

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

December 9, 1980



AT THE MASTER'S FEET

Pastor Ralph M. Rokke



Christmas memories

Who can forget the Christmases of his childhood? I never shall!

Usually the ground outside was covered with one or two feet of white snow. The snow had not yet overstayed its welcome, at least as far as we children were concerned, but the snow together with the stinging cold and early darkness compelled us to remain mostly indoors. As a result we felt insulated and secure in a way that we never did or could on a summer afternoon.

Inside, our house was filled with a wonderful combination of sights and sounds, smells and tastes. There was the tree. It was always decorated with all the art that could be achieved by the young minds and the low reaches of my brother, my sister and I. We always had natural trees and so each year the

piny smell evoked the memory of Christmas past.

Then there was the nativity set. It had belonged to my mother even before she was married to my father and so already it possessed an aura of antiquity for us children. Each year we set it up reverently and carefully in a place of prominence.

There were also special cakes and cookies. They came in shapes that we did not see except during the Yuletide season. Their aroma filled the house as did the smell of lutefisk cooking each Christmas Eve.

And, of course, there were the presents under the tree. Although all were gaily wrapped, we were quite certain that we knew what some of them were. Many entreaties and reminders had brought them there. Others were mysteries. They tantalized us until we opened them on Christmas Eve. The anticipation of opening them was as much pleasure as the deed itself.

But the memory of my childhood Christmases which lingers dearest of all is of our family's private devotions on Christmas Eve. Each member of the family who was old enough had a part in a family Christmas program. Then Dad would lead us in prayer. A sense of identity in the family of God, only a larger extension of our own family, has never been stronger for me. The communion of saints was an experienced reality in those moments.

How wonderful to have such memories of Christmases past! They are gifts far better than any treasures ever

discovered under the tree and they are gifts for which a loving God deserves thanks and praise.

James 1:12 tells us: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." What is wholesome pleasure and what is good in your life? Do you have memory-treasures? All that is truly wholesome and delightful is from God.

It's true that at Christmastime we celebrate above all the giving of Jesus Christ to be our Savior. Heaven's best was sent to a world of sin and need. This is the "Good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people."

But also because of the same tender, loving, fatherly heart of God which sent Jesus, we all have our other blessings as well. Romans 8:32 says: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also freely give us all things?" It is God who "...giveth us richly all things to enjoy," as I Timothy 6:17 tells us.

At this Christmas season, may you richly enjoy many things. May love and joy and peace be yours in large measure. But above all, may constant awareness come to you also that these things are from God. They are from the Giver of every good and perfect gift, the Father of lights. They, too, are yours because you have a God who was willing to give even His own Son for you. Amen.

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

is published biweekly (except the second issue in August) by the Association Free Lutheran Congregations, 3110 East Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, Minn. 55441.

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Send annual \$5.00 subscription to THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR, 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, Minn. 55441. Second-class postage paid at Minneapolis, Minn.

Volume 18, Number 24
USPS 588-620

COVER: Bringing in the Yule tree in Norway

Two days before a recent Christmas, Nicolai Thomsen, 81, of Brooklyn, N.Y., helped bring in the Christmas tree to decorate his boyhood home dur-

ing a visit to Lygra, a fjord island in Norway. Willing helpers joined him in the tow cart as it eased over an icy path to the house in the background.

Religious News Service Photo



by Rev. Trygve Dahle,
Spicer, Minn.

The Rev. Ole Dahle, my dad, was pastor in West Duluth from 1890 to 1895. His parish consisted mostly of Norwegian immigrants from several parts of Norway. They were carpenters, railroad workers, etc. When the depression came in the early '90s, commonly called "the Panic of the '90s," most of the laboring class lost their jobs. Many of them sold their homes and moved out to Aitkin County and took homesteads.

This was a crippling blow to the congregation, so in June, 1895, my father resigned and moved to Aitkin also and bought the homestead rights from a farmer on the west shore of Farm Island Lake. Here he organized a congregation, the Cedar Lake Congregation, out of his former members in West Duluth. That was real pioneering, hard work and poor pay. The place we moved to had a great many pine trees, about 100 between the log cabin and the lake, and many more in the woods behind the house. We had about a mile of lakeshore, with sand beaches. That same summer his congregation got together and donated lumber and built a frame building about 34 by 38 feet, two storeys, and joined that to the log cabin. Only the downstairs rooms were finished the first year, but my father, who was a graduate from the *Snikker-skole* (carpenter school) in Aalesund, Norway, worked on the finishing, as he had time. Cash money was scarce, but most people were happy and contented, and many people were saved through Dad's ministry. My father, to bolster his income, traveled a great deal among our people, holding meetings in homes, school-houses, logging camps, etc., and organized congregations in four counties: Beltrami, Crow Wing, Aitkin and Carlton, baptizing, confirming, marrying and burying and seeking to lead people into living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. He also visited jails and was a good friend of the sheriff of Aitkin County, who would notify my father about people in the jails.

One incident: a man, who in a drunken spree murdered his own

daughter, a teenager. He was condemned to be hung. Dad led him to the Lord in the jail and when his execution day came, he begged Dad to be there, and before he was hung he asked permission to say something to the on-lookers. It was granted, and he told them that alcohol was the cause of this crime and told how the Lord had saved him. Many people wept when he told about killing his own daughter whom he loved. They had saloons at that time.

In the early years, Dad rode horse back a great deal, as there were no roads, only trails which were too rough for a buggy.

We had no well on our place, but our lake was very clean, so we could even drink the water. We had to carry water from the lake for all purposes.



We had a Christian groceryman in Aitkin, whom Dad had led to the Lord. He was very kind to us, giving us groceries on time, till we had the money to pay for them. I do not recall when or how we bought our cow, but remember her name, "Storeboss" (Big Cow). She was a large Holstein, who delivered a pailful of milk twice a day, so we had plenty of milk, cream and butter, and "tykemelk" (sour milk), which I detested. We were six children in the family at that time, ranging in age from 1-1/2 to 8-1/2, and milk was a necessary food product.

Dad named our place "FURULY" (Foo-rue-lee), meaning "Pine Shelter." There was plenty of good firewood in the timber behind our house, but to get

I remember Georg Sverdrup

FURULY, A PLACE APART

it home was a problem. And to get it sawed into chunks was another problem. Dad was gone most of the time and we boys were small when we moved out there. I remember my brother Anker and I tried to saw wood, but Anker complained to Mother that I wasn't much help and I can readily understand that now. I was only four years old and Anker eight. We burned only wood in the kitchen range and the big "pot-bellied" heating stove took a lot of wood when it got cold. Sometimes a good neighbor would haul us a load of wood or we got some men to come with a team and haul wood, windfalls, which was already seasoned, but to cut it up in right lengths for the stoves and split it was a big problem. There were no saw rigs then, or power saws; everything had to be done by hand. We boys were too small when we first moved out there and Dad was no woodsman. He was raised on the coastland of Norway, and knew fishing, but nothing about cutting and splitting wood.

Before he came to America, Dad traveled extensively in Norway as an evangelist, with more than average success. In the Arendahl and Christiansand area a great many young people were saved. Here he also started a Sunday School, which grew so that it numbered over 1000 before Dad left for America. He knew about Georg Sverdrup from Stavanger and when he heard that he had been called to teach

"Dad named our place 'Furuly,' meaning 'Pine Shelter.'"

Mickey and the Dreamer

By: Elizabeth J. Nelson,
Leeds, N. Dak.

God has given the gift of Christmas to each of us, His Son, wrapped in His redemptive love. God has also given us the gift of remembering. It is inevitable that these two gifts intermingle and offer a mystery upon which to ponder. It is Mary who taught us to carefully consider and often remember the mystery of Christmas.

The twinkling lights of my Christmas tree seem to make the living room even darker than usual tonight. Memories often accompany stillness and it seems the room is filled with the thoughts of Michelle. . . as though we have gone back across the years to a time when we were ten.

High above the trees on Lookout Hill we watched the five o'clock train near the east end of the Johnson's grove. Soon it would enter the woods for a one mile run, then make a wide swing south and begin a fast climb up the grade and over the narrow railroad bridge that crossed the Park River at the north edge of our small town.

We were Indian braves, planning a raid on the white man's "Iron Horse." As the big steam locomotive disappeared into the woods, Mickey gave a fierce war-cry. We charged down the green slopes toward the bridge and lay in ambush listening for the signal that would begin our raid.

Mickey and I shared lunches at

SVERDRUP . . .

at Augsburg Seminary in Minneapolis, Minn., he decided to go to America, study at Augsburg, and become a pastor in that new country. He was encouraged by many people to do that and he also edited a little song book, which he sold at his meetings to help him finance that trip, which materialized in 1881. He graduated from Augsburg in 1886. Sverdrup and Dad got to be real good friends.

When Sverdrup heard that Dad had moved out to the "wilderness" south of Aitkin, he came to us, and spent a month or more several summers in succession. The first years he came alone. We had no boat, so Sverdrup bought us a 16-foot round bottom row boat which he gave to Dad. On another trip he bought a 14-footer, same kind. This was to be his boat to use when he was there. We could use it when he was not there. Dad named his boat "Rata-tusk." I do not know where he picked up that name. One summer Sverdrup brought some of his family. We children knew nothing about that until one nice afternoon in late June a livery rig

appeared in our clearing, coming down our road in full trot and stopping in our yard. Who should step out but Sverdrup, his wife and two daughters, Gunhild and Ragna. After greetings and the baggage had been unloaded and the livery had gone, Sverdrup handed my mother a package and said, "This is a treat for the children." It was a big bag of candy, 50¢ worth. It was the biggest bag of candy I had ever seen. Of course, Mother knew better than handing the bag to us, as it would not last

"Sverdrup always brought some presents when he came."

long and someone might get sick. She opened the bag, gave us all a treat, and put the bag away where only she knew, but took it down every morning and gave us a treat and that candy lasted almost all summer.

Then Sverdrup gave Mother two cotton "sailor suits" with short pants.

"Those are for Trygve and Viggo," he said. And then it was Mrs. Sverdrup's turn. She had some dresses for the girls. Sverdrup always brought some presents when he came.

