faith in God. Come to Jesus at this Christmastime and receive Him as your Savior. Those of you who know Christ as your Savior, thank God for the great gift you have. The most important one of all.

I'm thankful for the "free gift of God." We cannot work for it. We cannot pay for it. Jesus Christ paid for it by giving His life for us. The story is told of a pastor who went to visit an elderly man whom he had heard had been saved. The minister said, "I hear that you have been saved." The man said, "Well, not exactly." The pastor then opened the Scriptures and attempted to show him the way of salvation. When he had about exhausted his patience and was beginning to doubt that he would lead this man to Christ, he took a ball-point pen from his pocket. Holding it out before the man, he

said, "This is one of the best pens that I have ever possessed, but I would like to make you a present of it if you will accept it." The man reached out and took it. The Pastor said, "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23, NIV). Then he asked the man, "What did you have to do to get that gift from me?" The reply was, "All I had to do was just reach out and take it and I thank you very much!" The pastor pointed out that salvation was a free gift of God and all that we have to do is to receive it by faith. The man lit up like a Christmas tree and said, "Oh, I see it; I see it; thank God I now know that I am saved."

When we accept this great gift of salvation from the Lord, we "shall not perish." We will not be cast into outer darkness. We will not be separated from God. We will have everlasting life.

I hope and pray that Christmas will be a great time for you and your loved ones. It can only be great as we turn ourselves over to God and let Him have control time for you and your loved ones. It can only be great as we turn ourselves over to God and let Him have control of our lives. As families, take Jesus as your greatest gift, repent and turn away from sin, and have Jesus as your personal Savior and Redeemer.

May each one of you have a Blessed Christmas!

—Leslie Galland

The Lutheran Ambassador is published biweekly (except the second issue in August) by the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, 3110 East Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, Minn. 55441. Rev. Raynard Huglen, Newfolden, Minn. 56738, is the editor and all communications concerning content of the magazine should be addressed to him. Layout design: Solveig Larson. Editorial Board: Mr. Clarence Quanbeck, Rev. Francis Monseth and Rev. Robert L. Lee. Subscription price is \$4.00 per year in advance. Subscriptions should be sent to **The Lutheran Ambassador**, 3110 East Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, Minn. 55441. Second-class postage paid at Minneapolis, Minn. Volume 17, Number 24
Lutheran Ambassador USPS 588-620

Christmases in China remembered

by Grace Ditmanson Adams and
Irene Huglen Strommen

Introduction

When I came to the campus of Augsburg College as a Freshman in 1939, the roommate assigned to me was Grace Ditmanson, daughter of Fred and Emma Ditmanson, veteran missionaries to China. Grace and I had a number of things in common. Our fathers had both attended Augsburg Seminary; our mothers had known each other from Oak Grove Seminary in Fargo. Our freshman year at Augsburg represented great changes in lifestyle for us. I came to an urban atmosphere from the plains of Saskatchewan and Montana; she from an entirely different culture and life overseas. To me, our dormitory room in old West Hall had exciting reminders that Grace had come from the Orient: the teakwood and camphor chest with its ornate carvings and pervasive scent, Chinese pictures and artifacts, the pongee robe and silk pajamas. We spent hours exchanging stories about our families and early lives. I never wrote Grace's stories down, but I never wholly forgot them, either. During recent years I have thought it would be interesting to hear some of them again. And when brother Raynard Huglen asked me to "write something" for the Christmas issue of the *Ambassador*, I said, "I think I will ask Grace to tell about her Christmases in China."

So it was that on a hot summer evening, 40 years after our first meeting on the Augsburg campus, we sat together on the lawn of my suburban home, oblivious of the deepening twilight, and travelled in memory half way around the world to that part of China where Grace spent her girlhood years. "I'll try to narrow this down to the years between 1927 and 1935," she said. "After 1936 we were not able to gather again as a complete family until 1951. But to get a better picture I will have to relate other events also that occurred in our lives."

Here I would like to include a brief statement about the Ditmanson family and the Lutheran Free Church mission in China. The LFC mission field was

located in the northeast corner of Honan province, not far from the Lunghai Railroad and just west of Ane-wei province. The three principal stations were Kweiteh, Suichow and Luyi. Suichow and Kweiteh were about 30 miles apart and formed the top part of an isosceles triangle. At the bottom point was the city of Luyi, 45 miles distant from either city above it. Missionaries Arthur and Minnie Olson were stationed at Suichow; Peder and Pauline Konsterlie were at Kweiteh. Miss Alma Shirley, a nurse, was prepared to help with the planned-for mission hospital to be erected at Luyi, but which was never built because of lack of funds during the Depression. Dr. and Mrs. Einar Andreassen had spent a term in China and had been at Luyi doing medical work. It was not possible to send them back to China after their furlough, when funds were short. Miss Shirley then was sent to Suichow to work with the Olsons.

Fred and Emma Ditmanson and their family, which in 1927 consisted of a son, Marcy, who was eight years old, and Grace, who was five, were the only white people living in the city of Luyi. They lived in a two-storey brick house, which the owner offered for quick sale when sudden deaths in his family led him to believe the house was cursed by demons. The family loved the house and its compounds. The main compound was an enclosed area consisting of the main house on one side, Fred's study and office on another side. A third small house where the nurse would have lived if medical work had gone through was on the third side. The fourth side of their compound was formed by the side wall of the chapel building, and through its windows often peered the faces of those who were curious to see the "foreign devils" and their children. In an adjoining compound, connected by a brick walkway, was the cowbarn where there

Sesame Seed Candy and Dried Persimmons

usually were one or two cows, providing the necessary dairy products, and there were vegetable gardens. The mission also had two other compounds at the "front" where lived the evangelists, Bible women and other staff. A large wall surrounded the whole mission, the entry to which was an enormous iron gate which opened to the outside street. The chapel had both street and compound entrances.

1927

In 1926, civil war raged between the North and South. Our mission field lay in the path of the fighting. The American consul ordered all U.S. citizens to leave the inland for coastal cities, and even evacuation to the States should it become necessary. Early in 1927, the Ditmansons, Olsons, Konsterlies and Miss Shirley gathered at Kweiteh to decide what to do. Kweiteh was the closest point to the railroad, it being only a short distance outside the city. After prayerful consideration the missionaries decided to leave at once. It had been learned that one last train was ready to go and then the railroad was to be blown up to slow the advance of the enemy forces. Word was sent to the station that the party of missionaries was on its way. During that trip by rickshaw out to the station the persistent, angry-sounding and impatient sound of the train's whistles could be heard urging the group to hurry. Mrs. Ditmanson was in the last rickshaw. Her puller seemed to go slower and slower. In desperation she asked him to

stop so she could get out and run but he either could or would not understand. As they finally pulled up to the tracks, the train was already moving. She ran alongside the train. Some unknown person picked her up so she could reach Fred's outstretched hand and was reunited with the rest. This last train was a troop train, its boxcars filled with soldiers, horses and supplies. Sharing a boxcar with the soldiers was mutually interesting: they to observe the actions of "foreign devils," and for the American civilians to watch what the military did.

After a harrowing trip, the party arrived safely in the beautiful port city of Tsingtao in Shantung province. The Ditmanson and Konsterlie families stayed there about two years; while Olsons and Miss Shirley went to America for furlough. Tsingtao was a pleasant place in which to live. There were many nationalities represented there. There was an American school for the children to attend. The first Christmas Eve, the Ditmansons went to a German Club where there was a beautiful service in German. Later in the evening, Mrs. Ditmanson went with Marcy and Grace to participate in the Christmas program at the Chinese church. It was very crowded. The more restive the crowd became, the more difficult it was to be heard. Soon people were tearing down Christmas decorations that had been put up. Despite all the distractions the program continued on for three hours. Meanwhile, Fred had been preparing a Christmas

"Sharing a boxcar with the soldiers was mutually interesting: they to observe the actions of 'foreign devils,' and for the American civilians to watch what the military did."

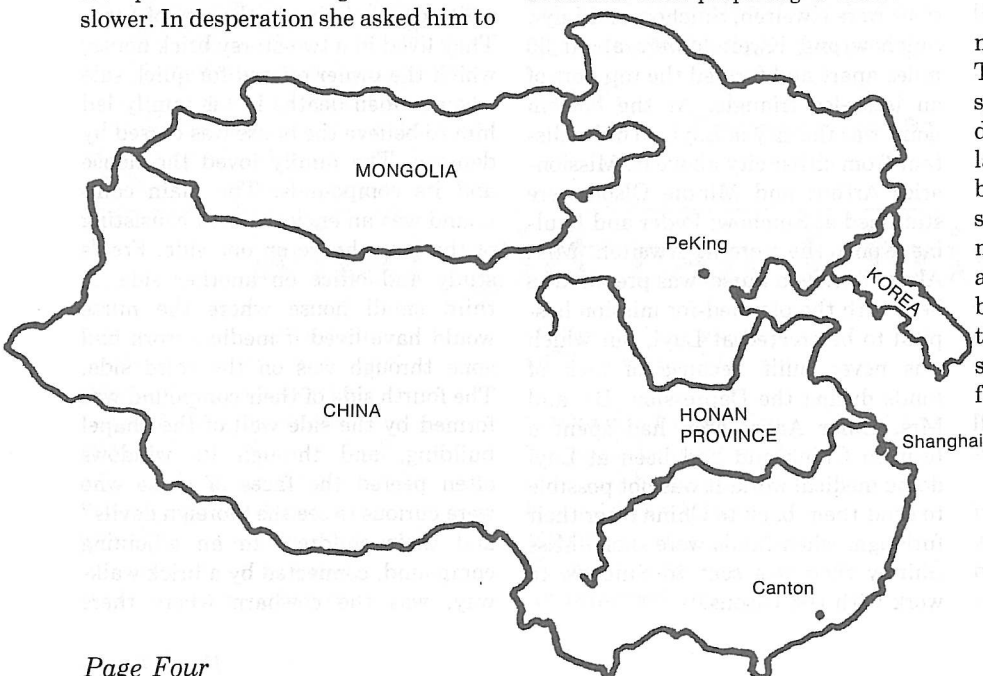
dinner at home, which he valiantly tried to keep warm for those three hours! No one felt like much festivity after the tiring day.

When it was feasible, Ditmanson and Konsterlie, at great personal risk, returned through the war zones to Honan in order to take funds for the mission work, to assess the situation, and to encourage the Christians. Things had not fared well with the mission properties and many of the church members had been unwilling conscripts in the armies. Mission compounds and residences had been taken over for the billeting of troops and horses. Because it was not advisable for the troops to know he was there, Fred Ditmanson was hidden by Chinese Christians and he took care of church affairs very surreptitiously from secret quarters.

During the time the fathers were away, the families took much strength from the faith and courage of the mothers. Grace recalls the loneliness and worry as long periods went by with no word as to the safety of the men.

When he was able to get away, Ditmanson left to return to his family in Tsingtao. He rode troop trains, sharing space with Russian "advisors" and soldiers; traveled through no-man's lands; crossed rivers whose bridges had been blown up and hiding when necessary to save his life. Dishevelled, often mistaken for a "Russky," he finally arrived back in Tsingtao sporting a bushy red beard, looking, Grace thought, very distinguished. His wife saw it differently, so he removed it forthwith!

[Continued on page 10]



PAPER SNOWFLAKES

by Inez Schwarzkopf

"Glo-o-o-o-ria! In egg shells he's day oh!" The fifth grade girls straggled down the center aisle, the smallest confirmation robes limp and wrinkled, sashed around their skinny waists with lengths of tinsel rope. The same tinsel circled their heads, more like hippie headbands than halos.

The Reverend Marty Sandness watched from the back of the church. Dress rehearsals of the Sunday School Christmas program were always dreadful. This year's seemed worse than ever. Children with speaking parts didn't know their lines. The angel Gabriel was home with strep throat. Half the teachers had come late, protesting the press of last-minute Christmas activity. They fidgeted now as impatiently as the children, eager to return to their spritz presses.

"Glo-o-o-o-o-ria!" the angels droned past him listlessly. Their wings were wire coat hangers with cheese cloth stretched across them and trimmed with glued-on iridescent sequins.

Why only two? Marty wondered irritably. Why not six? Two to cover their mouths, two to cover their feet and two to fly? These angels bore little relationship to the magnificent creatures of Isaiah's vision. If anything, they aped sentimental Victorian art, where angels were always diaphanous and always female.

"Look more like tap-dance fairies," he muttered under his breath.

At the front of the church the shepherds waited, bored, in an odd assortment of belted bathrobes, glowering under the flowing white dish towels draped on their heads. Two of them

reached out with their crooks to trip the shortest angel as she mounted the three steps to the chancel.

Marty signaled his wife, Dorraine, to join him in the vestibule.

"I'll bet there wasn't a shepherd in all of Judea who had a tartan plaid robe," he growled as they closed the door to the sanctuary.

"They probably didn't have Adidas tennis shoes either," Dorraine laughed. "But does it really matter?"

"Doesn't it?" Marty could hear the testiness in his own voice. Christmas was beginning to wear on him, too. There just wasn't time to do all he should, to prepare adequately for the season.

"It just seems so tawdry," he went on. "So sloppy. So half-baked. If we're going to do something for God, shouldn't it be the very best? If we try to dramatize Christ's birth, shouldn't it be the best possible example of dramatic art?"

"Like those churches where they only use adults in the Nativity pageant?" Dorraine returned. "And only hired soloists for the carols?"

"But what are we teaching these kids if we let them think a slipshod performance is good enough for God?" he asked.

"How do you know they're not doing their best?" Dorraine asked. "Tomorrow night they will. Have you forgotten what it was like when you were little? The special thrill, the honor of being in the Christmas program?"

"But we don't even make them earn

the honor," he protested. "Mary and Joseph are picked from the kids who are too dumb to speak pieces because they don't have to talk."

"Matthew and Luke never said Mary was brilliant," Dorraine smiled. "Just favored. You will be proud of your daughter, though. Joan knows her part beautifully. Doesn't even stumble on 'Quirinius was governor of Syria.'"

Marty touched Dorraine's cheek. "Thanks to your coaching. But I didn't get you out here to talk about the program anyway. I just wanted to tell you that you and the kids should go on home when you're through. I've still got some work to do on my sermon."

He could see Dorraine's disappointment as she slipped back into the sanctuary. It wasn't fair to her. He spent too much of his time at the church, forcing her to bear more than her share of the burden of keeping their home. I'm not even a good pastor to my own family, he thought, adding to his store of confessed, yet chronic sins.

"How can I do otherwise?" he argued in silent prayer. "How could I dare to serve as Your priest, pastor to Your people, without being willing to do the best possible job of it? I don't dare to bury the Master's talents!"

Back in his study, he turned on the electric space heater and exchanged his suit coat for a down ski jacket. Heating costs this winter were already way over budget. By heating only the space in which he worked instead of the entire drafty study, he hoped to

"At the front of the church the shepherds waited, bored, in an odd assortment of belted bathrobes, glowering under the flowing white dishtowels draped on their heads."

keep them in line.

Maybe the Puritans had the right idea, he thought, opening his Bible and reaching for his sermon notes. Nothing but the spoken word. You can't go too far wrong with a Scripture-based sermon. It's all the trappings that lead us astray. Trying to tell the story in song and pageant. Yet, he admitted, there was something appealing, even edifying, about the pine-scented sanctuary, the flicker of candlelight and the children's voices singing "Away in a Manger" on Christmas Eve.

Two hours later he closed his books and filed his notes. His sermon was as ready as it could be. He had polished and rewritten every phrase, praying desperately to convey in a fresh way the wonder of the incarnation.

Yet his stomach still cramped with fears of inadequacy. Had he done it? Would he do it? Christmas and Easter sermons were still the hardest to prepare and deliver. The message was eternally old, so encrusted with tradi-

tion and sentiment that even the most pious and devout hearers looked for no new understanding.

"How dare they!" Marty thundered aloud in the empty building. "How dare they become blasé about the holiest, most explosive mystery in the history of the universe?"

"And how do I dare try to explain it?" he prayed quietly. "Forgive me. Speak for me."

Outside, the early winter dark had fallen. Low soft clouds emptied swirls of big, perfectly-formed snowflakes. Marty stood for a moment under the light, looking up into the kaleidoscope of falling crystals, then closing his eyes to feel them melt softly on his lids. Boyishly, he opened his mouth, sticking out his tongue to catch and taste the icy pin points.

"How dare they!" Marty thundered aloud in the empty building. "How dare they become blasé about the holiest, most explosive mystery in the history of the universe?"

His navy blue jacket was cold enough now so that the flakes no longer melted against it. He held his forearm up to study the individual hexagons as they landed, marveling again at this year's new proof of what he'd been taught in grade school: that each snowflake is different from all others. In high school he and a girl friend had taken a microscope outside to study the enlarged crystals before they melted. He still remembered the delicate intricacy of each unique flake.

"Even here," he told God, "even with these ordinary thrown-away bits of frozen water that we'll only trample and shovel, you've created a wonder too great for me to describe. What is man, anyway? Why do You bother with us?"

HAVE YOU ANY ROOM FOR JESUS?

by Rev. John C. Rieth

These words, penned by the song writer, C. C. Williams, clearly describe the events surrounding the birth of Christ nearly 2,000 years ago. Luke 2:7 (NAS) states: "And she gave birth to her first-born son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn (NAS)." The Advent season each year is the ideal time to "make room" for Jesus Christ. While this will be read after the Advent season has begun, I am writing it prior to it and hope that the thoughts shared will help you to experience the Christmases of the future in a new and blessed way.

"Have you any room to receive?" A strange question, perhaps, were it not implied in Isaiah 9:6, when the writer stated, "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given." As we observe Christmas each year it seems that more and more time is given over to the commercialization of the birthday of Christ and less and less time is spent celebrating this special day. Please note that from the very first person who saw Christ as an infant to the last

Rev. John C. Rieth is pastor of Faith Lutheran Church, Kalispell, Mont.



Inside the parsonage the air was warm and bright, smelling of balsam fir and pot roast. Here, too, in the hallway, the upper reaches fluttered with snowflakes, stopped in their fall to the floor by threads scotch-taped to the ceiling. Dorraine's holiday preparations emphasized homemade gifts and decorations. Joan had made these paper snowflakes, using a method Dorraine's mother had taught her. She'd folded squares of paper into triangles, cut out free form snippets of swirls and curves and crescents with an embroidery scissors. When she unfolded them and pressed them flat, they were perfect hexagons, each symmetrical and each one different. They wafted now in the air currents, intricate tracteries of delicate cut work as fine as the work of any adult.

A howl of outrage and frustration came from the living room. Five-year-old Rob sat on the braided rug, surrounded by scraps of paper. Angry red indentations in the soft thumb and forefinger of his left hand showed how

hard he had been gripping the blunted paper scissors. Awkwardly, he tugged his hand free of its handles and threw it on the floor.

"They're ugly!" he cried, his mouth squaring in a fresh outburst of rage. "I can't do anything right! I'm so stupid!" He collapsed forward in sorrow and self-disgust, his head on the floor in front of him, his knit shirt pulling out of his pants, exposing a vulnerable triangle of bare skin.

His sister, Joan, squatted and patted his shoulders. "Don't worry, Robbie," she said. "Daddy will know what they are."

Marty stepped into the room and sat beside his son. Scooping the little boy into the seat formed by his crossed legs, he could feel the tension and trembling of apprehension beneath the child's soft skin and muscles.

Marty picked up the largest scraps of paper. Some were square. Some might have been hexagons if they hadn't been folded wrong and cut too deeply, slashed into triangles. They

were gouged with awkward, asymmetrical holes.

Holding his son, Marty saw them and saw too the delicate tracteries of fairy cut work which the boy could not yet copy. Saw in and beyond them, the crystalline constructions studied so long ago in the icy microscope, constructions which the boy and the man he would become could only imitate, never re-create.

"Why, Rob!" Marty said, hugging the child. "What fine snowflakes!"

"See, Robbie," said Joan. "I told you. Daddy knows."

So does our Father, Marty understood at last. So does our Father.

Inez Schwarzkopf, daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Iver Olson, has contributed articles to various publications. Husband Lyall is Minneapolis City Clerk.



person who saw Him in the Ascension, only those who *received* Him were blessed. We would note that of all things regarding our relationship to Jesus Christ, receiving Him was the hardest. Receiving always deals with our pride. The self-righteous Pharisee of Jesus' day was not the only one guilty of the sin of pride. Oh, how hard it is to receive a gift and not be able to either give or do anything for it. It is a *gift*! Christ came as a gift! We cannot truly understand nor appreciate Christmas until we understand that blessed truth. "And the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:10-11, NAS)."

"Oh, how hard it is to receive a gift and not be able to either give or do anything for it."