In the morning Sverdrup lost no time getting on the lake to do some fishing. About 10 o'clock, he brought his catch up to Mother and said, "Can we have some fish for dinner?" Mother said, "Yes, if you will clean them; I am too busy now." Yes, indeed, he would clean them, and asked when she needed them ready for the frying pan, and Mother told him about 11:30. He got the scaler and knives and had the fish ready on time. From then on Sverdrup kept us supplied every day except Sunday. Sunday we all went to church. Mother was an excellent cook and prepared the fish in different ways, baked or fried or cooked, when she also made her famous fish soup, which was delicious. The northerns she would sometimes grind up and make into fish balls.

Sverdrup spent several summers with us, I do not know how many or what years, but it must have been

school, secrets, and my three-year-old fox terror, Pal, who at this moment strained against my grip on his harness. His body quivered and his black eyes shone with excitement as he cocked his head and watched me for the signal.

It came! A plaintive whistle as the locomotive entered its wide swing. Heads back and feet barely touching the ground we raced until my lungs ached. Mickey was at the middle of the bridge when I got there.

"Boy," she said, gasping for air, "makes me feel like a king up here."

"Yeah, watch the water rush over those rocks."

I pointed far below toward the dam

"As the big steam locomotive disappeared into the woods, Mickey gave a fierce war-cry."

where the spring run-off had swelled the river to its highest level. Here and there ice, held by a floating branch, broke loose and moved with the swift current, on and on to the end of all things

"Cut it out!" I shook my foot violently and scolded Pal who was tugging at my pants leg

Mickey and I lay on our stomachs and peered between the crossties. Enchanted by the white churning water we had forgotten her mother's warning, "That bridge is just wide enough for the train to pass, don't ever lie there."

Pal ran to the end of the bridge and returned. Carefully picking his way over the crossties, he whined and barked sharply.

"What's wrong with you?" In the same breath I knew, "Run, Mickey!" I screamed.

The train had begun its cimb and was racing toward the bridge.

"I'm stuck!" Mickey called after me. I sensed fear and panic in her voice.

I looked back. She had slipped; her foot dangled in the open space between the ties.


"Turn your foot the other way," I yelled, twisting and yanking at her leg. In a moment she was free and together we ran and jumped the remaining distance; rolling over and over down the rock filled siding to the bottom of the grade.

Trembling, I picked myself up and together we checked our clothes for rips and tears as the train thundered above us. Confident we could explain our bruises without telling about the train, I said,

"We nearly got killed back there."

Mickey shrugged her shoulders and walked ahead of me, her back stiff and her chin determined.

We bounded from one misadventure to another through the summer until Christmas vacation promised free time and the chance to perfect our skill at our favorite winter sport, sledding on the icy sidewalks.



about the turn of the century. We always welcomed the Sverdrups and they always were glad to come. It was always from the last week in June to the first part of August. How they enjoyed that wilderness haven, the quietness and the picturesque scenery, the wild strawberries and raspberries, both of which ripened while they were there. Sverdrup called Farm Island lake, "the Pearl of Minnesota."

Sundays we went to church and if Dad was away Sverdrup would fill his pulpit. The only way to get there was to walk. It was only five or six miles. If the weather was quiet, we could row the boat to the end of the bay, about two miles, leave the boats and walk from there.

Our schoolhouse, Caza, was on the county road, about one-half mile from the boats and the church was two miles beyond the school. The post office was across the road. We did have a horse and a single seat buggy, so Dad and Mother and the smallest children could ride, but that road was about three miles longer. The school path was along the lakeshore and then

across the big swamp we had a corduroy road made of logs laid in pairs, end for end, all across the swamp. This had been done during the winter when everything was frozen. The driving road had to go around that big swamp which was about three miles long. Our road went first south half a mile, then west half a mile, then north and east to the school house, about three miles farther than walking. When Dad was away, Sverdrup or his wife could ride, and he would speak. Dad would preach at home every month or six weeks, the rest of the Sundays he would preach some other place. He had so many places to go that he could not be there oftener. He could not cover more than one place each Sunday. He would arrive at a place on Saturday, read with the confirmands, stay over night, preach on Sunday morning, have a fellowship lunch at noon, Ladies Aid in the afternoon, do some calling on the sick or shut-ins, etc., and leave for home on Monday. Locally we had a good Sunday School all summer. We had a good layman who would hold house meetings occasionally. During

the cold winter months we had no Sunday School except in our homes, where we always had singing, Scripture and prayer, and read a sermon by some pastor.

How happy Viggo and I were when we donned our new sailor suits. One day when we were walking and talking with Sverdrup, we came to a little tree about six inches in diameter. Sverdrup said, "Trygve, will you climb that tree for me? I'll give you a dime." Of course, I was game even without the dime, so up I went. When I was about six feet up, Sverdrup said, "That is high enough. You had better come down now." On the way down, a sharp twig caught my pants and tore them and also punctured my skin so that the blood ran down my leg. I said, "Det har gaat hul paa mig" (My skin has been punctured.). Sverdrup chuckled and said, "Ja, det er ikke saa fare med skinne; det vekser snart igjen. Det er verre med boksa" (Don't worry about the skin; that will soon heal. It's worse

[Continued on page 22]

Mickey . . .

The cold winter evening made the ice as slick as glass and with the bright moon to give us light I watched as the runners of Mickey's sled made sharp white lines on the ice.

"Let's go on the road," she said. "We can get a great slide; probably coast a whole block."

The heels of her boots made crunching sounds as they dug into the ice. I watched as she dropped to her stomach and went into her slide. Straight and fast, picking up more speed; then suddenly she used her foot as a rudder and ground her sled into a sharp turn as she entered the avenue. She had seen the car round a turn with headlights blazing! Mickey twisted and rolled but not before the car's bumper sent her against the curb.

She sat up as the driver bent over her, "Now I'm going to get it," she muttered, "I've busted my glasses."

The next day, as we compared punishments, I said softly,

"Guess we could have been killed."

Mickey shrugged her shoulders and adjusted her new glasses.

Years later, during another Christmas vacation, we worked on our class motto for the annual. Filled with dreams for the future, I selected, "Ad Astra Per Ardua" . . . to the stars through difficulties.

'Dreamer,' she grinned.

The following summer we graduated from high school. We sat reflecting on the war and sipping cokes.

"It's awful, Mickey, all those people killed. We don't even know what the A-bomb can do, yet we dropped it.

She shrugged, "On our enemies, don't forget! Come on, dreamer, we've entered the atomic age. The greatest thing since the invention of dynamite. We'll never have another war. No nation will ever challenge us again"

"When we were alone I told her about my new found faith in Jesus Christ."

I was eager to see her the next Christmas vacation. We had both been

away at school and I had something special to share with her. I found her where she always seemed to be, in the center of a group of friends and in the midst of a lively discussion.

When we were alone I told her about my new found faith in Jesus Christ.

"What about all your grand plans?" She grinned, with a twinkle in her eye. "Still the idealist; by spring you'll have another cause to get excited about"

But it wasn't just another cause, it was the start of a new life. In the years that followed we saw each other only occasionally. I'd tell her about my faith; she would listen patiently,

"Great, let me tell you about my trip to Japan."

In my last remembered conversation with her she told me about her visit to the Soviet Union and West Berlin. Her career ended quietly but abruptly.

On a spring morning her body was laid to rest in a country graveyard not far from our small town.

Whenever I watch a cold Christmas moon and see the stars it seems she smiles as if to say, "Dreamer. . . To the stars through difficulties."

My Christmas tree lights twinkle on in the stillness. Mickey is gone. Toys lie waiting under the tree for our granddaughter and morning. I'll put out the light and consider the Christmas mystery once again:

"Then said Mary unto the angel, 'How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?' " Luke 1:34

"And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn." Luke 2:7

"But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." Luke 2:19

"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." I Timothy 3:16

God incarnate! The Christmas mystery we can never solve, only accept and believe. Believed in Mickey's world, I wonder? I trust that she was clothed in His Redemptive Love, and that you are as well.

A missionary wife reflects



By Mrs. John H. Abel

As I sit down to write about some of our Christmases in Brazil, a flood of memories enters my mind. It is good to think back over the years, being reminded of the promise: "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."

Our first Christmas was spent in Campinas, where we studied the Portuguese language. A woman evangelist, Miss Marguerite Lofthus, was with us and in God's providence is back here again after 27 years. At the time we just had two little boys. Marguerite shared with us many Norwegian customs and helped us pick out a Christmas tree. It looked like a pine tree but the needles were very soft, fitting for this warm climate. Together we made Christmas cookies. This was quite a project, as we only had two alcohol burners to cook on and for baking we put a small portable oven over them. For Christmas Eve dinner I tried to roast a chicken with dressing in it and I can still remember my concern about whether or not it would get done in time.

"Dorothy brought a roasted chicken and a plum pudding."

We could not as yet speak the language well enough to share the Gospel with Brazilians, but John met a family from England, Dorothy and Bill Morris and their three girls. Bill worked at the Singer Sewing Machine Co. Their factory was several miles out of town and John would go out there once a week for a Bible study. They accepted the Lord and were baptized in our home. They were also with us for Christmas Eve dinner. Dorothy brought a roasted chicken and a plum pudding. How we enjoyed sharing our Christmas with them and Marguerite! David was two and Jonathan was having his first

Our Early Christmases in Brazil

Christmas. The important gift that we received that year was a pump organ bought with gifts from relatives and friends. This went into the interior with us and was used in various new churches that were born over the years.

1954

By our second Christmas in Brazil we moved to Cianorte, a city that was only a year old, little more than a clearing in the jungle, with about 50 houses. Paul was born in Sao Paulo, Oct. 18th, with a respiratory problem. He had to spend his first eight days in an oxygen tent. Many people were praying for him and after the eighth day he began breathing normally. How thankful we were that the Lord spared his life. On Nov. 15, 1954, I flew to Maringa with the three boys and Kiyoko Suda, a Japanese girl, who had come to live with us; she is a Lutheran from Japan who was to begin work with the Japanese immigrants on the frontier. John had gone on ahead to Cianorte by jeep with most of our belongings.

It seems hard to believe now, but the road to Paraná was little more than a trail that led through large ranches, so it was necessary to open and close gates on the one and only highway. He had been to Cianorte the month before and rented a store front with three rooms in the back. It was in the process of being built but was supposed to be ready when we got there. However, on our arrival only one room had a floor in it. John worked with the carpenter and by the end of November we began having Sunday School and evening services. Every afternoon almost, we were out visiting and inviting people to church. Our closest friends were Geni and Francisco Cavalcante. He made furniture and was making our church benches. They had a Bible and we began having Bible studies with them each night after the work on the

benches was finished. One night they prayed to receive Christ as their Savior.