The question about having room to receive is so practical and to the point for us today. How many of you who read this article really have time to receive, indeed room to receive that which God intends for us this Christmas? Are you overwhelmed with the preparations for the Sunday School program, distraught at the deadline for mailing packages to who knows where, and if by some strange coincidence you are a pastor, how about the preparation for the Advent sermons and services. And, of course, don't forget the Candlelight Christmas Eve Service and Christmas Day. Say, how about all those gifts that you haven't purchased, and there are only a few days left. Oh, my, how am I ever going to get all my baking done in time? Do you understand now? If I have touched an area for you, you can rest assured that you are not alone. I have also touched areas in my own life. If "things" have crowded Christ out of your Christmas, don't just sit there, do something about it. Buy those gifts, or better yet, make them, throughout the year. Purpose to be finished by the time the Advent Season begins. You will have to examine for yourself that which robs the

room that Christ so desires to have in your life. I pray that He will find in you the room to receive Him.

The reason I mentioned the need of receiving first is because we must have received the Lord Jesus before we can give. We also need room to give. "Have you any room to *give*?" If you are a Christian and sharing your faith, you find very quickly that daily experience with and devotion to Christ are essential if you are going to have anything worthwhile to give. And, you know, Christmas is a reminder of how we should be living and giving of ourselves all year long.

Going back to the 7th verse of Luke 2 again, we find that the conventional sources of accommodation were not available to Joseph and Mary. The surroundings in which Christ was born say little for mankind but much for God. Having grown up on a farm, I find little to be desired about being born on a cold night in a smelly stable away from family and friends. Yet, Christ in His birth, as in His life and death, demonstrated to man the need for humility. What might we give to Christ? Psalm 24:1 states that "the earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world,

and those who dwell in it." The Magi brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. What do we have room to give?

We must first give ourselves to God. How wonderful it is that God has so designed our relationship with Him that we can do nothing without Him. We can give nothing of real, eternal value without Him. Christmas, as a reminder that God had "room to give," should challenge us to ask, "Do I have any room to give?" We busy ourselves preparing to give the right gift. There's nothing wrong in doing so, but are the "things" we have to do at Christmas replacing its true meaning and purpose for our lives? This Christmas, as you bake those cookies, would you pray that God would reveal someone with whom you could share them and, in so doing, also share the love of Christ? And in the shortness of time, would you spend extra time in prayer for friends and neighbors who don't know Christ personally, that they might, through salvation, experience the true blessing of Christmas? Would you give time to your children to explain that this season honors the birthday of the Christ who loves them and cares for them? Please try to spend some time each day meditating on the true message of Christ's birth. The world around you is not going to be impressed if it sees in you only frustration at the secularization of Christmas, but it will notice if your life and actions reflect the love and compassion of Jesus Christ.

My wife will tell you that in my life the time from Thanksgiving to Christmas is special. It is my favorite time of the year. There's a reason for that. It's because as a child we found enjoyment in preparing for the "holidays." "Have you any room to enjoy?" I know that one reason I enjoyed Christmas so much as a child was because I didn't have to mail all those cards and I

didn't have to bake all those cookies, and on and on. Now we worked hard on the farm and were busy as others were in daily chores and such, but we enjoyed Christmas. Why is this important? Simply because the world has a false idea of what a Christian is. I have had many struggles "growing up" since my rebirth in Christ Jesus and still do. There have been those times when laughter seemed hollow and comfort seemed to fall short of what was needed. But, beloved friends, isn't it wonderful to realize this Christmas, 1979, that we have a changless God who not only has saved us but who also promises to care daily for all our needs. I had the distinct privilege of being adopted into a Christian home. While I lived many years apart from Christ, I knew that the peace He provided for those who really trust Him was real by observing my parents. It's not that we're perfect—it's that He is.

I can enjoy and have room to enjoy Christmas this year because I know that as I cast all my cares upon Jesus, He really does care for me. As long as I have room to receive what He has given and gives daily, as long as I have room to give out of the abundance He has first given me, I will have room to enjoy.

I'd like to close with a poem by Doris L. Van Meter titled "Catching Up."

I can't catch up with Christmas
No matter how I try.

I stand at the cross street
And watch the crowds go by
Inside, the press and hurry
And rush leave me amazed.

I almost fear to enter,
My senses are all dazed;
I think I'll find a house of God
And stay on bended knee,
Till I have calmness in my soul
And Christmas catches me.

May this be a rich and blessed
Christmas for you all.



WHY?

I look down from Heaven
And I wonder why
All the fuss and bother
But not a thought of Me?

I was born on Christmas
In a stable cold and drear,
But when they plan to celebrate
Not a "Happy Birthday!" do I hear.

I gave My all to save them,
From sin to set them free;
They have gifts for all the others,
But not one gift for Me.

I feel so sad when I see them;
I often shed a tear.
All I want is to be near them
And give a bit of cheer.

I long to have a party
That is meant for just Me;
Forget the worldly Christmas;
See how happy you can be!

*When you plan your Christmas,;
You'll invite many, no doubt,
But please do remember
And don't leave your Savior out.*

*It is our Savior's birthday
And He should be there, you know;
Don't let Him have to say,
"I wasn't invited to go."*

*People tend to forget
That on the cross He died.
He gave the greatest gift of all,
But He wasn't invited for Christmas.
Why?*

—Helen Swenson
Boscobel, Wis.

**"Please try to spend some time each day
meditating on the true message of Christ's birth."**

GOD IS FOR US



"On earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14).

As Christmas comes again, we commemorate the greatest miracle in the history of the world. The angel multitude declared God's intention for the world in the familiar and precious words, "peace" and "good will." The little Babe cradled in the straw in Bethlehem's manger, born to be the Savior of the world, was God's evidence of His goodwill to mankind.

God's purpose for us has not changed since that wondrous night. God's intent for each one today is still that we might know His "peace," His "good will." The assurance of God's "good will" becomes a reality, when through the eyes of faith one sees the Babe of Bethlehem becoming the Lamb of Calvary, shedding His life-blood for the sins of the world. Paul states it so well in Romans 8:31, 32. "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him freely give us all things?"

Many hearts in the world are hungering for this assurance. Many know only hate and hunger and hopelessness. From the empty hearts comes even the cry, "If there is a God, doesn't He care?" Yes, God cares. God's Word in the Gospel assures us that in our deepest fears and frustrations, God cares. The proof is there in the fact that God did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all. Oh, that in some way that message could get through to all men this Christmas. Oh, that every living being might individually experience God's care and love. That is the appeal from Bethlehem and Calvary.

What comfort there is for the child of God, living as he does, in a world of testings and tensions, to know that God is *for* us. What strength there is for our faith in the knowledge and experience of His love. We are assured that

nothing in this world shall be able to separate us from Christ's love.

The deepest problem in each of our lives, and the problem God is the most concerned about, is our sin. God adequately provided for that need before He offered "peace" and "good will." A sin-burdened soul finds courage to come boldly to the throne of grace only when he can by faith claim the shed blood of Christ as full sufficiency for his sin and guilt. Only then come the assurance and confidence in God's "good will."

May God's act of love continue to bless every individual and every home in our Association this Christmas. Bethlehem and all the events that surrounded it two thousand years ago, call us to a deeper realization of God's purpose in our lives. But just as God did not bestow the gift of His Son with much fanfare and demonstration so long ago, so today His richest blessings are bestowed in quietness and stillness. Will you, dear reader, take the time to allow God to draw you closer to Him in these busy days? Will you allow Him to come into the stillness and quietness of your heart to impart afresh His forgiveness and His love? God's "peace-" and "good will" are for the quiet, needy heart that will turn to Him in faith and confidence.

How silently, how silently

The wondrous Gift is given!

So God imparts to human hearts

The blessings of His heav'n.

No ear may hear His coming;

But in this world of sin,

Where meek souls will receive Him
still,

The dear Christ enters in.

It is a joy to bring this greeting to you at this wondrous season of the year. My prayer for each of you is that it may be your best Christmas ever, because Jesus is more real to you.

Pastor Richard Snipstead
President, Association of
Free Lutheran Congregations



China . . . 1928

In 1928, there was another Christmas program which Grace remembers. This time it was less hectic, but memorable because it was the first time she had heard of or participated in a "skit" of any kind. She was designated an "angel," complete with gossamer wings, and brother Marcy was one of the shepherds, wearing a bathrobe and carrying a staff. It is mentioned here because it seems to Grace that thereafter each Christmas they both had the same roles year after year. Marcy always had his bathrobe and was a shepherd. Just once she wished he could have been one of the resplendent Wise Men!

1929

In 1929, although the countryside was still quite torn up, it was decided that the LFC missionary families would return to the mission field. A school for the children was started at Kweiteh with Miss Shirley as teacher. Olsons and Konsterlies, over the next few years, alternated in having the school at their stations. It would not be wise to have the children as far away as

Luyi, for it would take a two-day journey from there to the railroad. With the unsettled situation, evacuation might be needed again.

Marcy and Grace had many reasons for longing to live at home, with their family complete. A very special event in 1929, the arrival of baby sister Esther, brought the family great joy, but being absent from home for such long periods of time meant missing out on watching her grow and develop. It was always exciting to get home for the holidays and vacations and catch up on lost time. One year, because of fighting near Luyi, Marcy and Grace were kept at home and their parents taught them. This was an unparalleled treat.

When school was in Kweiteh or Suichow, Fred Ditmanson would make the trip from Luyi to take Grace and Marcy home for holidays. Winter trips were especially hard because of the cold weather. Fred Ditmanson made those trips by bicycle. Rickshaws were hired for the children. Grace remembers their getting very early starts, leaving the sleeping cities while it was yet dark. The children were bundled heavily against the cold in huge quilts,

JOURNEY OF THE MAGI

MATTHEW 2:9 — "... and lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was."

This hand-woven Christmas card of The Magi is by the Kapiuk Times of Ceylon, Sri Lanka.

—Religious News Service Photo
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but nonetheless the frigid air quickly penetrated.

She speaks of the trip home for Christmas vacation in 1929: starting out on muddy roads, for there had been many days of steady rain. The going was very slow and they were only able to make ten miles that day. "Worn out, we went to an inn in a little market town only to find that every available space had been taken. We were allowed to sleep in a ramshackle animal shed. Dad spread out some straw on which he laid our bedding rolls. We shared the shed with other travelers who were as luckless as we, as well as

"We shared the shed with other travelers who were as luckless as we, as well as some animals."

some animals. A part of the roof had been washed away by the rain. But we were most thankful to God for this shelter. Later when we celebrated our Christmas, reading again of that holy night in Bethlehem when our Savior was born, we empathised with those who had found 'no room at the inn.' "

Christmas was a festive time at the mission stations. There were programs for Sunday School children and programs for the general congregations. The church members alone would have easily filled the chapel, but special times like Christmas, word spread out to the public and huge throngs would assemble which in no way could all be squeezed in together. This, Grace remembered, usually led to the need to control disorderly mobs and to change plans. Once, the congregation quietly disbanded and the programs were cancelled. Later bags of treats were given to the children. Marcy and Grace enjoyed helping to prepare the gifts that were given to them as well as to all the people who lived in the compound. Red being the color of joy and festivity, gifts were wrapped in red paper.

The family always had a decorated pine tree in the home for Christmas. Treasured ornaments were brought out to enjoy each year; paper chains and tinsel were strung. Candleholders were clipped to the tree and Emma would bring out the carefully-hoarded candle stubs. Nothing but the most basic items could be purchased in Luyi. So gifts consisted mostly of the handmade offerings of the heart. Fred made games of jackstraws, dominoes, Snakes and Ladders, lotto and Snap. He made gifts for Emma that might help to make her life a bit more comfortable. Emma Ditmanson sewed clothing (new and made over); she knit mittens and scarves. The children's gifts to each other and to their parents were unsophisticated, but appreciated.

For the Christmas Eve meal there on the grassy plains of Honan, some old

Scandinavian traditions were observed. Grace reminisced, "Mother had made the julekage (Christmas cake) flavored with cardamom brought from America, lefse, suet pudding with hard sauce, pork chops, gingerbread men, and filled cookies. There was orange peel candy, penuche and fudge. The fudge was made by Dad and was perfectly delicious despite the fact that it was always either too runny or too hard; it never turned out the way he said fudge was supposed to, but what did that matter, anyway? There was fløtegrøt and rømmegrøt, liked mainly by Dad. Chinese treats also made their appearance: sweetmeats, paper-thin sheets of sesame seed candy, toffee, sugared and dried dates and persimmons, which had been carried for long distances from the west and southwest on the backs of the matted and ill-tempered camels whose caravans wound through the city and beyond from exotic places whose pictures we had seen in our *National Geographic* magazines. Sometimes friends would come in, bowing their greetings and leaving colorful packages of moon cakes, although they were more traditionally given at Chinese New Year."

When the dinner dishes were done and the cook and amah (nursemaid) had departed to be with their own families, the Ditmansons hung sheets over the windows for privacy and placed the gifts under the trees. The candles were lit, the lights dancing over the sparkling ornaments and especially the two little German angels with their shiny wings. They sang Christmas carols and listened again to the Christmas story. In their minds they knew just what the stable looked like; they easily thought of donkeys and camels, for were not these seen frequently right there in Honan? There was a baby even now in the midst of their own family, reminder of precious new life. Fred slowly read off the names of the gifts' recipients—much too slowly for the impatient children. "But even then," Grace says, "we understood why he prolonged the event and accepted it. There was so little under the tree, but love was bursting all around. Mother and Dad sometimes wrapped up the same things for each other that had already been given the year before, and it was good for a laugh."

1931

In 1931, the Ditmansons sent to Montgomery Ward in the United States for an order of necessities and a few "luxuries." Grace remembers that there was stationery for her mother, two alarm clocks, an assortment of Christmas tags and stickers, licorice, horehound sticks, a set of jackstraws, thread, elastic and a cyclometer—all for \$13.57! What a Christmas they had that year. But the greatest present of all for Marcy and Grace was to be home in the security of their parents' love.

In those years between 1929 and 1936, there was seldom peace. For if it was not the warfare between two armies, it was the harassment of banditry in the countryside. One took one's life into one's own hand traveling out in the country. It was always advisable to get to a walled city before the night fell for personal protection. Sometimes walls were not sufficient, however, to keep out the trouble.

1932

In 1932, Luyi was besieged for 28 days by army troops from the South. As soon as the siege lifted, Rev. Ditmanson biked to Suichow to get the children for their summer vacation. On the way back, a flat tire on the bike delayed them for a while. As it turned out, this delay meant that they just missed a bandit raid on the route. They made it to Luyi safely.

During the summer, war broke out again in fury. Northern soldiers held the city and there were daily bombardments from the Southerners outside the gates. The family, for their own safety, spent many nights in the dark, dank, centipede-and-scorpion-infested dirt-walled cellar. Fred and Emma Ditmanson tried to cover the walls as well as they could with newspaper. Whenever there was a lull in the fighting, Marcy, aided by his oldest sister, would run around the compound looking for used bullets to add to his collection. He had a fair-sized collection that year. One shell came through an upstairs window and went over the place where Esther's crib stood. Had she been in it, she would have been killed. Once again the Lord's protection was evident.

[Continued on page 19]

A Christmas Story

by Hermann Mettel

It was Christmas Eve in the year 1884. The 80-year-old Jewish peddler, Josef Mai, from the German city of Goslar had gone out into the territory surrounding that city to transact some business before the holiday. Against his usual custom he had brought along his ten-year-old grandchild, Samuel, the only relative he still had left.

If Josef had known it or noticed it, a great deal had gone on in the way of Christmas preparations, as shown by the many images of the Christ Child in the neighborhood. He could not keep his grandson completely away from all of this. At any cost, however, he must prevent any longing for the joys of Christmas from taking root in his grandchild's heart.

It had been a beautiful winter morning when they had started out. The old man had no worry about the trip's becoming too hard for the lad. During the course of the day, however, considerable snow had fallen, and now toward evening a sharp wind had arisen, forming high snowdrifts across the roads.

The old peddler thus headed for home earlier than he would have otherwise. With his peddler's sack on the his back and taking little Samuel by the hand, he tried to brave the elements as he kept plodding ahead into the wind, which was sending cascades of fresh snow against his face.

Before long he discovered how arduous their journey had become. He could hardly keep going, and the boy was whimpering with exhaustion at his side. "Follow my footsteps," he told the boy, holding him by the hand as well as he could in that position. But suddenly the lad declared that he could go no further, that he must stop to rest.

"Then the peddler made a decision, one which for a Jew could hardly be an easy decision to make."

The grandfather knew that it was no longer possible to stop safely for very long. He made a last attempt to persuade the boy to keep going, but to no avail. After only a few more steps the lad sank, utterly collapsed, to the ground.

What would they do now? Stay in the woods? For both of them that would mean certain death.

The old man cried out for help. What good did his shrill cries do against the howling of this wind? He was just throwing away what voice he had left. It also occurred to the old man that the foresters who worked these woods had surely all gone home for the holidays. And soon in every house across the land there would be the joyous exchange of Christmas presents. . . .

Then the peddler made a decision, one which for a Jew could hardly be an easy decision to make. He would put his heavy sack of merchandise down, hiding it in a safe place, then carry the half-crazed boy on his back and try to keep going, hoping that they would soon get out of the woods and onto some highway.

For a time it seemed that he would realize these hopes. But when they were out of the woods, he noticed that they were lost. Their home town was not out in this direction. He could hardly go back through the woods—he had no strength left for that. What would he do? And what about this poor little boy?

Then he heard the ringing of bells, a sound he fervently hated. Christmas bells! But this time they brought a message of comfort: they meant that the two must be somewhere near a village.

Sure enough, by following the sound of the bells he came into a village which he knew well. But he could hardly ask the farmers here for help. Oh no!—they often had treated him spitefully and called him "Dirty Jew"!

Wait! Hadn't the village pastor always been friendly toward him? At this

moment of extreme need the peddler felt that this was the only place he could turn for shelter. So he summoned up enough nerve to ring the pastor's doorbell. The door was opened to him, he received a friendly greeting, and his hesitant pleas were answered without hesitation. Yes, here they would find help.

First, the pastor's wife brought them something warm to drink. She helped carry the by now unconscious lad into the living room, reviving him by the prompt application of skillful first aid. It worked! After a short time Samuel opened his eyes and overcame his fatigue.

Meanwhile, the pastor had come into the room. He greeted the old man enthusiastically and invited him to spend the night here in the parsonage.

Both of the pastor's daughters struck up an instant friendship with Samuel. In such surroundings the law thawed out, socially, too. Of course, the main thing the children were talking about was the imminent exchange of Christmas gifts. With beaming faces the two little girls told their guest what they expected to receive for Christmas. The pastor invited the old peddler to take part in their family celebration, since he had been led to their house for this Christmas Eve.

But the old man found himself on guard. What he was most certain of was that he wanted to stand by the old faith of his fathers. He feared that he might bring the wrath of the God of Israel down upon himself. Not even the lad's piteous pleas that they take part in the Christmas celebration swayed the grandfather's opposition—until the latter noticed the tears streaming down the cheeks of his grandson. Then he did reluctantly give in, after first earnestly warning the boy not to let himself be "taken in." He himself prayed fervently to the God of his fathers not to let the little fellow see anything that might be injurious to him, and to deafen him against any corrupt teachings.

from the Hartz Mountains

Overtaken now with joy, the lad let his two new companions take him into the Christmas room. The old man remained in the living room, alone—yet not alone. Before leaving him the pastor had suggested to him, with a careful choice of words, that he might at least allow himself to test whatever it was that Christians celebrate at Christmastime. Could it possibly be that this was the fulfillment of the hopes that Israel had entertained ever since Abraham's day?

The pastor had spoken of the most important prophecies concerning the Star of Jacob, of the hero of Judah, and of the Prince of Peace who was to come from Bethlehem Ephratah. These words had impressed the old man. Indeed, they would not let him rest; he could not longer contradict them.

Then the Christmas celebration began. First they sang Luther's precious Christmas hymn under the brightly decorated Christmas tree: *Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her . . .*

From heaven above to earth I come
To bring good news to every home:
Glad tidings of great joy I bring,
Whereof I now will say and sing.

Then the father read the wonderful old Christmas Gospel. As he came to the message of the angels, his voice seemed to have an especially fervent quality: "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord!"

Shyly, Samuel stood at the door, listening. His dark eyes darted again and again with consuming desire toward the tree in all its radiance. His otherwise pale face grew rosy with joy, making him look doubly handsome. What especially hit home for him—he who had been accustomed to hearing only the words of the Law from Grandfather—were the appealing words of the Christmas Gospel.

When the pastor had finished reading, the boy suddenly reached out his hands toward the tree and cried with

longing: "Why hasn't the Savior been born for me, too?"

The pastor gave him the explicit assurance that he and all his people had been included in the salvation message which had first been imparted to Israel: "Unto you is born this day a Saviour."

"Shyly, Samuel stood at the door, listening. His dark eyes darted again and again with consuming desire toward the tree in all its radiance."

Now the boy felt inwardly at peace. He could enjoy the gifts which the daughters of the house presented to him. Yet again and again his eyes turned to the Christmas tree, and again and again his lips whispered: "Unto you is born this day a Saviour."