Since we had the first church in town, the Baptists, Presbyterians and Methodists were also with us. We had a good group to work with in a short

"I believe we were the only ones in town to have a Christmas tree and it was quite an attraction . . ."

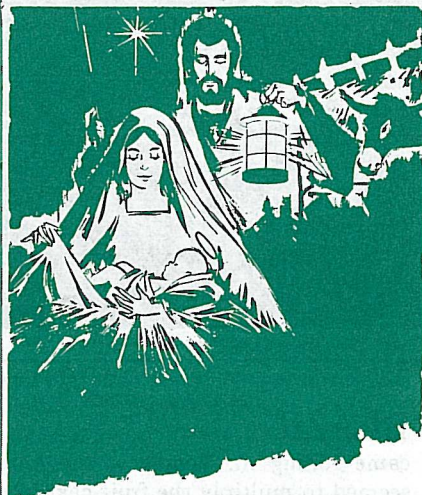
while and by the time Christmas came there were several to recite poems and we had also organized a choir. One new convert in our choir was Alfredo, a young Japanese, who worked as a mechanic. He was usually the first one to arrive for practice and little did we know that it would be his last Christmas on earth for in April he was baptized and in July he was accidentally shot in the garage where he was working. That year we were wondering where we could get a Christmas tree. We had contact with a young German engineer, who was a Lutheran. He offered to take John to an area in the jungle that had some pine trees. They had to crawl and cut their way through thick underbrush to find one. It was the Parana pine variety that has such sharp needles that you have to wear gloves to decorate them. I believe we were the only ones in town to have a Christmas tree and it was quite an attraction in the church with electric lights run by a generator.

Kiyoko and I baked a fruit cake to serve at the Christmas program on Christmas Eve and we prepared bags of candy for the children. We weren't counting on such a crowd, however. As the program was about to start a truckload of Baptists from a large sawmill

CHRISTMAS HYMN

*From His home in glory
Jesus came to earth;
Precious is the story,
Telling of His birth,
Heralded by angels,
Heard by shepherd-men,
Ever since this message
Echoes o'er again.*

*Unto us the Savior,
Born in Bethlehem,
Brings to us from heaven
Peace, good-will to men.
"Glory in the highest!"
Heaven's angels sang,
And down through the ages
This sweet anthem rang.*



*May our hearts be open!
There He comes to dwell,
There we would accept Him,
And His praises tell.
No one can have Christmas
Who does not have room
For the blessed Christ-child
In the heart and home.*

*Welcome, dearest Jesus,
Come with us to stay,
Fill us with Thy Spirit,
Guide us on our way,
Keep us ever faithful,
Bless us day by day,
That we may in glory
Reign with Thee for aye.*

—C. K. Solberg



Roger Huebner, D.D.S.

MAIN STREET, U.S.A.

No Room for Christ

No room for Christ?
How absurd, you say.
But let's take a look at ourselves today.
We just don't have time, we're so on the go;
Even at Christmastime, where is the glow?
People rushing and pushing, here and there.
This is Christ's birthday, is it fair?
Buying gifts for the family, friends, and relatives too,
But are we doing it out of love, or is it the thing to do?
We bake, we trim, we scrub all the floors,
We even hang beautiful wreaths on our doors.
But aren't we too busy with decorations and things
To stop and remember the joy that He brings?
For the manger is overshadowed by the cross.
Christ loved us so much, He suffered the loss.
Of course, let us remember the things we hold dear,
But remember to put Christ first, in Christmas this year!

Peggy Broten Johnson
The Free Lutheran Lamplighter
Roseau, Minn.

BRAZIL . . .

came rolling in. Somehow the Lord seemed to multiply the fruit cake and everyone got a piece. Traditionally, for our family, Christmas Eve had always been for the family. The Lord helped me to overcome this and find joy in giving this night to the church and making it more meaningful to Brazilians. When everyone had gone home and the doors were closed, and the generator had been turned off, we sat down to read the mail that had just come that day from home; lots of letters were read by candlelight. How good it was to get news from home on Christmas Eve.

We had much to be thankful for. Paul, just a little over two months old, was doing well and David and Jonathan also.

1955

The following year we were very busy. We built a house on three lots that had been cleared for us on the edge of town. All around us was the beautiful virgin jungle. After moving out of the back of the church, we organized the first grade school in town, which occupied this space. In another part of town Francisco and Geni gave half of their lot to build a church and we started to build a church and class-

rooms in the center of town. When Christmas came around we had two good-sized Sunday Schools and an active youth group. We prepared a play for the young people, something none of them had ever experienced before. By that time we also had a Sunday School going on a large ranch and sawmill about a 20-mile drive through the jungle.

One of the church members had a truck, so we decided to take all the young people to the ranch to present their Christmas play. The roads were something else and we had a flat tire on the truck and it was a job to get it changed on the loose sand road in the middle of a dark jungle. We made it over and back and I'm sure this is an experience that none of those people have forgotten.

With all the building going on and preparations for the play, bags of

[Continued on page 10]

"I remember standing in our outdoor kitchen wondering what I would prepare for our Christmas dinner, as we could not buy any meat."



President's Message

A Christmas Greeting from our president

THE LAST, THE LEAST

Greetings to our Ambassador Readers:

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

For us as Christians, Christmas is the day of the Prince of Peace. We see the grandeur of the King in a manger. There is nothing that compares with this wonderful gift of God's Son, our Redeemer. He and He alone is the sufficiency for all our sins, all our anxieties and all our failures.

I had been meditating on this Christmas greeting to our readers when my wife and I went down town one day recently. The stores were already glittering with Christmas tinsel and other colorful decorations. The beautifully displayed presents everywhere were testimony to how we have allowed commercialism to distract us from the most profound event in man's history—Jesus God's Son being born in a lowly manger.

On the sidewalk we met a man whose form was bent and whose step was slow. His face was unshaven and his hair dishevelled. His clothes were faded, worn and ragged. He was not a pleasant sight to behold and his presence there seemed out of place, for certainly he was not taken by any of the excitement of the Christmas spirit.

When we went home and I returned to my office, I could not forget the figure of that despicable and probably lonely man. I wondered what Christmas would mean to him. I wondered if he would have any to show that they cared for him this Christmas. Once, too, he had been just a little baby, loved by a mother who had a great dream for her little one. There was agony in my heart as I pondered on what had gone wrong for him in his life. Had there been no one there to guide him in his youth? Why had he missed his opportunities in life?

I don't have the answers to such questions concerning this stranger. Perhaps a valid suggestion is that there had been no one along the road to show him the path of Life in Jesus Christ. Or perhaps, if there had been a witness there, he had rejected it. What a difference it makes in a human life when one does not know Him, who is "Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the Prince of Peace."

The man I have written about represents, perhaps in the extreme—but represents nevertheless, men who are outside of fellowship with God this Christmas. Paul describes them, in Ephesians 2:12, in this way, "That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." It is sad, but true that there are dozens of people like that all about us this Christmas.

Will we take time in all of our merrymaking and preparations for Christmas to share with someone in some way the true meaning and message of Christmas? Surely we would be well pleasing to our Lord and it could provide the biggest thrill of this joyous season.

I am so glad that God sent His Son, that it was unto us that Jesus was given. I am so glad that He makes the difference in my Christmas and in that of my family. The most wonderful of all is that it is not only for the times we can have now with our loved ones, but it includes the anticipation we have of the coming again of our Prince of Peace!

In Dickens' "A Christmas Carol," the little crippled boy, Tiny Tim, said, "A Merry Christmas to us all. God bless us, every one." That is my prayer for each heart and home among us. May the celebration of Jesus' birth bring warmth and love to our hearts and homes again this year. May the reality of our experience with Him radiate His life to others about us.

*Pastor Richard Snipstead
President, Association of
Free Lutheran Congregations*

by Pastor Ronald
Knutson
Ferndale, Wash.

Responses to Christ's

Introduction

John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

This verse is at the heart of Christmas; the wonderful, familiar message that has brought peace and joy to countless lives. It's an old message. Almost 2,000 years have gone by since Christ entered the world in this manner. From God's point of view and from that of those who have received Christ, the message has never changed. The presentation of the message has varied to fit the occasion, but the content has remained the same. There is no other way if there is to be any spiritual rebirth or growth. Jesus said, "I am the

way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by Me." He also says, "I am come that you may have life." He speaks of a life that's overflowing, a life which is no longer bound or condemned by sin. When Christ lives within us we can live daily praising and thanking God from a grateful heart because of what He's done for us.

John 3:16 speaks of God's way of giving life. There is no other way. Jesus looks upon the world today just as He looked upon the city of Jerusalem years ago, saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace" (Luke 19:42a). This invitation continues to be extended. "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

This Christmas, as usual, will find most people busy with preparations. We think of the programs, meals, gifts and all the other things which we enjoy, but which at times almost obscure the real meaning of what we are celebrating. Our approach to Christmas can be an indication of how we live the rest of the year.

There are three responses to the coming of Christ that we should consider. They typify the lives of many today.

The Rejection at the Inn (Luke 2:7)

Luke writes that when Mary and Joseph came to the inn there was no room for them. There is no indication that it was an intentional move against the

BRAZIL . . .

candy for Sunday School, etc., by the time Christmas Eve came around we were completely out of money, and somehow the mail had not gotten through for several days, so no checks. I remember standing in our outdoor kitchen wondering what I would prepare for our Christmas dinner, as we could not buy any meat. Just then Francisco Cavalcante drove up on his bicycle with something tied behind. It was the hind quarter of a goat he had raised for Christmas and they wanted to share it with us. Praise the Lord for His constant provision!

We had been able to buy a toy truck for each of the boys earlier, so that was their present and they were happy. Little children in Brazil don't expect a lot of toys for Christmas. We were happy, too, because we were able to share the real meaning of Christmas with many people in the two churches and on the ranch. Things have changed a lot, but at that time the only special Christmas activity that most people had was in the churches. For those who didn't participate in a Christian church, Christmas was more like a family day.