After some time the boy remembered his grandfather. He asked if he might go to him. He was not too worn out to tell Grandfather everything that he had seen and heard. But then it finally happened that he said:

"Grandpa, please don't be angry with me, but I have to tell you something. The word of the angels about the great joy which was to be for all people—this word takes us in, too! Oh, yes! *Unto us* this day a Savior has been born! I believe in Jesus Christ. He is the Messiah!"

A deep sigh reverberated throughout the old man's breast. He pushed the child away from him and, almost beside himself, shouted:

"O God of my fathers! The worst has happened. The boy is deluded—and so am I! O Jehovah, loose these shackles and allow us to remain within the faith of our fathers!"

This went on for hours. Long after the little fellow had fallen asleep, the old man moaned piteously, wept, and

muttered between groans: "O horrors! I want to die—and I can't!"

Around midnight the pastor's servants' sleep was interrupted by this cry. They went in to the pastor, who was still sitting up working on his Christmas Day sermon. They told him what they had heard.

The pastor hurried into the peddler's room and found old Josef sitting in a chair, still moaning. In front of him knelt his little grandchild, crying bitterly and kissing his hands.

The instant the peddler saw his host, the pastor, he cried: "Pastor, help me! I feel that death is coming, I must die—and I cannot!"

The pastor recognized at once that the old man was speaking the truth. The physical exertion of this past day, but above all its emotional excitement and the inward upheaval of these hours just past, had been too much for the old man.

On similar occasions the pastor would repeat to the dying person those Scriptures which especially spoke of oncoming death. But he did not do that this time. He told the old man that while he might indeed have only a few hours to live, he (the pastor) felt especially sad that he could not place his true hope and trust in Jesus Christ before he went. He wanted to know nothing of the Lord Jesus Christ, our only consolation in life and death.

The dying man anxiously gripped the pastor's hands as he declared: "But, Pastor, stay and tell me whatever you will! Show me that what you told me earlier was the truth. Then I will believe that your Christ is the Messiah who was promised to our fathers. I can't let go of the promise that 'unto you is born this day a Saviour'!"

Now the servant of God knew what he had to do. Before the dying Jew he spread out the Old Testament Scriptures and spoke to him of the Virgin's Son, Immanuel, whose name means: "Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The

Christmas story . . .

Prince of Peace." He showed him the picture of the prophet Jesus, who had received a ready tongue from His Father "to preach good tidings unto the meek; . . . to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord . . . to comfort all that mourn."

And the pastor made especially sure that he showed the old man what Isaiah had said about the Lamb of God: "Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed."

He showed the old peddler how all of the predictions in ancient Israel had found their fulfillment in the One born at Bethlehem and killed on Golgotha. He urged the old man to reach out and

take this Lord in faith, as Simeon had done, and to go to Him then in peace.

During this conversation the veil fell from the eyes of this son of Abraham. Tears coursed down his face as he joyfully declared: "Yes, I believe that Jesus is the Messiah, and I can say with Simeon: 'Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation!'"

The old man still had one concern: caring for his grandson—and one request: that before he died he might look at the shining Christmas tree.

The pastor removed this concern from him and granted his final request. He promised to care for the lad, this child whom the Lord so plainly had given him as a Christmas gift, as his very own, adopt him as his own child, and lead him to the Lord Jesus.

Letting the Christmas tree shine in its full glory in the middle of the night, he and his servant led the old man into the Christmas room, where he read once more the comforting Christmas Gospel.

Many moments went by in holy stillness. Then, suddenly, the old man raised his hands, extended them toward heaven, and cried in a voice voice that was cracking: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation!"

His head dropped. Under the Christmas tree with its burning candles the old peddler had gone peacefully to his final home. There he would awaken in a far brighter glory, and with the multitude of the heavenly hosts and the perfected saints of God he would answer the message, "Unto you is born this day a Saviour," with the cry: "Glory to God in the highest!"

—Reprinted with permission of *Kirchliches Monatsblatt*, Dr. Adolph Wegener, editor, Philadelphia,

Rev. Edward A. Johnson, translator of the above article for us, is pastor of Grace and St. John's Lutheran Churches, LCA, Ohio, Nebr.

THE BEST GIFT

Darkness fell early that December night;
No stars shone through to give their light.
Yet within a home, hearts were aglow—
For 'twas Christmas Eve, and all would surely know!
Inside the home was the Christmas tree
Proudly arrayed and glistening for all to see.
Presents around it were piled knee-deep,
Presents from loved ones to give and to keep.
The members were gathered in their favorite places,
Each one outfitted in satin and lace,
Breathlessly awaiting the appointed time
When gifts could be acclaimed as "mine!"
The Father read the Christmas Story
And offered prayer, proclaiming the

real glory.
The family sang in joyous voices
Of Mary and Jesus, and all the world rejoices.
Then the gifts were handed out,
Each one received with a happy shout.
"Oh," said Mike, "See my train—
It's the best present. I'll wind it again."
"Oh, no," said Tom. "My sled is the best.
I can go further than all the rest."
But Sally sat with her doll and bed—
"It's the best doll I've ever had."
Father was smiling from ear to ear:
"The presents get better every year."
Even Uncle Dan said, "Mine's the best.
I wouldn't trade with all the rest."
Mother sat with a lovely smile;
All this would pass in a little while.
Then the children said, "Mother, is your gift the best?"
She replied, "No, not like the rest."
"Why not?" said Tom, who wanted to know.
"Why doesn't Mother want to show?
Aren't her gifts the nicest thing
That anyone would ever bring?"
Quietly Mother said, "No, you don't understand.

These gifts are for this land.
Years ago I received the best gift of all,
The free gift of salvation, grace and love
From our Heavenly Father above.
He sent His Son to save us all;
He will answer if you will call."
Their faces fell to a solemn look;
Hushed silence reigned in every nook.
Had they failed their mother they loved so dear?
Never before had they felt such fear.
But Mother all-knowing, could read each mind:
"Oh, precious ones, you're all so kind.
Love is the greatest gift of all
And sharing makes it complete.
Our Heavenly Father hears our call
And we can worship at His feet.
My biggest gift from all of you would be
That you'd live for Christ and His children be.
In agreement each one nodded his head.
For love and joy filled their hearts instead.

—Mrs. Arnold McCarlson
Eagle Butte, S. Dak.

editorials

SONG, SHEPHERDS, SAVIOR

The long days and weeks of waiting and anticipation are nearly over. Christmas is at hand. How good it is that every year we celebrate Christmas, commemorating the stepping of God into history in the birth of His Son Jesus. The *incarnation* it is called theologically. "The Word became flesh," John said. Paul, writing to scattered churches in Galatia, asserted, "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman."

But we will leave it to the academic theologians to wrestle with the deep meanings of incarnation. Enough for us that we believe that He is God's Son. Let us enjoy Christmas and share our gifts with one another, providing that we always keep in focus the lesson that the mother in Mrs. McCarlson's poem taught her children (page).

Three words come to mind easily as we think about Christmas. The first is *song*. Actually, the words "sing" and "song" aren't found in the Christmas story. But it would be unthinkable to observe Christmas without music. And there is strong reason for associating song with the holy season for the multitude of the heavenly host, as they praised God after the announcement of the birth of the Savior, undoubtedly did so in song.

What a flood of memories the beloved carols bring as they are sent to us over radio, TV and store inter-coms, and through school and church choirs and choruses, by children's Sunday School programs, and as we sing them as formal audiences, around Christmas trees or carolling out-doors.

And what sermons they are to our hearts as they speak of joy to the world, the glorious song of old, God and sinners reconciled, the King of kings in lowly infant form, Jesus our Immanuel, and that His shelter was a stable and His cradle was a stall. In our minds' eye we look over the little town of Bethlehem on that holy, silent night and rejoice as the herald angels burst forth in their glorious proclamation of divine birth upon earth.

We love the prayers of the carols, too, and pray with the writers: "Oh, dearest Jesus, holy Child, make Thee a bed, soft, undefiled, within my heart;" and "O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray; cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today;" or this: "Come Jesus, glorious heavenly guest, keep Thine own Christmas in our breast."

Yes, Christmas and song are inseparable. Let the hymns and carols ring out from our hearts and lips with true joy and conviction. May the world know that we rejoice that the Savior came.

The second word often identified with Christmas is *shepherds*. The news of the divine birth came first, not to rabbis, scribes or priests, but to shepherds. How differently God works than man would propose. Why were the shepherds on night duty singled out as the first hearers of the Gospel? Because they were a waiting people. Stunned and surprised at the heavenly visitation as they must have been, they nevertheless weren't frozen by incredulity. Rather, they said, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."

They were also chosen to first hear the good news because they would share it with others. They left the stable manger and told people they met that the Savior had been born. So it is that they can be called the first witnesses and evangelists for they preached Jesus Christ. Today God still looks for witnesses. If we believe the Savior is here, we must help to spread the news around, wherever it lies within our power to do so.

The third word that comes naturally to mind in connection with Christmas is *Savior*. "For to you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior." Little children lisp their words about the Savior in their Christmas programs, little comprehending the great truths they are speaking. Doting parents, proud brothers and sisters, and accepting adults react approvingly to the childish performances, often paying more attention to how the words are spoken than to what the words mean.

But the message is, "A Savior is born." To a world "in sin and error pining" the Savior came. That is *good news*.

However, that isn't all there is to it, as any thinking person will realize. As Adam and Eve were given a choice in antiquity, today also we are free to choose our priorities, to select life's direction and destiny. The words of Ludvig Hope bring us up short: "You will not get a new mind in death; you must get that here. No, the Jesus that you have no room for, He has no heaven for you." We have to respond to Jesus, to know Him as personal Savior.

The observance of Christmas is superficial for many people. They go along with it, maybe even attending the Christmas service. But the real Christmas is the one in which Jesus is *my* Savior and my relationship with Him colors all of my life. We covet that experience for all our readers.

Best wishes to you all, our *Ambassador* readers, at Christmas 1979 and in the New Year. God bless you, everyone.

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His Mother Prayed

by Pastor O. J. Haukeness

Gently the white snow fell. Like a clean carpet it covered field and meadow. Depressions and unevenness were smoothed over. The trees became arrayed in a white mantle. Quiet and majestic they stood there decked with snow. Everything was clean and beautiful outside and inside the little cottage at the edge of the woods toiled the old woman, Aslaug, to get everything as pleasant and inviting as possible. The Christmas baking was finished. Everything had been washed and cleaned; she worked now to decorate the simple little house as well as she could, for she was waiting the arrival of her only son, Hans, for Christmas.

Her husband had died several years ago. They had been able to look back upon a happy life together, because when they had moved into their new home they had taken with them the One who alone can make life rich and give it meaning. But suddenly death came, that cold and cheerless guest, and Sven, her dear husband, had to follow. For Aslaug the sorrow had been deep and painful. She came close to

giving up, but then she received strength to bear her sorrow. She still had something for which to live. She had a son and in him she set her hope, and for him she had to work. This gave her courage and strength and by work and thrift she was able to make what was necessary to carry on. After some time passed by and Hans got older he was able to give her much help. And at last the day came when he was confirmed. The happy days of childhood were over and because he wanted to give his mother all the assistance he could, he had to leave his little childhood home and go out in the great, wide world.

And as with so many young men the desire to travel had gripped him. He wanted to see something of the world and so he went to the closest town and signed on with a large sailing ship which was going on a long voyage. And now after having been away for four years he was on his way home and hoped to arrive for Christmas. For his mother the years had been long ones and therefore the joy of seeing him again would be all the greater.

“... he was on his way home and hoped to arrive for Christmas.”

All was ready in the little house, now if only Hans were home. She sat and thought about the days that had gone by. How the most unexpected thing can happen and how fortune cannot be reversed. At one time everything had seemed so bright and hopeful. Now she was old and gray and felt lonely.

Already it was getting late and darkness was falling. Aslaug sat alone in quiet reverie. But what was that she heard? Was there someone who had gone out, or had it begun to blow? Yes, she heard something again. She couldn't be mistaken. A gust of wind struck the house so that it shook and then another came. The wind gained in strength so that every few minutes it blew almost with hurricane force. She tried to open the door, but had to shut it again. The storm rushed past the corner of the house and the snow whipped around so that it was almost

impossible to see anything even a couple of yards away. She thought of Hans and an indescribable fear seized her. How were things going for him? Had he come safely to the harbor or was he still out on the sea struggling with the frenzied waves? The storm grew worse as time went by and Aslaug's fear grew greater and greater. It was an unhappy Christmas Eve. She couldn't eat or sleep. All that she could do was to lie in quiet prayer for her boy.

The proud ship “Norden,” where Hans had hired on as cabin boy, had pressed on through the North Sea and finally sighted land at Røvaer lighthouse on the 24th. The crew was happy in the prospect of arriving in port for Christmas. They had scrubbed and polished as well as possible and everything was done with good spirit, for they expected to soon set foot on home ground. The weather had been good ever since they passed through the English Channel, but now it began to look as though there would be bad weather and the wind was very brisk. They hoped, however, to reach harbor before the storm broke loose. The heavily-loaded vessel faced into the impending storm and waves northward along the coast and at last at twilight the same day the crew was able to see Marstein lighthouse which lay right on course.

Hans had packed his things together so that he would be ready to get home as quickly as he could. He knew that his mother couldn't rest while she was waiting.

The captain came up from the cabin and went back and forth on the after-deck. It was evident that he was somewhat uneasy. Unless he was completely mistaken, the storm wasn't far away, and its arrival showed that the old seaman was right. Suddenly and unexpectedly the storm broke and with blinding snow so that a man could scarcely see across the ship. As many of the crew as possible were sent on deck to take in the sails. That was dangerous work but with care they managed to do it. To sail toward land would now be certain death because if a man didn't see the lighthouse and take on a pilot there would be no hope. And so they attempted to sail out against the wind and the sea. And as the wind and seas increased conditions grew worse and

[Continued on page 19]

"I do not believe that when Jesus here speaks of eating His flesh and drinking His blood He has reference to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. I am thoroughly convinced of the correctness of the Lutheran position on the Lord's Supper, that using the bread and wine as vehicles, Christ in the Sacrament gives all the partakers His glorified body and blood. . . . The eating and drinking in this chapter is plainly that of the assimilating of Christ by faith, when He gives Himself in the Word. . . . In the Lord's Supper all the partakers receive the glorified body and blood of Christ; the believers unto remission of sins and life eternal, the unbelievers unto damnation. This is based on, "This is my body, This is my blood." But the believer may also and does always eat Jesus by faith as set forth in this wonderful chapter." (*2)

(*1) From *Expository Thoughts on the Gospel According to John* by J. C. Ryle

(*2) From *The Gospel by John Studies* by Samuel M. Miller

—Mrs. Harvey Carlson

I will never forget Christmas Eve, 1947, in the prison camp Nikolajew. Even on this day we had to work in an industrial plant. When we got back to camp, weary and hungry, there was a small package lying on my mattress. Carefully I unwrapped the package. It was wrapped in a paper from a cement bag. Inside I found half a slice of bread. It was a Christmas present from a young fellow prisoner, who was trained as an artist for the press. This piece of bread meant more to me than a festive meal today. But most wonderful was a small note alongside the present. It was written with elaborate letters and read: "I want to do to others what God has done for me." This Christmas sermon I recall again and again. It was a beam of light from the splendour of Bethlehem in the merciless darkness of prison. Somebody who had realized that he was cared for by God wanted to give thanks for God's grace—for the Child in the crib.

—Paul Deitenbach
Newsletter, Immanuel
Lutheran Church
Tel Aviv, Israel



January, 1980

The Gospel of John

Chapter 6

What great love the Father showers upon us to give us such a clear explanation of what it means to have life in His name (John 20:30, 31). So far we have studied five chapters of John and already we have a storehouse of gold nuggets to open our eyes to the treasures of heaven. Has new light dawned in your heart? Are you thrilled with the definitions and promises so far?

The following lines are a brief review of key words or phrases in Chapters 1 through 5 that assist us in discovering *life in His name*. Meditate on these and pray for fresh understanding.

Chapter 1—Receiving Christ—v. 12; Beholding the Lamb of God—v. 29; witnessing and bringing others—vs. 41, 42, 45, 46

Chapter 2—Obedience—"Whatever He says to you, do it"—v. 5; cleansing—vs. 15, 16

Chapter 3—A new birth—vs. 3, 5; believing in Him—V. 16; practicing the truth—v. 21

Chapter 4—Drinking living water (Jesus)—v. 14; worshipping in spirit and truth—v. 24; believing the Word that Jesus speaks—v. 50

Chapter 5—Honoring the Son—v. 23; hearing the voice of the Son of God and believing—vs. 24, 25; willingness to come to Christ, v. 40

Now we come to chapter six, which presents yet another approach. Here it is *eating the Bread of Life*. First, read the whole chapter prayerfully, (aloud, if possible). Underline key verses which give you more light on *life in His name*. Then fill in the answers to the questions.

Chapter 6:1-15. The Miracle of the Feeding of the 5000

1. All four Gospels mention this miracle. It probably touched the largest number of people in one day. Can you imagine how many more than 5000 there might have been? v. 10 and Matthew 14:21
2. Why did the multitude follow Him? v. 2 _____
- Is this a noble motive? _____
3. What comfort is there for you in v. 6? _____
4. What lessons are there in vs. 9 and 11? _____
- The multiplying took place right in His hands. What an amazing sight that must have been! They saw something created that did not exist before! We can be sure that that boy never forgot that day. Does His miracle-working hand still multiply our supply? Every true child of God has the privilege of distributing what He gives.

Chapter 6:16-21. The Stormy Crossing

5. Mark 6:45, 46 tells us that after the feeding of the 5000, Jesus sent the disciples out to sea, dismissed the crowd and went up the mountain to pray. For the disciples the storm was a great contrast to their experiences with the multitude on the grass earlier in the day. The "sea" is the symbol of the world's restlessness and confusion and calamity. Today also Jesus is sending His own into the world of storm, opposition and trial. To such, what are the comforts in vs. 19, 20 and 21? _____

Chapter 6:22-71. The Next Day—The Discourse

- Notice how the miracle is the basis of the discussion. He fed the multitude with bread and then taught them that He is the Bread of Life from heaven and as such He is the source, nourishment and resurrection power of life for the world.
6. What ability do we see in Jesus in v. 26? _____
 7. What does Jesus rebuke in v. 27, when He said, "Do not work for the food which perishes"? Compare Matthew 6:32, 33. _____
 8. How do we work "for the food which endures to eternal life"? _____
 9. What does Jesus say in vs. 27 and 29 that makes it clear that salvation is not earned by our working? _____
 10. Next follow three of our Lord's greatest sayings:
v. 35 What do we learn about Christ in this great verse? _____
v. 37 What do we learn about those who come to Him? _____
v. 40 What is the will of the Father? _____
 11. Compare vs. 41, 52, 60, 61, 66. What conclusion do you come to in regard to Jesus' claim about Himself? _____

12. Study carefully vs. 44 and 65. There is a very sobering truth here. Is it possible for us to come to Christ any time at all or whenever we would choose? _____

13. In v. 45, can you see three steps that lead to eternal life? _____
14. What does it mean to eat His flesh and drink His blood? vs. 53-58 _____
It is so important that you understand this and experience it. Pray that the real truth will be revealed to you.
15. How does the incarnate Son of God give Himself to us? v. 63 _____
16. Notice the crisis in vs. 66-71. Why did Jesus put the question as He did? _____
How could Peter give his answer? Compare Matt. 16:17 _____
17. Memorize your favorite passages in this chapter. Be sure to include v. 57. Do you have this *life*? If you want it, will you come just as you are to Jesus and ask for it? Then will you rest on His promise of LIFE? _____

The following are quotations from a sermon by Bishop Ryle of England on John 6:35: "Our Lord would have us know that He Himself is the appointed food of man's soul. The soul of every man is naturally starving and famishing through sin. Christ is given by God the Father, to be the Satisfier, the Reliever, and the Physician of man's spiritual need . . . In Him there is life, He is "the Bread of life."

"With what divine and perfect wisdom this name is chosen! Bread is necessary food. We can manage tolerably well without many things on our table, but not without bread. So it is with Christ. We must have Christ, or die in our own sins.—Bread is food that suits all. Some cannot eat meat, and some cannot eat vegetables. But *all* like bread. It is food for both the Queen and the pauper. So it is with Christ. He is just the Saviour that meets the wants of every class—Bread is food that we need daily. . . . We want bread every morning and evening. So it is with Christ. There is no day but we need His blood, His righteousness, His intercession, and His grace—Well may He be called "the Bread of Life!" Do we know anything of spiritual hunger? Do we feel anything of craving and emptiness in conscience, heart and affections? Let us distinctly understand that Christ alone can relieve and supply us, and that it is His office to relieve. We must come to Him by faith. We must believe on Him, and commit our souls into His hands. So coming, He pledges His royal word we shall find lasting satisfaction both for time and eternity. —It is written, "He that cometh unto Me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst" (*1) (Doctrinal note on Chapter 6 by Dr. Samuel Miller).