1955

By the time our next Christmas came around Ruth and Bob Kasperperson from South Dakota and their three children and Miss Viola Reed had joined our mission family. Ruth was a good seamstress and she helped make more elaborate costumes. That year we included adults in the presentation of the Christmas story. They enjoyed having a part. Bears were made from some fur rugs I brought from Bolivia a few years previously and also from hair from cows' tails gotten at the butcher shop. For the most of them it was their first opportunity to act in a play. Viola Reed and I had a lot of sessions with the adults and children, but it seemed to be a real thrill for all involved. Ruth was also an excellent baker, so we baked Christmas cookies together, but when the day came our problem was about the same as the previous year; none of us had any money as the checks had again some how gotten delayed en route. Bob worked building wooden toys at night in our outdoor kitchen. Their son Philip had been very ill with pneumonia but was better by Christmas so they took a picture

with him surrounded by all the medicine bottles he had gone through. We pooled our resources and sold two bags of beans we had harvested off a vacant lot that we planted near the house. So

"We considered it a privilege to have been pioneers in a frontier town and to have been the first to share the Gospel with many precious souls."

we had a good Christmas Day dinner and I believe we even tried to make lefse that year. It had been another busy and important year as Deborah joined our family in August. This was the last Christmas we spent in Cianorte. The jungle that surrounded our house had now been cut down and houses were springing up closer to us. Several houses and stores of brick had been built in the center of town and the

first coming

couple. The inn was simply filled with others who had come earlier. Mary and Joseph had to take what was available in the city. Those who have traveled without reservations can identify with that. The innkeeper missed the blessings of having Christ born at his inn. I wonder how many people miss the real blessings of Christmas because their lives are too full of something other than Christ?

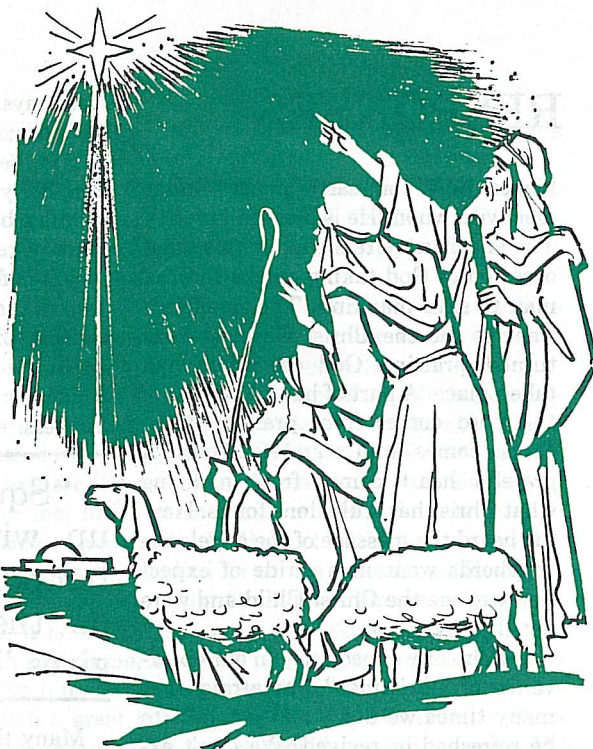
There are people who deliberately reject Christ, refusing to believe or accept what God's Word has to say. To them Christmas can have only the shallow meaning of a temporary festive time. There are some people who may not have heard the message of Christ and are living in rather foggy existence. Then there is the majority (at least in the United States) who go along or

population had increased considerably. We consider it a privilege to have been pioneers in a frontier town and to have been the first to share the Gospel with many precious souls. Most of the people we knew then, we have lost track of, but the oldest daughter of Francisco and Geni, whom John baptized, together with her parents, at the first baptismal service in Cianorte, now attends our beginning Free Lutheran Church here in Curitiba, together with her husband and little girl. Zanilda told us some months ago that they would like to help us start this new work as her father helped in Cianorte. Praise the Lord for His faithfulness to our children and children's children.

I have now only covered our first four Christmases in Brazil, for as I started to write so many memories came to me. We want to thank all of you who have stood with us over the years, some of you from this very time I've been writing about.

We desire to all who read this a blessed Christmas, remembering most of all the real meaning of Christmas. Continue to hold up the missionary families in your prayers.

"Our approach to Christmas can be an indication of how we live the rest of the year."



have a form of religious life, having a head-knowledge of what Christmas is all about and going through all the right motions. But the season leaves a sense of emptiness, a feeling of futility, because there is no relationship with the person of Jesus. For many it's not a deliberate rejection of Jesus. "I believe; what else can I do?"

The word believe is used in the Bible many times. But what does it mean? God's gift to the world is Jesus. A gift must be received to be of value to us. John 1:12-13 reads: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." It's not self-effort or deserving or earning it. We could never be good enough to earn salvation. It must be received by recognizing that *we are sinners* and confessing our sin and receiving Christ. "And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life" (1 John 5:11-12). How much simpler could God have made it?

Whatever our past may hold, the searching question for anyone is, where do you stand with Christ today? Has there been a personal acceptance of or commitment to Jesus? You cannot have a relationship of any value with anyone unless there's a commitment.

A lack of receiving Christ is an act of rejecting Him. Living in a hope-so, think-so relationship does not contribute to peace and assurance. 1 John 5:13 reminds us that we can know we have eternal life. Is your faith based solidly upon God's Word and not your own feelings? The Christmas season can lose a lot of its meaning for Christians as well if Christ is not kept at the center. I'm reminded of the sower, in Matthew 13:22: "The one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the Word, and the worry of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the Word, and it becomes unfruitful." With all the business of responsibilities and obligations or anxious thoughts about the world and our own needs, we can easily start looking inward rather than at Christ. The joy of the Lord is our strength and when our attention is off Christ, we can quickly become defeated. If we find this true in our lives, perhaps we need to examine our priorities to see if we're putting first things first.

The Joy of the Shepherds (Luke 2:20)

"The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen." They were the first to hear the good news proclaimed by the angel of the Lord, "That Christ the Savior was born." Then they witnessed a multitude of angels praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the

RESPONSES . . .

highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased" (v. 14). The angels were rejoicing at this great occasion of God taking on the form of man to save mankind. The shepherds went to see the Christ Child and returned praising God for what had taken place. A part of having the joy of the Lord comes from praising Him. Praise comes from a grateful heart. A grateful heart comes from realizing what Christ has truly done for us. Having heard the message of the angels the shepherds went in a stride of expectancy to see the Christ Child and were not disappointed.

Is there any expectancy in our observance of Christmas? I'm afraid that many times we don't really expect to be refreshed or revived. We don't expect God to work in us or through us and we just carry on as the world around us. Squeezed and caught up with that which is temporal we miss out on the joy that Christ gives. This Christmas, as all through the year, let us "turn our eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace!" This is the answer which will keep us from being earthbound and walking around with a downward look.

Devotion Leads to Worship

In Matthew 2:10, we read: "When they (the Wise Men) saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly, with great joy." This led to their response, in v. 11: "They came into the house and saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell down and worshiped Him; and opening their treasures they presented to Him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh."

The joy in Christ brought forth a giving of self, a sharing of what they had. Isn't this the practical outworking of a life centered on Christ? Many people seek joy but look for it in the wrong way. How true are these words, "If we go out in quest of joy, it will elude us. If we go out to impart joy, we will find it." This goes along with the words of a song, "Once earthly joy I craved, sought peace and rest; now Thee alone I seek; give what is best." In John 15

Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing." Though we may be fully aware of the importance of keeping our eyes on Jesus, how easy it is for us to get caught up in the pressures and activities of life, miss the joy that Christ gives and begin operating in the flesh. Apart from a daily dependence on Christ, life passes into a fruitless, empty existence.

"Squeezed and caught up with that which is temporal we miss out on the joy that Christ gives."

Many things give us peace and joy; family, work, material objects, recreational pursuits, etc., but the greatest comes, and should come, from a personal relationship with Jesus. May Christ reign supreme in our hearts and minds, whatever the situation or circumstance we find ourselves in. We can rejoice because the most important thing in all of life is settled. We have salvation in Christ Jesus and we're bound for Heaven. No one can take that away from us and it's going to influence our own attitude and the effect we'll have upon the lives of others. Let us rejoice as the Shepherds and the Wisemen this Christmas season and throughout the year, that God loved us so much that He gave His only Son, "that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." ✠

THE SHEPHERDS

When they had seen and heard this wonderful thing, to their hearts content, the stable could no longer hold them. They left with still greater joy than they had when they came. Being the first recipients of the glad tidings they immediately became the first confessors and disciples of the Lord. They could no longer hold their peace; for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. In an excess of rapture they went forth shouting and publishing the glad tidings to the sons of men.

—Theo. P. Frohne

ASSOCIATION OF FREE LUTHERAN CONGREGATIONS

3110 East Medicine Lake Boulevard
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

BUDGET RECEIPTS

Feb. 1 - Oct. 31

Fund	Total Budget	Received to Date	% of Total (Ideal 75%)
General Fund	\$104,140.00	\$54,439.61	52%
Schools	179,802.00	87,387.95	49
Home Missions	105,252.00	44,059.09	42
World Missions	156,636.00	75,785.66	48
Praise	36,407.00	14,791.42	41
TOTAL	\$582,237.00	\$276,463.73	47%
1979-80	\$481,635.00	\$218,659.74	49%

editorials

NO WONDER THEY WONDERED

Once again it's Christmas, blessed, glorious time.

Bethlehem becomes the capital of the world now. I spent five Christmas Eves in Tioga, N. Dak., at the home of one of my sisters. I would drive over from Medicine Lake, Mont., on the 23rd or 24th, a distance of 115 miles if I came by way of Williston or 95 miles across country. If the approach to Tioga were made from the south I would see the large BETHLEHEM Steel sign. It seemed so appropriate at Christmas, for then not New York or London or Rome or Tokyo was the world's capital, but Bethlehem. And that is true, really, not only at Christmas but at any time because Bethlehem has to do with God. This most awe-inspiring moment of history, the birth of Jesus Christ, had to happen first, before there could be a Calvary and a Resurrection.

There's a word which appears again and again in our carols, the word "wonder." "A great and mighty *wonder* our Christmas festal brings." "... and *wonders* of His love." "How silently, how silently the *wondrous* gift is given." "Come then, let us hasten yonder; here let all, great and small, kneel in awesome *wonder*." In Luke 2:18, we read, "And all who heard it (the word of the shepherds) *wondered*." That brings us to the theme of this editorial: No Wonder They Wondered.

The Shepherds wondered at the *heavenly manifestation*. It was a routine night for them up to a point. They were doing what their fathers and their fathers' fathers had done for generations, keeping watch over their flocks. And then the angel of the Lord appeared, suddenly, just like that. He announced the birth of the Savior and a heavenly host sang praises to God.