"All hope of safety was as good as gone and the fear of death could be read in every face."

Prayed . . .

worse. The sea washed over the deck continuously. The vessel shivered in its joints and the wind pulled and tore at the rigging so that they feared that it would be blown overboard. And in spite of all effort and work the boat was driven in toward land. More and more plainly they could hear the breakers near shore. All hope of safety was as good as gone and the fear of death could be read in every face. Then suddenly, through the storm there pierced a sharp, penetrating voice: "Do you want a pilot?" And soon they could see the pilot's boat running up alongside. Like one partly divine the pilot climbed on deck. He rushed astern, grabbed the wheel, and within a few minutes the ship was turned. As the spray of foam rose up the "Norden" shot like an arrow between reefs and breakers, past tiny islands and rocks, and a little later came into calm water. After a couple of hours they could cast anchor in a safe harbor.

The weather quieted during the night and Christmas morning dawned clear and beautiful. All who could now endeavored to get home to their dear ones. And Hans took his belongings and by twilight that evening he approached his home, the little house over by the edge of the woods. Who can describe old Aslaug's joy when she greeted her son? And when she heard of the danger he had been in she burst out, "It helped that I prayed."

—Augsburg Ekko,
Christmas, 1917.

Translated from the
Norwegian by the Editor

Rev. O. J. Haukeness is a retired Lutheran pastor living at Everett, Wash. He is himself the translator of Johan Lunde's book, TALKS WITH CHILDREN.

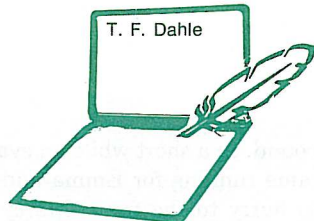
China . . .

During the siege it was always difficult to get food, as the city's gates could not be opened to the farmers with the enemy also waiting at the gates to take over. "Thus," Grace remembers, "it was a happy day for our family when the cook returned from a trip to the market with two scrawny chickens. One was prepared and eaten forthwith, but fortune smiled on the other, for she was able to lay an egg and thus saved her own life. Mother reasoned that since she started to lay an egg every day, that took care of the needs of the baby for iron and protein. She became a family pet, christened 'Chick-a-Biddy Short Shanks,' and took over ownership of the yard in a hurry. Shortly after conditions normalized we were amazed to notice that Chick-a-Biddy was developing some features of a rooster and to compound this, 'she' began to crow. No longer did she lay any eggs for us, but became somewhat haughty and bossy. The cowman said: 'I know how to cure her! Gather round.' We all gathered to watch. He got a basin of water, grabbed the unsuspecting henster (?) and dunked her vigorously up and down several times. When he let her loose, we knew what is meant by 'mad as a wet hen,' for mad she was, indeed. She ripped around the yard screaming her rage and shaking herself nearly into a fit. Well, she did stop crowing, alright, but she never again laid another egg, nor could her ruffled feathers be soothed by any form of ministrations. There was a sad ending, with her served up for dinner, and Marcy and I totally unable to eat what was left of her, hungry or not! (Years later at Augsburg, when studying genetics, I learned that this change is well known in poultry.)

Later in the summer, the Northern forces left the city and the Southerners triumphantly took over. The Ditmansons were having their noon meal when suddenly there was shouting and soldiers everywhere. One had removed a gate from its hinges and had run over to a wall to pitch it over to an accomplice in the street. Fred bolted from the house and took the front steps in a couple leaps. He collared the soldier and then went with the men out to the front

compound. In a short while an evangelist came running for Emma and told her to hurry to the front. Marcy and Grace ran along with them. Their father was standing in the courtyard facing a very angry officer who ordered him to turn over the church property to him. A few soldiers, their guns in hand, stood by. Fred refused: "This is church property and I will not let you take it." The officer said that unless Fred complied he would give the order to shoot. To enforce the threat, the soldiers made ready and aimed at Fred. He continued to refuse. At that moment a senior officer riding on a horse outside the compound in the street went by the gate and saw what was happening. He barked an order and the men lowered their guns. He rode into the yard and apologized for what had happened. "We will talk further," he said. The soldiers filed out of the yard and the family returned to the house. After the tension and danger of the event they were much spent but knew again the Lord's provision and care. The soldiers did take over the church for a time, but this time their animals were quartered elsewhere.

In the fall of 1932 Fred Ditmanson took Marcy and Grace to Kweiteh to catch the train for the boarding school on the Kuling mountains in Kiangsi. Altogether the trip would take five days. Between Luyi and Kweiteh, while spending the night at an inn in a small village, they were captured by bandits. Ditmanson protested to the chief at the delay. He said that there was a deadline for meeting the train and hooking up further on with other students and teachers. At first the chief, "Old Heavenly Grandfather," refused. Then he saw the gold wedding ring on Fred's finger and demanded it. Fred refused, saying it was a gift from his wife on their wedding day. "If you don't give it to me I will have your finger cut off and take it," the chief stormed. Still Fred refused. Eventually the chief gave up on his demands. After keeping them a while longer he relented and let them leave. This could have been a very serious situation, as at that moment there were other missionaries who were being held captive for ransom, some even who were martyred. There is a side-note of human



GIVE AS HE GAVE

It is almost unbelievable that the Christmas season is approaching again. We should really rejoice and be exceeding glad as we commemorate the birth of Jesus, God's great gift to men. Back of the giving is *love*. God so loved that He gave the greatest of all gifts to the world while we were yet His enemies (Rom. 5:8).

It is not hard to give gifts to our own kin; therefore we exchange gifts with our dearest ones. However, Christmas has been so commercialized that He, in whose honor we celebrate Christmas, has all but been left out. Some years ago, an old lady in one of my congregations came to me and said that she was giving no Christmas gifts to anyone that year, but instead she was giving that money to missions. She then handed me two pension checks. The world is full of needy people. People who have lost everything in fires, or earthquakes, or typhoons, or floods or

Thoughts from Tryg

tornadoes. They are destitute and don't know where to turn.

Then there are other thousands, yes, millions who are destitute spiritually, never having heard of Him who is able to save them and give them hope. Did not our Lord say, whatsoever ye do unto one of the least of these ye do it unto Me? Because we have been spared, we so easily forget those in need. If every family in our AFLC would give to our work at home and abroad what we spend for Christmas gifts, all our goals for schools and missions could be met, and more work could be started.

When the rich young ruler came running to Jesus, kneeling down before Him, asking what he should do to be saved, Jesus answered, "Go, sell that which thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven," and then added, "Come, follow Me." When the young man heard this, "he went away sorrowful." His treasures on earth meant more to him than

what Jesus offered him. As we take inventory of our own lives, are we, too, "going away sorrowful," clinging to our earthly treasures and spurning the eternal riches which Christ offers?

Shouldn't we, who have received God's greatest gift, give generously to help spread the Good News to others both at home and in foreign lands? Remember what Jesus said, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring" (Jn. 10:16). Jesus also said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." All God asks of us is that we are faithful stewards of His manifold gifts and give as we have received. There is real joy in giving to God's great work. Joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). God wants us to have real joy by sharing what He has entrusted to us. J-Jesus first; O-others second, and Y-you last.

We are His stewards (trustees). Are we trustworthy? If we keep the Good News to ourselves, we lose it; but if we share it, we keep it. This is a paradox. Merry Christmas!

Trygve F. Dahle

China . . .

interest about Fred Ditmanson's wedding ring. Many years later, when he died, the mortician asked Grace, "Do you want your father's ring removed?" Grace thought a moment. "No," she said, "he almost lost his finger once because of that ring. Please leave it on."

At Christmas that year they repeated in reverse the long trip and were happy once again to be together. Such times were treasured, for most of the months of the year the family was separated. Even had there been nothing tangible to put under a tree in the line of gifts, they would have been content.

The return trip to the American School was an eventful one, but in a different way. For the last part of the journey up into the mountains, the students had to be carried in sedan chairs by experienced climbers. As they approached the steepest ascent, the part called "the thousand steps," a blizzard was raging. Ten-year-old Grace happened to be in the last chair. When the

carriers came to the "steps," she had to get out and with the help of the men, she struggled up. At the top of the climb the storm appeared to be even worse. The carriers turned to leave so they could make the descent before the path back became impassable. One carrier protested. "We can't leave her here," he said. "We've got to take her farther." But the other men would not wait and so they all left her, exhausted

of students crowding around her.

Christmas 1933 was a longer vacation than usual—three weeks. The reason? Bandits were on the loose again and travel was too dangerous.

1934

In 1934, when the Konsterlies were in America on furlough, the Ditmansons spent Christmas at Kweiteh. It was nearer the railroad, it meant four

"But the other men would not wait and so they all left her, exhausted and frightened, unable to go more than a few steps before she floundered in the snow and fell. . . ."

and frightened, unable to go more than a few steps before she floundered in the snow and fell, soon losing consciousness. It happened that a teacher and two students, hiking some distance behind, stumbled upon her and carried her to school. She remembers "coming to" in the school building with a flock

extra days to spend together, they could enjoy fellowship with other foreign missionaries and their families. Grace recalls that an elaborate Christmas program had been planned; invitations were even sent out. But, as had happened before, a curious mob broke in to see what was happening. The end



Yesterday's Winter

This 1863 Currier and Ives reproduction, courtesy of Kennedy Galleries, of New York, is entitled, "The Farmer's Home—Winter."

—Religious News Service Photo
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result was that the congregation members quietly slipped away. So, in spite of great plans, there was no Christmas program in Kweiteh in 1934. I asked Grace what constituted decorations in a Chinese church. She replied, "Pink and red paper flowers and blue and green chains. Red is the symbol of joy, so any festival like Christmas or weddings was celebrated with a red motif."

1935

By 1935, Grace, now a 13-year-old, was among the eager students boarding the train just before Christmas. Destination was Kweiteh—and then home. Among the most excited was Margaret Konsterlie, who, because of a furlough, had purchased many Christmas gifts, even a camera, in America. They were all safely packed in her suitcase which she kept in the baggage rack above the seat. It was a typical nighttime ride on a Chinese train, with the air so heavy with the foul odor of cigarette smoke and crowded bodies

that the students periodically opened the windows to get a whiff of fresh air. On one of these occasions a heart-breaking incident took place. Margaret wanted something from her suitcase; one of the boys reached up to lift it down for her. At precisely that moment the train lurched. The ill-fated suitcase flew out the window into the night. It was a disaster for the Konsterlie family. And the students speculated about who found the suitcase and what happened to its contents! For the Christmas program in Luyi that year, the last one the entire family spent in Luyi together, the Ditmansons had been asked to sing. Again, the curious townspeople entered the church and caused such confusion that the singers had to give up. "Father and Marcy," says Grace, "were needed to help control the scene."

In reminiscing on her Christmases in China, Grace had this observation to make, "We felt the presence of horror and war all around us so much during

those years. But more than that, we remember Christmastime as that festival of deep family warmth and purpose, where externals were not all that important; it was what was within the gift. We could feel the courage and faith of our parents; we were early introduced to Him Who became our Savior. Our future was in His hands and we were together in undying love. I never approach Christmas now, but what I spend some time thinking over how the beauty of that event was experienced in our family in our childhood."

*Grace Ditmanson Adams lives with her husband Myron in Burnsville, Minnesota. She is a registered nurse working in the medical clinic of the Salvation Army Adult Rehabilitation Center in Minneapolis. Irene Huglen Strommen has authored a book, **Rivers to the Sea**, and written numerous articles for publication. She and her husband Merton live in the Minneapolis suburb of Richfield.*



Happy Acres



SLIGHTLY SOILED, MARKED DOWN

Several men, laughing heartily, stood about the showroom of the farm implement store in Woodbridge. Stephen and his father had joined the group when they recognized two of their own neighbors. One of them was Mr. Ronaldson, a member of their own church.

"Quite a story, quite a story," chuckled one of the strangers. "I can tell you one just as good," said another stranger. Then he told a dirty story that made the men roar with laughter again.

Stephen, embarrassed, looked at his father. Dad was the only man who was not laughing.

Silently now, he took Stephen by the arm and they walked out of the store.

As they got into their car to go home, Stephen said, "Dad, I never thought that Mr. Ronaldson would laugh at a dirty story like that. Why, he goes to our church!"

"Yes," said Dad, sadly, "he goes to our church." For a few moments, he was silent. Then he added, "Remember that sign in the store where we bought those shirts at bargain prices because they had become soiled?"

"Sure. You mean that sign that said 'slightly soiled. Marked down'?"

"That's it. I can imagine that is the

way you feel about Mr. Ronaldson now—that he's slightly soiled and marked down in your estimation."

"You're right, Dad." Stephen's eyes were serious. There was hurt in them, too. He had always admired Mr. Ronaldson. Mr. Ronaldson was a pleasant man, one of the most successful farmers in the Pleasant Valley neighborhood, and he always had a cheerful greeting for everyone.

"We'll hope and pray," said Dad, "that our friend Ronaldson will learn to 'Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good'" (Rom. 12:9).

Dad laid a hand on Stephen's arm. "Next year, you'll be going to high school, Son. You'll be mixing with a lot of different kinds of boys. Some of them are going to have a lot of smutty stories to tell."

"I'll remember, Dad," Stephen promised, "to try not to get slightly soiled and marked down."

MEMORY VERSE:

Be not overcome of evil,
but overcome evil with
good.

Romans 12:21

FAMILY DISCUSSION

1. Read I Thessalonians 5:22. We'll imagine that you play with friends who are known to do pranks that are sometimes not kind, even destructive. You do not join with them in such pranks. Do you think that some folks might think—because you are with such children—that you are "slightly soiled, marked down"?

2. Is there a danger that if you keep on playing with friends that like to do harmful pranks that you may weaken and take part in such pranks?

3. Notice that the Bible points out that it is not enough just to stay away from evil, but that we must also put good in the place of evil. If you have a bad habit you want to get rid of, what then should you put in its place? If you play with children who are inclined to do naughty tricks, what should you then try to do for them?

4. God hates sin, but He loves the sinner. While we are to "abhor evil," how should we feel toward those who may do evil or things that we know are not right? (Romans 12:9)

5. What is our reward for turning from evil, and doing good? (I Peter 3:11-12)

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what gift can I bring you?

What gift can I bring You,
Lord, on this Your birthday?
What gift can I bring You
Before Your holy throne?
What gold can I bring You?
What gem of earth's treasure?
How, Lord, can I give You
What You always have owned?
The gifts of the Wisemen
Were paltry by measure

Of the sublime glories
Of Your empyreal home.

A poor gift I bring You
To honor Your birthdate.
It is all I have, Lord.
It is all I can bring.
My life, Lord, I give You
To mold at Your pleasure,
All tarnished and tattered,

Such a commonplace thing.
Yet You take and hold it
As though it were treasure,
As though it were worthy
Of so great a King.

—Marlene Moline
Lansing, Iowa

Life on the Edge of Town



Thoughts About Christmas

For me, it is possible to group boyhood Christmases according to where I observed them. Let me think back about them with you for a while.

Govan, Sask.

My first memories of Christmas come from this period when I was 2 to 9. Those were years of growing awareness of life around me, of fascination of the world of nature. The coming of winter was not a fearsome thing to a small boy, but a delight. We did learn respect for it, though, and in my second year of school we endured that all-time champion of cold temperatures, the winter of 1935-36. In milder weather we boys ran after the teams and sleighs which came into town and caught brief rides on the runners. There was skating at the big indoor rink, although I didn't do much of that, and I remember watching some of that game that captivated the men, curling.

And Christmas was pure delight to a boy my age. Our family was all together after my brother joined us. Christmas Eve was a magic time as we gathered around our tree with the candles on it. As I've written before, our parents, even in those Depression days, always had some nice gifts for us children. We never came away disappointed.

Father, the pastor of a far-flung parish, had to be away a lot during Christmas as he conducted services in the congregations. In those days many autos were put away for the winter as there weren't that many roads passable for a car. So he did much of his

travelling by train. But it must have been a real sacrifice for him to be away so much during the holidays.

Westby, Mont.

From the edge of the parklands of Saskatchewan to the treeless, hilly country of northeastern Montana. And these were the years of 9 to 12, years of exploration and, with greater mobility (although still by foot), the boys my age and I were all over town and off a ways on the edges.

And Westby was a great place for winter sledding. Right in town there were some excellent hills. The big one was the hill where the highway came into town from the west. There wasn't much traffic and it was quite safe. A medium-sized hill was the one by the NLC church, that swept down to Main Street. We had a rink, an outdoor one, where some of us would gather of a vacation morning for a primitive, although earnest, hockey game.

At Westby I was in my first Sunday School programs. And as in Govan, I was in programs at school. Westby had a gymnasium, something new to me. Again the Christmas trees at home with the wax candles, first at the parsonage and then, after my father had passed away, at the more modest house a block down the hill west of Main Street. My oldest sister was away at nurses' training after the first year, too, so there was a difference in the family circle, but we could still enjoy the exchange of gifts and we knew the true meaning of the season.

Newfolden, Minn.

Newfolden, where I lived from seventh grade and until I went away to

college is great Christmas country. It is wooded and you can be pretty sure that there will be a nice covering of snow for the holidays. The real cold temperatures usually stay away until New Year's time.

In those days we often got some skating done on the river before the heavy snows came and if the beavers had dammed up water to make a nice pond. We would gather fallen branches and make fires for warming ourselves. Again we had our hockey games and being we were older they were a little more rugged as we played two on two or three against three. Newfolden didn't have hills for sliding, but we did use the riverbank for downhill skiing. I bear a small scar for life from one of the tumbles I took.

On Christmas Eves the family membership varied somewhat from year to year, but always we followed the old family customs and traditions as to procedure, and food at the festive meal. There are beautiful memories of the festival service on Christmas morning, the church filled to the brim, and with the processional offering; of children's programs in the several churches in and out of town, and the programs at school; of get togethers with friends; of carolling around town; of time to read and play games.

You have your own memories, from different times and different places. Mostly happy, warm thoughts. But of all the thoughts of what Christmas really means, this the greatest—God sent His Son into the world.

—Raynard Huglen

Personalities

Rev. Wesley Langaas, pastor of the Hampden, N. Dak., parish, for the past four years, has resigned in order to accept the call from New Luther Valley Lutheran Church, McVile, N. Dak., and Bethany Lutheran Church, Binford, N. Dak. Pastor and Mrs. Langaas will move to McVile at the end of the year.

Rev. Richard Snipstead, president of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, recently spoke at a preaching mission at Trinity Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, N. Dak., Harvey Carlson, pastor.

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**MERRY
CHRISTMAS**

Down from the wintry sky,
Down from their home on high,
Wavering, drifting by,
Snowflakes are falling.
Hark, how the icy breeze,
Roaring through forest trees,
Like the wild, tossing seas
Loudly is calling!

Let the gay laughter peal
And our glad hearts reveal,
While rings the skater's steel
O'er the broad river!
Winter's good gifts we take:
Ice-bound and shining lake,
Tempest and starry flake,
Praising the Giver.

What can the storm avail,
Raging o'er hill and dale?
Hail to December, hail,
Merriment voicing!
Hail to the northern blast!
Sunshine is coming fast;
Christmas is here at last,
Day of rejoicing!

How the red firelight glows
On the dear form of those
Gathered here, warm and close,
Safe from all danger!
Sweet are the joy and mirth,
Peace, peace to all the earth,
Blessing His holy birth:
Christ, in the manger! —Selected

Perhaps I Was Dreaming

**Christmas
and
the Cross**

It was still dark when we arrived at the church Christmas morning. The vestibule was well lit, but the church itself was only partly lighted. From each of the ten arches twinkled a pair of candles, filling the room with what Milton calls a "dim religious light," merely strong enough to enable people to find their way to the pews.

The cross on the altar glowed with a mystic radiance, due to a small electric light concealed in a metal hood at its foot, while a shadow of the cross, magnified many times, loomed large on the drapery behind the altar. That shadow impressed everybody. It was like an ominous intruder upon the joys of Christmas morning. It claimed half the attention reserved for angelic glory, while into the blessed "There is born this day a Saviour" it wailed, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities." The awed hush of the congregation was doubtless due, in the main, to that shadow.

Presently, while the organ breathed

"Dawn" (by what composer I know not), a light began to shine through the south window of the altar chamber. Almost imperceptible at first, it grew brighter and brighter, as if the day were dawning there. As the light increased, the shadow of the cross grew less and less obtrusive, and by the time the lights throughout the church were all turned on, it had vanished entirely.

It was an eloquent way of saying that when the Day dawns, the shadow of the cross, which is the shadow of sin, must disappear. It was a most unusual, but also a most beautiful way of bringing before the worshipers that thronged the temple the innermost meaning of Christmas, as well as the innermost meaning of the cross. For after all, Christmas and the cross belong together. They complement each other. They are inseparable. Christmas without the cross would degenerate into mere gayety, while the cross without Christmas—without the victorious Christ—would mean hopeless tragedy.

C. A. Wendell