Yes, they wondered, but they didn't think it incredible that this was happening. Yes, they were amazed, but not incredulous. From their ready response we gather that they were among the believing, waiting ones and they hastened to Bethlehem to see this which had come to pass.

The shepherds wondered at the *visitation of God to man*. They knew the Old Testament prophecies, but they still wondered at this mystery of God becoming man. We still wonder at it.

A little boy lost his father in death and missed him dearly. He would often look at his picture. One day as Christmas approached his mother took the small boy in her lap and asked, "What do you want for Christmas?" "I wish Daddy would step out of that picture."

God has stepped out of heaven and come to us. "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of women." "For God so loved the world that He gave His

only Son." "For to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior."

We wonder at the miracle of *incarnation* (God became flesh) today also, but we believe it. Modernists and liberals seek some other explanation, but we accept God's message as truth. Jesus is man *and* God.

The shepherds wondered at the *salvation promised*. The child was called a Savior. Later it became known that His name was Jesus, which means exactly that.

We are sinful and cannot save ourselves. No human being can take another's sins. He may feel the shame of them, as a mother may for her son or a wife for her husband, but he cannot assume them or atone for them. My own sins would condemn me, had I to account for them. So it is that we need a Savior and Jesus, the Babe of Bethlehem, is that for us. He lived for us, He died for us, He arose for us. However, we must recognize our plight and desperate need. That part is yours, it is mine. "But to all who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave power to become children of God." Nothing could be plainer than that.

It's such a great gift. No wonder they wondered and we wonder. A pastor stood at the bedside of a dying man. He had come to know the wonder of God's love in his soul, but over and over he repeated the thought, "It's not decent. I have wasted my life and it's not decent to expect God to forgive all that now." The pastor reassured him, "No, it isn't decent, but it's divine."

The shepherds wondered at the news of a Savior. And so do we, but salvation has come. Believe in the Savior. This is the way to a *merry* Christmas.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

It is our privilege to send this *Ambassador* on its way with some very fine things in it. Our sincere thanks to all who have written for our Christmas reading enjoyment and edification. An introduction to all those writers will be found elsewhere in this issue.

But one article deserves special explanation. It is our lead article, on page 3, "Furuly: a Place Apart." Last summer while re-reading Andreas Helland's biography of Georg Sverdrup, we came across a reference to Sverdrup spending vacation time at the home of pioneer pastor Ole Dahle near Aitkin, Minn. Then the thought occurred, it must have been when Trygve Dahle was old enough to remember the elder Sverdrup. And so he did and "Furuly: A Place Apart" is the result.

It is really a piece of writing to be treasured because not many people are living today who remember Sverdrup at all for he died in 1907. And any person who was an adult when Sverdrup passed away would have to be well into his 90s now. Trygve Dahle was a boy when he knew Sverdrup, but the recollections from that time of life are priceless for their freshness and seeing things as they are, or should we say *were*? The human side of Georg Sverdrup which Pastor Dahle tells us about is an extremely interesting story.

Some of us have known of Georg Sverdrup all our lives. To others of our readers his is a new name. He was a long-time president of Augsburg Seminary in Minneapolis,

Writers in this issue

Trygve F. Dahle (emeritus), Spicer, Minn.; Richard Snipstead, Minneapolis, Minn.; Ralph Rokke, Minneapolis; Ronald Knutson, Ferndale, Wash.; and Einar Unseth, Bismarck, N. Dak., are pastors in the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations . . . Bjarne Taranger is a missionary from Norway, serving in Kenya, Africa . . . Richard Lofthus is a public school teacher in Bottineau, N. Dak. . . Mrs. John Abel (Ruby) and Mrs. Michael Brandt (Jeanne) are pastor's wives, the former in Brazil and the latter in Amery, Wis. . . Mrs. Arnold Jodock, Hatton, N. Dak.; Mrs. Elizabeth Nelson, Leeds, N. Dak.; and Mrs. Arnold McCarlson, Eagle Butte, S. Dak., are housewives, the latter also being a public school teacher . . . the poets, Marlene Moline, Lansing, Ia., and Peggy Johnson Broten, are housewives, while Marilyn Langness is a 9th grader at Faith, S. Dak. . . the late C. K. Solberg was a pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and a prolific poet.



The new WMF Bible Studies

by Solveig Larson



Mrs. Jeanne Brandt with Kayla, Erika, and Alisha

Women, according to the world's view, are overdue in expressing rebellion and dissatisfaction with the honored position God intended for them. This year's WMF Bible studies confront the world's abrasive vocalists and dangerous subtleties which constantly bombard the Christian woman. God's perfect and fulfilling design must be understood and lived as an assured example of complete satisfaction so "that the Word of God may not be discredited" (Titus 2:5).

This Ambassador contains the first of this year's studies entitled, "I Enjoy Being a Woman." Mrs. Michael Brandt, the author, is a woman content with the role God has given her. A young lady acknowledges the influence this pastor's wife has had in her life: "Mrs. Brandt is a living example to me. She has helped me a lot."

Mrs. Brandt has written these studies to encourage women to know and to be content with the Biblical instruction for the life of a godly woman.

As a child, the author's impressionable life was molded through the influence of godly parents. When a teenager, she earnestly sought Christ alone for her salvation from the wretchedness of the old nature. Days at California Lutheran Bible School provided a formal setting of Bible study. Mrs. Brandt's days now are still spent as a student, always learning from that daily struggle of choosing the way of the flesh or of going God's way through repentance and daily renewal.

Even though a busy home mission pastor's wife and mother of three, Mrs. Brandt anticipates the supportive fellowship and encouragement found at a weekly women's Bible study. Her nursing degree from St. Olaf College is valuable as she serves as a volunteer school nurse at Mustard Seed Faith Academy, the Christian school in Amery.

EDITORIALS . . .

1876-1907. Dr. J. O. Evjen, no mean theologian himself, called Sverdrup "the greatest Lutheran theologian America has ever had" (1930). Whether that was overstatement or not is not for us to judge, but without contradiction he ranks near the top. All the more delightful, then, are the personal observations of Trygve Dahle. Sverdrup was a founder of the Lutheran Free Church and a champion of free and living congregations. He is without doubt one of the spiritual forbears of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations.

We think, too, that our readers will enjoy these glimpses into Pastor Dahle's early life. A beloved elder in the church (89 on Nov. 14), he reveals that he had to "bear the yoke in his youth" and is none the worse for it. Incidentally, some or

all of "Furuly: A Place Apart" will be contained in a story of his life which he is writing. Hopefully, that will be available to friends beyond his family circle.

May we mention one other article in a special way. It is "An African Christmas" by Bjarne Taranger, the son of the Editor's cousin. He wrote for us some years ago when he was in Ethiopia. Political unrest there precluded his return, although his sister Reidun is there and he and his family are working in Kenya. Bjarne is from Norway and we have met him twice. God bless this young family as they bring the Gospel of Jesus to the Potok tribesmen.

And now we want to wish you, our readers, a blessed, joyous Christmas. Hopefully you are able to share it with family and friends. May you have a Christ-honoring Christmas.

13.) Obedience is an act of the will. Often my will must precede my emotion and even my intellect. How do John 7:17 and Psalm 40:8 reinforce this truth? _____

14.) Exercise caution lest even your obedience becomes a work of the flesh. What is the only "work" we can do that is acceptable to God, John 6:28-29? Philipians 2:13? _____

15.) Many standard hymns express the solid truths of Scripture. A good hymn-book may enhance your devotional time. May I suggest the exercise of matching a verse of Scripture to the phrases of the hymn? Select a hymn to share at your WMF meeting which repeats a thought from this lesson that has blessed you.

We can never hope to enjoy being a woman until we first enjoy being His child. This discovery is basic if Godly womanhood is to be a joyous, fulfilling reality in our lives. None of the principles expressed throughout this year will be meaningful if Christ is not resident within you.

Next month. I enjoy being God's creation.

4

WMF Bible Study

I Enjoy Being a Woman

January, 1981

Titus 2 is the inspiration for this year's study. Please read it carefully.

Women worldwide are restlessly struggling with their femininity. Mass media all around us evidence frustration, dissatisfaction, discontentment and feminine demands. Perhaps in our own neighborhoods, our own hearts, we are aware of the lack of fulfillment that is subtly poisoning the attitudes of women today. This was never God's intent. He still desires life abundant and fulfilled, not just for eternity, but for this day; not just for some, but for all who would have it. Christian women need to dwell on what God says about their role, for our own enrichment and fulfillment, and "... that the Word of God may not be dishonored" (Titus 2:5). He charges us to live sober, upright and godly lives in this world, adorning the doctrine of God our Savior. This is a serious responsibility, so throughout this year we will explore womanhood in the light of God's Word. This is not meant to be a comprehensive study, for many excellent Bible studies have already been published to meet this need. Rather, let us consider our 1981 adventure as significant Bible insights from my coffee cup to yours.

I Enjoy Being God's Child

A woman will never enjoy fulfillment, personal satisfaction and feminine privilege until she first enjoys being God's child.

I. Without Christ

1.) Read five verses from the following list and describe yourself apart from Christ.

Jeremiah 17:9;	Psalms 14:1, 3;	Romans 7:18, 24	Isaiah 64:6
John 15:5	Isaiah 53:6	Romans 3:10, 11, 23	Job 42:6
1 Timothy 1:15	Isaiah 6:5		

1

2.) Many of us, especially in our subconscious, do not thoroughly accept this fact. What does the Bible say about this, Galatians 6:3?

3.) We are frequently instructed in building up our self-worth. Discuss the following thought: It is impossible and unadvisable to build up one's self-image until one has established a personal relationship with Christ.

Seeing ourselves from God's point of view, we are desperately corrupt apart from Christ. Have you personally recognized yourself this way? Acknowledging this view, we admit our need: deliverance, salvation, redemption.

4.) Read the following verses in succession. Verbally relate God's provision for our wretched state in simple truths, as if talking to one who had never heard: John 3:16, 17, 36; Romans 5:8; 1 John 5:10; Galatians 4:4-7; John 1:12.

II. Within Christ

5.) Genuine fulfillment and complete satisfaction are a reality to me only when I am found in Christ. How is this expressed in the following verses?

1 Peter 2:10 _____

Colossians 2:9, 10 _____

John 6:35 _____

John 10:10b _____

John 17:3 _____

III. Getting to Know Him

Being a child implies an ongoing, ever more intimate relationship with the parent. This is God's desire for each of His children. I only enjoy being God's child if I am ever seeking a growing love relationship with Jesus Christ. If my relationship with Christ has become dull, it is my fault, not His! Getting to know Him may be accomplished by three means: the Word, prayer and obedience.

6.) How is my life built and by whom. Proverbs 24:3-4 and 1 Corinthians 1:30? —

7.) The knowledge of which we are speaking is more than an assimilation of Scriptural facts. How do Proverbs 9:10, Proverbs 4:7, and 1 John 5:20 explain this? _____

8.) Perhaps you experience occasional defeats in your life. What will lead to your ultimate destruction, according to Hosea 4:6? _____

9.) Who is the best teacher of the Scriptures, 1 John 2:27? _____

10.) An important starting point is emphasized in 1 Peter 1:20-21. What is it? — We need to spend concentrated time in the Word of God. What busyness is keeping us from taking this time? If we let the Word of Christ dwell richly in us, then God Himself will do the spiritual building. We may not understand how our physical food turns into bone, muscle, flesh, yet we continue to eat whether we understand this physiological fact or not. So the Word of God eaten and digested turns into spiritual growth whether we understand how it happens or not. Eat and digest the Word! (Note Job 23:12, KJV)

11.) Here is one barometer to check the quality of your devotional life: John 15:11, Psalm 16:11, and Jeremiah 15:16. _____

Getting to know God involves union, knowledge and communion.

Getting to know God involves union, knowledge and communion. Wonderfully, communication with the true God is two-way. Prayer is a privilege for God's child to enjoy and enjoy in getting to know Him. The Word and prayer go together like bread and butter. We will cover this topic more thoroughly in a later lesson.

Obedience to the insights I obtain in the Word is my faith in action and a result of my love for the Savior. Allow me liberty to personalize Titus 2:14 this way, "Jesus gave Himself for us to purify for Himself a woman of his own—one ardently pursuing obedience."

12.) How can I be sure I am getting to know Him, 1 John 2:3-6? _____

an african christmas

by Missionary Bjarne Taranger

"... Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

The missionary finished the Gospel reading, looked at the group of men, women and children and began to preach. It was his second Christmas at this new mission station. Approximately one and a half years earlier the work had been started with regular Sunday meetings. People had come. Many simply because of curiosity, others because they had heard about Jesus while visiting other places. Now they wanted to hear more.

Today more than a hundred people had come. They sat crammed together under the "church tree" to escape the burning sun. People were listening. Some of them heard the Gospel for the first time and they were wondering, "Is it really true that God loves us? That He gave His Son to be our Savior?" Yes, it is! He came also for them. What a wonderful message! And some did receive Him and believed in Him; so He gave them the right to become God's children (John 1:12).

A breeze from the plains brought fresh air to the people under the tree.



Bjarne and Magny Taranger with their children, left to right, Torstein, Bjørn Asle, Rebekka and Helge.

When the preaching was ended a group of young boys stepped forth in order to sing. They were Christians who had come from a village some 25 kms. away. They had been converted, some during their time at school and some by the help of their friends. Their songs and testimonies were really touching. People were asked to leave their old way of living, their worship of spirits and demons and to receive the Savior and follow him.

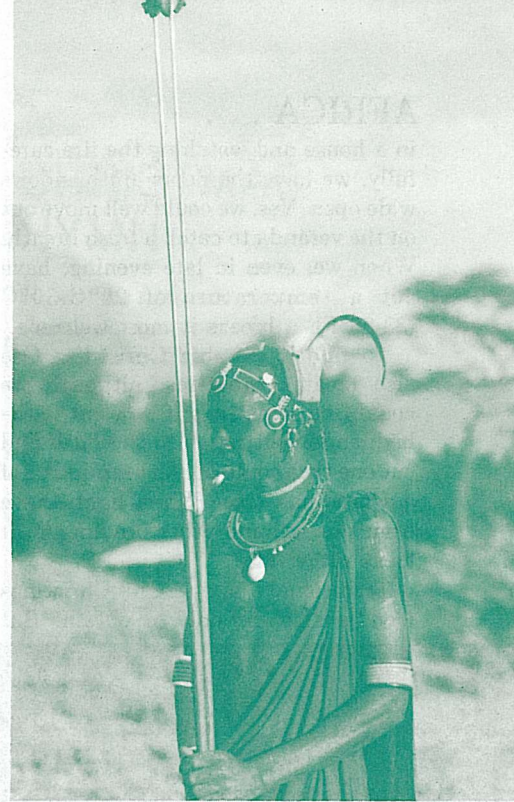
Some of the local people expressed their thankfulness for the message. "We need the Word of God and we want to learn more about Him."

The meeting ended and people broke into smaller groups. They greeted each other and asked news. Many things

"They sat crammed together under the 'church tree' to escape the burning sun."

were discussed. Soon more and more people moved in the direction of another shady tree. There some men and women were busy preparing food. The birthday of Christ the Savior was to be celebrated and remembered. The people sat down on the ground and they were served tea and bread. Some friends had also brought hens and eggs. Everybody seemed to be happy.

Now you may think that the people went back home to continue their Christmas celebration, but if so, you are wrong. There is no one in this area who has adopted this custom yet. Those few who are baptized still have to be taught how to celebrate the Christian holidays. The mountainous areas of West Pokot have been difficult to reach for Christian missions. There have been a few attempts but no real breakthrough. It seems now that a new time has come. One of the reasons for this is the pressure from the authorities



A Potok warrior

to educate and change people's way of living. The grip of traditional religion and custom is about to loosen in some places. But it takes time. Most people still worship the spirits of their ancestors, certain mountains, the sun and the morning star, and their "prophets" have great power. Religion is woven into all parts of life from birth to death.

But it is a privilege to preach the good news to these people. We expect God to do great things. In John 4:35, Jesus says: "I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest." We feel that these words have become true for this area.

How then do we missionaries celebrate Christmas? We are, of course, very much occupied with making a feast according to our customs. I think all people, wherever they come from, will try to follow their traditions. This does not mean that we also try to impose our customs on the people among whom we live. The only thing which must be the same all over is the message of Christmas, the real content, and that is Christ, the son of God, being born as a human child.

To make a Norwegian Christmas in our homes here in the equatorial zone of Africa is not that easy. The circumstances are too different from that of home. First of all, the climate makes it difficult. Instead of closing oneself up

AFRICA . . .

in a house and watching the fire carefully, we have the doors and windows wide open. Yes, we could well move out on the veranda to catch a fresh breath. When we, even in late evening, have got a temperature of 28°C-30°C (83-86°F), a breeze is most welcome.

To find a suitable Christmas tree also creates problems, although we could find something if we went to the highlands. But we go to the bush and cut one that could at least remind us of a Christmas tree. When lights have been put on, and other ornaments, it looks rather nice.

Traditional Norwegian Christmas food is also difficult to obtain. But



The tribespeople at the Christmas service.

from Nairobi we can get both pork and fish. The latter is from Lake Turkana (Lake Rudolph) and is very tasty. "Lutefisk" is impossible to get and likewise smoked mutton rib. Anyhow, we are happy because there is enough food and good food. Mother is able to bake the best cakes and the children are not able to realize any difference from food made here and at home in Norway.

Our celebration is always begun on Christmas Eve. All presents are put under the tree and left while we have our dinner. How exciting it is for the children. Their attention is very much concerned with the tree and the presents. The older ones instruct their younger brother and sister not to touch anything until permission is given.

We are two missionary families at our station and after dinner we gather to sing Christmas songs and read the Good News.

The time comes for the exchanging of presents. The children jump for joy

fellowship corner

My reflections on a wonderful Christmas

Christmastime means many things to me.

First of all, it means proclaiming the Virgin Birth of our wonderful Savior and Lord, with all the beautiful carols and special music, like Handel's "Messiah" and "O Holy Night."

Since my experience of salvation many years ago now, Christmas hasn't seemed complete until I have sung carols and heard these God-inspired songs.

Then secondly, it is family and friends getting together and sharing their lives. This hasn't been my privilege, to be with my family, for too many years now. But I have wonderful memories of making a great effort to spend my Christmas at home when my parents were here on this earth.

I still can hear my godly mother say, "The only gift I want for Christmas is to have my children home." And I think of the times my dad spent his last pennies to make a surprise for Mom. I think it was my mother, however, who made home what it was. I can't ever remember wanting to run away from home. Rather it tore me up to have to leave home for work or school.

Then lastly, I love the surprise Christmas brings, the fun of giving when the receiver knows nothing about it.

Last night we had our Sunday School program at church, where the

while opening the packets. How thrilling it is. Our two boys who are attending school in the capital had both prepared their presents secretly. And the joy is as great for the givers as for the receivers.

Naturally, a time of play follows. The children hardly have room for tasting Mother's Christmas cakes and biscuits. If someone were listening outside they would hear the noise and cheer followed by song before all becomes silent. Everybody has gone to sleep. From the bush only the sound of wild animals and owls can be heard.

story of "Christ to the World" was well presented. You see, we nearly missed it this year (1979). Because I am not teaching this year, so I can enjoy our adult Bible class, I didn't feel the need to go. And as it was so cold even to walk those few blocks, we decided to stay home this time. But somehow there was a pull in my heart to be there. Thank God for the Holy Spirit's voice to our hearts and His nudging us to go, and so we went.

Then we saw all the beauty of Christmas in its lighted streets and the happy children, which is a most important part of Christmas, I think. But the crowning joy of this evening was a homemade, beautiful farm or manger that was put there under the tree for me. I was surprised and thrilled and the children were, too. You see, I had made a ceramic nativity scene, but no stable. And I had asked if the children could make me one. But because they were planning on surprising me, I thought they had forgotten.

This is really Christmas, isn't it? Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" and that "your joy might be full." Let's keep this Christmas joy in our hearts all through this coming year as Jesus tarries.

Mrs. Arnold Jodock
Hatton, N. Dak.

"Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which translated means, God with us.'"

Matthew 1:23

Though Christ a thousand times
In Bethlehem be born,
If He's not born in thee
Thy soul is still forlorn.

Angelus Silesius

Recipes

by Mrs. Arnold McCarlson

The afternoon shadows were beginning to show through the kitchen windows as Mrs. Johnson sat down by the table. She was busy thumbing through the pages when the doorbell rang.

Of course, she thought, it's time for the grandchildren to come home from school. Their mother had called earlier and asked if they could visit until she had finished at the dentist's.

Lucy and Andy both greeted their grandmother with happy smiles as she helped them with their jackets and caps. "It's cold outside," said Andy, "and it's starting to snow." This didn't surprise Mrs. Johnson as it was just a few weeks before Christmas.

Hungry as usual after a day at school, both children looked at the table. Disappointed, Lucy said, "Grandma, what are those books you are reading?" Mrs. Johnson, with a smile, explained that they were recipe books and she was going to bake some things for Christmas.

"Oh, I know," said Andy, "you mean bake things like lefse, fattigman and all those good things. Is that what's in those books?"

"Yes," said Grandma, "these books have recipes that tell you how to make things to eat. You must do exactly as it says or it will not turn out right."

"But," she added, "here's some cookies and milk for you." This satisfied their appetites and soon Lucy was looking through the books. "Are recipes like rules we learn at school?" she asked. Our teacher says, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." And our Sunday School teacher says, "Love your neighbors as yourself."

"Yes, those are good rules to follow. We must never forget that God sent His only Son to be born in a manger, God's love Gift—the Gift of all ages. That's the real meaning of Christmas: to know God loves you and me. We, in yurn, should share our love with others."

"Oh, here is a Christmas recipe, but not for eating," said Lucy.

1 busy hectic mother
1 unperturbed father
2 or 3 excited kids (various sizes)
1 budget badly bent
1 lb. of patience
1 qt. of secrets
1 bushel each of joy, love, laughter and faith

Place all ingredients in house a few weeks before Christmas. Sprinkle children with secrets and allow to simmer. Gradually add patience to mother as needed. Add as much joy, love, laughter, and faith as hearts will hold. Garnish father with unpaid bills. Serve generous portions topped with the blessings of the Christ Child. There will be plenty to go around and lots left over for yourself.

I like this "Recipe for Daily Life," said Grandma.

Rules for Daily Life

Begin the day with God;
Kneel down to Him in prayer;
Lift up thy heart to His abode
And seek His love to share.

Go through the day with God,
Whate'er thy work may be.
Where'er thou art—at home, abroad,
He still is near to thee.

Conclude the day with God;
Thy sins to Him confess.
Trust in the Lord's atoning blood,
And plead His righteousness.

Lie down at night with God,
Who gives His servants sleep;
And when thou tread'st the vale of death
He will thee guard and keep.

Time had passed so quickly that soon Darlene had come and the children had left. As Mrs. Johnson was putting her recipe books away she thought not only of recipes for Christmas but also for the New Year.

Begin the New Year Right

Begin the New Year by giving the Lord
The complete control of your life.

Completely surrender
your life,
your fears,
all you call your own,
to His control.

Only then will you be able
To really enjoy your New Life.
Only then will it really be yours.

(Poems are selected)



Bethlehem

I saw a radiant star that night,
So big and shining bright;
It seemed to whisper softly—
"This is a memorable sight!"
I saw a burdened donkey
Carrying with such tender care
The sweet little mother-to-be
And a young man beside her there.
They stopped at the village inn,
But for such there was no room.
So nestled in a nearby stable
A cry of joy and gladness
Was passed from angel to angel.
The song the angels sang that night
Because of a new-born Babe
Brought tears to the humble parents'
sight:

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth—
Peace, and good will to all men.
For unto us is born in the city of David
A Savior, who is Christ the Lord!"

Marilyn Langness

Reflections on the Wonders of God's Love

(Luke 2:1-20)

by
Richard Lofthus

Most people are familiar with the story of Christ's birth. At this time of year we often see the story depicted by way of a nativity scene, or perhaps acted out at a Sunday School program. Of course, we are all well aware of the commercialization of Christmas and how this has worked to turn our attention from the actual meaning of the event. And we are aware, I hope, of how easy it is to know the story, but never consider its significance. Strangely enough, despite the familiarity of the story (and also because it is so familiar) I think we have to try harder to think about what the account of the Incarnation says to us. Consequently, I would like us to consider what the account of Christ's birth tells us about the wonders of God's love. Perhaps we will gain new insights into this well-known story. I intend to point out three observations from the Christmas story and they will show how it is

that God deals with man, as well as man's response to God.

The Revelation of the Gospel

The first observation we can make concerning the passage is that God chose to reveal what had been the secret and hidden wisdom of the Gospel through an event which appears, on the surface, to be the birth of just another peasant child. Had any of us been in Bethlehem on that night, we would have had no clue that the image of the invisible God was now among us. We would not have realized that the first born of all creation, the One in whom all things consist and hold together, was in our midst. We would have been oblivious to the fact that we were witnessing the Word becoming flesh.

Because God chose to reveal the Gospel in this way, one thing we learn

The Nativity

The polychromed terracotta and wood figures depicting The Nativity are attributed to Neapolitan artist Salvatore di France (1770-1815). Along with other creche figures from that era, they were part of the 14th annual Christmas exhibit at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Religious News Service Photo



is that Christianity, in any of its traditional forms, has rooted this most characteristic and daring assertion in the ordinary realm of human history. The Gospel is not communicated by means of some esoteric, higher knowledge, as the Gnostic sect was to claim as the path of salvation. The Gospel is not dropped from the sky in a conveniently typed and bound volume. The Gospel is delivered within the context of human history by way of this humble birth.

This Incarnation is not only the central doctrine of the Christian faith—it is also the center of history. From the conviction that God intervenes in the life of mankind by direct action at certain definite points in time and place, order and structure are given to the flow of history. Because of the Christian interpretation of history, there is a beginning, a middle and an end to history. In a sense, the Biblical doctrine of God's active revelation was the most influential factor in the institution of the very idea of history. For example, it is not an accident that we take the year of Christ's birth as our point of reference in the chronological system we use with our calendar.

Divine Interpretation

A second observation is that God sent an angel of the Lord to announce and interpret the event to and for the shepherds. From this we return to a point we made earlier. Left on our own, we would not have been able to understand the significance of this birth. God graciously accompanies this act with interpretation. The mystery of the Gospel, which Paul says that God decreed before the ages for our glorification, was not discovered by two people, or even by a group of people in dialogue with each other. It was not discovered through research by well-trained scholars. Neither was it discovered through the efforts of an ecumenical council. As important and meaningful as are all these methods for arriving at knowledge, they are not sufficient to arrive at what the angel announces. The mystery of the Gospel was revealed from a source outside of our human condition.

The Gospel is not the product of human ingenuity. Neither is it the result of a long process of the evolution of religious conceptions. On the contrary, it is difficult for man to accept the basic doctrines of Christianity. As Christopher Dawson, an influential Christian thinker, skillfully put it:

"That God should have chosen an obscure Palestinian tribe—not a particularly civilized or attractive tribe either—to be the vehicle of His universal purpose for humanity, is difficult to believe. But that this purpose should have been fully realized in the person of a Galilean peasant executed under Tiberius, and that this event was the turning point in the life of mankind and the key to the meaning of history—all this is so hard for the human mind to accept that even the Jews themselves were scandalized, while to the Greek philosophers and the secular historians it seemed sheer folly."

From the text itself we realize that in the darkness of that night in Bethlehem most of the city was unaware of the Messiah's birth. It took the glory of the Lord to frighten and startle the shepherds into the realization that this was not just another night to be spent out in the fields. And so we are led to conclude, as did Luther when he commented on this passage, that the Gospel and its interpretation are an entirely supernatural sermon and light, setting forth only Christ.

A Personal Message

A third and final observation is that the angel personalized the message: "For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). From this we learn that the Incarnation means more than an expression of God's abstract love for mankind. This is a message of salvation that is initially given to the individual shepherds, but is eventually meant to be a message of "Joy to the World." One of the wonders of God's love is that He has chosen some to communicate His mes-

"This Incarnation is not only the central doctrine of the Christian faith—it is also the center of history."

sage to all. The shepherds are quick to understand this and they go and find the Christ Child. Finally, we read that, "When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds" (Luke 2:17-18).

And so we are compelled to conclude that it is not enough to simply believe that the story is true. The Gospel calls us to receive what God has given us by exercising faith in believing that Christ was born *for us* and that His birth is ours. And once this is grasped, we must, as did the shepherds, make known what has been done for us. As Luther says concerning the Christmas story:

"Therefore see to it that you derive from the Gospel not only enjoyment of the story as such, for that does not last long. Nor should you derive from it only an example, for that does not hold up without faith. But see to it that you make an exchange with him, so that you rid yourself of your birth and receive, instead, His."

We must realize more of what it means to live between the first and second advents. Christ came to earth as a humble peasant boy as the first advent was accomplished, but when the second advent occurs, He will return as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And may He find each of us obeying as the shepherds did—they wondered at His love and responded to it. Not the least of the wonders of God's love is the fact that He gives us an opportunity to give ourselves back to Him.

SVERDRUP . . .

with the pants.). But mother took care of both in short order.

Our lakeshore had a heavy growth of rushes, so thick that it was next to impossible to row a boat through it. Dad took a scythe and waded out and mowed it close to the bottom, making room for the boats and a 15-ft. channel out to open water. As soon as the weeds showed their heads above the water, Dad would cut them off. This he did three summers in succession, which killed the weeds permanently. The water was about six feet deep at the outer edge of the rushes and was a good depth for trolling. We always caught all the fish we needed and how Sverdrup loved to row his little boat and troll. We also built a dock, about 30 feet long, where we tied our boats. The water was about waist deep at the end of the dock. This dock was useful for many purposes. We carried water for the house from there and laid our towels on the dock when we went swimming. We tied our boats to the dock during the daytime and at night we would pull them up out of the water.

One day Sverdrup was walking out on the dock looking at something on the shore and stepped off the end of the dock. Mother often warned us children to be careful not to fall into the water, but she said she never thought of warning Sverdrup.

When we needed some lumber, we would get our neighbor to cut some timber and haul it across the lake on the ice to the mill. In the summer we would make a raft of the lumber and float it home behind the boat, when the wind was in the right direction. One day when there was a nice soft wind from the right direction, Dad asked Sverdrup if he would go with him to the mill and get some lumber so they could build a bathhouse. He thought that if they took both the boats they could lay the lumber across the back of both boats and each row his own boat, as there were not too many boards. Yes, Sverdrup was game, so off they went, loaded the lumber on the boats and started for home.

Everything went fine until they got about halfway home, close to the

center island, when the waves got too big so that they swamped Sverdrup's boat and he came crawling on hands and knees on the lumber over to Dad's boat. He hadn't more than gotten to Dad's boat when that swamped, too, because of the extra load. Then they had to push the lumber off both boats and let it float. Luckily they were near enough to the island so that the water was only waist-deep. So they had to get out of the boats and rescue the lumber by steering each board toward shore on the island, taking each board on shore, piling them in a neat pile, then rescuing the boats, emptying them of water, and rowing home. The lumber they would have to get some other day. It was God's guidance that this didn't happen in deep water; not that the boats would sink, but it would have been next to impossible to rescue the lumber. Dad said that it was a funny sight to see Sverdrup crawling on the lumber over to his boat; but when his boat swamped, too, they both had a good laugh. Both men were soaked, but it was a warm summer day so neither of them suffered any bad effects.

It was always "berry season" when the Sverdrups were with us and there was an abundance of wild strawberries and raspberries which ripened in June and July. The blueberries didn't ripen until later. Mrs. Sverdrup and the two girls enjoyed joining us in picking wild berries. There was an abundance of wild berries, especially on "burnt-over" land, and we made good use of it.

My mother was an avid student of the Bible and she loved to talk with Sverdrup about the deeper things and hear his comments, which were simple, still deep. We always had a devotional hour before retiring. We would sing many of the old spiritual songs and then have Bible reading and a prayer session, where everyone would take part. I was too young to get too much out of Sverdrup's messages and the discussion. But after I entered the ministry and had to dig deeply in studying my sermons, I would often get *Sverdrup's Skrifter*, Volume VI, where from page 1 and on there are hundreds of short mission messages, which appeared in *Gasseren*, a little mission

pamphlet Sverdrup edited and mailed to our LFC constituency, in order to bolster their interest in missions. We had only one mission at that time and that was Madagascar, which Sverdrup helped begin. Anyone who can read Norwegian and understand it would benefit greatly in reading these pages which appeared in *Gasseren*, bi-weekly, for many years, and have been preserved and are to be found in *Sverdrup's Skrifter*. It is too bad that these messages are not translated into English so present day people could make use of them. I can remember when *Gasseren* used to come to our home. Mother could hardly wait till she could get time to sit down and read Sverdrup's meditations, which were both simple yet deep.

I do not recall how many summers Sverdrup visited us, but I remember one spring I painted his boat for him in anticipation of his coming. For this he thanked me and gave me a dollar bill, the first dollar bill I had seen. We used mostly silver dollars at that time. It was also the first dollar I had earned, except for trapping muskrats and selling the skins for six to eight cents each. In the later years Sverdrup was too busy to come to Furuly. Too busy for his own good.

He had been ailing, and died suddenly, at a still comparatively young age. It was reported by his wife that he was up one night and cried out to his wife, "Aa Mamma, jeg er saa forferde lig syk" (Oh mother, I am so terribly sick) and then fell across the bed and died. That was 1907. I do not know how the news reached us, as we had no phone. The only news we received was *Decorah Posten* or *Folkebladet*, but I can remember how both Dad and Mother wept. Augsburg Seminary and the whole LFC mourned this seemingly untimely death and tremendous loss. "Who can we get to fill his place?", was the question on most people's lips. He seemed so indispensable; but they say there is no indispensable person. Great men die, but the world goes on. Sverdrup was a great man; but both Augsburg and the LFC had to get along without him, impossible as it seemed. I cherish his memory. I can still see him in my mind's eye. Blessed be his memory.

(See the editorial, "About This Issue.")

"... I can remember how both Dad and Mother wept."

Life on the Edge of Town



CHRISTMAS, 1933

Glorious Christmastime. Thoughts go back to childhood. Wonderful memories.

To lead off today, I am going to re-print, in translation, something which my father wrote about Christmas in our home in Saskatchewan for the 1935 *Kristelig Folkekalender*.

"There was commotion in the parsonage. The mother was fixing the food. The Christmas tree was being brought into the house and as it was being taken in, the youngest child said, 'Christmas is coming into the house.' The oldest children helped Mother decorate the tree. Father helped to hang some Christmas decorations also. He brought out *Jul Vesterheimen*, the Nordmand alliances' Christmas magazine, *Kristelig Folkekalender*, together with the Christmas issues of other papers. *Folkebladet's* and *Vennen's* issues were special. The candleholders were on the table. The presents lay at the foot of the tree. And soon the table was set.

"Laache's devotional book and the

hymnbooks were in their place. The song, 'Now we will gather together,' was sung and then the text for Christmas Eve was read: 'For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given.' Then the festival meal was eaten—the one above all others in the year. The four large candles were all the illumination on such an occasion.

"The Christmas tree candles were lit and the presents handed out and there was jubilation and happiness in every way. The gifts were very modest, but if the blessed allotment hadn't come from the (home) mission secretary, then they would have been even less, so all were truly thankful. At the question why we get Christmas presents, the children answered, 'Because God gave us Jesus as a Christmas present.' Mother and Father and the children now marched around the Christmas tree and sang several of the well-known Christmas carols and songs, beginning with 'Thy Little Ones, Dear Lord, Are We.'

"Then it began to get late and the children went to bed and the youngest

When the Lord of glory came to bring the highest blessing, He chose the lowest place as the best adapted to accomplish His purpose. Intelligently and cheerfully He emptied Himself of all His riches, as they were neither needed or suited to effect His purpose.

—J. Hudson Taylor

ones had to take some of their presents with them and they dreamed about their gifts as they slept.

"The pastor and his wife sat up for a while later and looked over the Christmas literature which contained so much good. Thoughts went back to the first Christmas night way back in Bethlehem. . . . He went to the window and looked out. The snow lay deep and it was terribly cold. But the heavens had more stars than ever before. A couple of lines from a Landstad Christmas song came to mind: "Outside it is cold and the snow is deep, God's heavens full of stars still we see.' "

As Parish Pastor

As I think back on Christmases as a pastor my thoughts go first to my first parish, at Medicine Lake, Montana. And that is the only one I have time to deal with now.

Our schedule called for a morning service Christmas Day in the town church. In the afternoon I'd drive the 33 miles to Zion, out on the reservation, north of Brockton, for a 3 o'clock service. Then at 7:30 or 8 we would have the Sunday School program out there. In between I would have supper either at the Edwin Larson's or the Orville Qualley's, both living near the church. Perhaps it would be a lutefisk and lefse meal, something to bring joy to the heart of most any Norwegian. Many of our readers know the Orville Qualleys. The Edwin Larsons are gone now. Edwin was our organist. I can still see him at the organ. Perhaps he played a little slowly, but he played with feeling. In our prayer meetings he would pray, "for our pastor, who is the shepherd of the flock." Those were good words to hear, but humbling, for me who was a very young pastor.

But back to Christmas. One of those Christmases at Zion I stayed overnight at the Edward Kaschube home, up north, so that I could go on from there the next morning across sparsely settled country to conduct services at Rock Spring (we met in a schoolhouse at that time) and Bethel on Second Day Christmas. We had a "black Christmas" that year, but by the time we got to Kaschube's it had begun to snow and by midnight the ground was white.

—Raynard Huglen

THE WANDERING CHILD

(a Christmas legend)

Put a candle in the window
On this night of His birth,
For they say the Christ steps
below

To walk upon the earth
As a poor child. He seeks
the gleam
Of an awaiting heart,
And by the light of candle
beams

He is led through the dark.
Remember, though, not as
the Lord

He walks the world alone,
But as a humble beggar lad
Who has no kin or home.
A little crust is all He asks
Of bounty He has given—
Can charity be such a task
In this dim world of men?
Some hearts are much too
small for Him,
And some keep Him
outside.

Some hearts are shuttered
with their sin,
But some hearts open wide.
The inn was barred, there
was no one
Who cared about the poor;
But where the candle shines
He comes

To knock upon the door.

—Marlene Moline



A Minister's Musings

Pastor Einar Unseth



BEAUTIFUL CHRISTMAS MUSIC

Luke 2:13-14

"Just then I heard the beautiful Christmas music." Twenty years ago a 20-year-old Japanese girl spoke these words as she gave her Christian testimony on the day of her baptism. This girl, Yukiko Takahashi, said in her testimony, "When Christmas morning came, I really wanted to know the significance of Christmas. So I turned on the radio. Just then I heard the *beautiful Christmas music*. While listening to the music, I decided to visit a Christian church. That evening when I went to the church, the door was open. I entered the church, removed my shoes, and stood in the entrance. This was all I could do; I could go no further. Having no courage to push the door open, I thought I would listen to the sermon from the entrance. While I was thinking this, someone opened the door and invited me in. The church was not what I had expected it to be. I was so much captivated by something beyond description that that day was truly a day of real joy to me."

Never shall I forget seeing that girl enter our little church in Yaizu, Japan, that Christmas night. She came in late and sat in the back row of chairs. However, her attentiveness told me that her heart was open to hearing of the Savior's coming into this world. Her openness that Christmas night led to her accepting Christ and being baptized. In her testimony she also said, "God is the God of love. He looked into my heart. Thus by driving me into the depth of despair, He showed me how hopeless I was before Him. I prayed

with all my heart and soul, and God forgave one who had been hard and a hypocrite. The Word which was given then was: 'And him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.' " That girl testified that she came with a sinful and hopeless life. But through hearing *beautiful Christmas music* she was inspired to visit our church. Thus she came to trust in Christ who forgave her sins and gave her a life of hope.

As I think of Yukiko Takahashi being so moved by *beautiful Christmas music*, I am reminded of the first Christmas song which must have been *beautiful Christmas music* indeed. That music is spoken of in Luke 2:13, 14: "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Without doubt that was *beautiful Christmas music* because it was sung by a choir from Heaven. That choir was a huge choir composed of thousands of holy angels. The choir's song was one of praise to God as the singers honored God's Son who was then lying in a humble manger. But the choir's song was also directed toward men, promising us peace through the Christ Child.

Ever since that first *beautiful Christmas music* was sung that night of Jesus' birth, countless numbers of people have been blessed by *beautiful Christmas music*. Christmas music blesses us because it tells us that unto us has been born a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Once again we have the joy of hearing this *beautiful Christmas music*. May this wonderful music with its wonderful message lead us also to God's House and to God's Son. ✝