

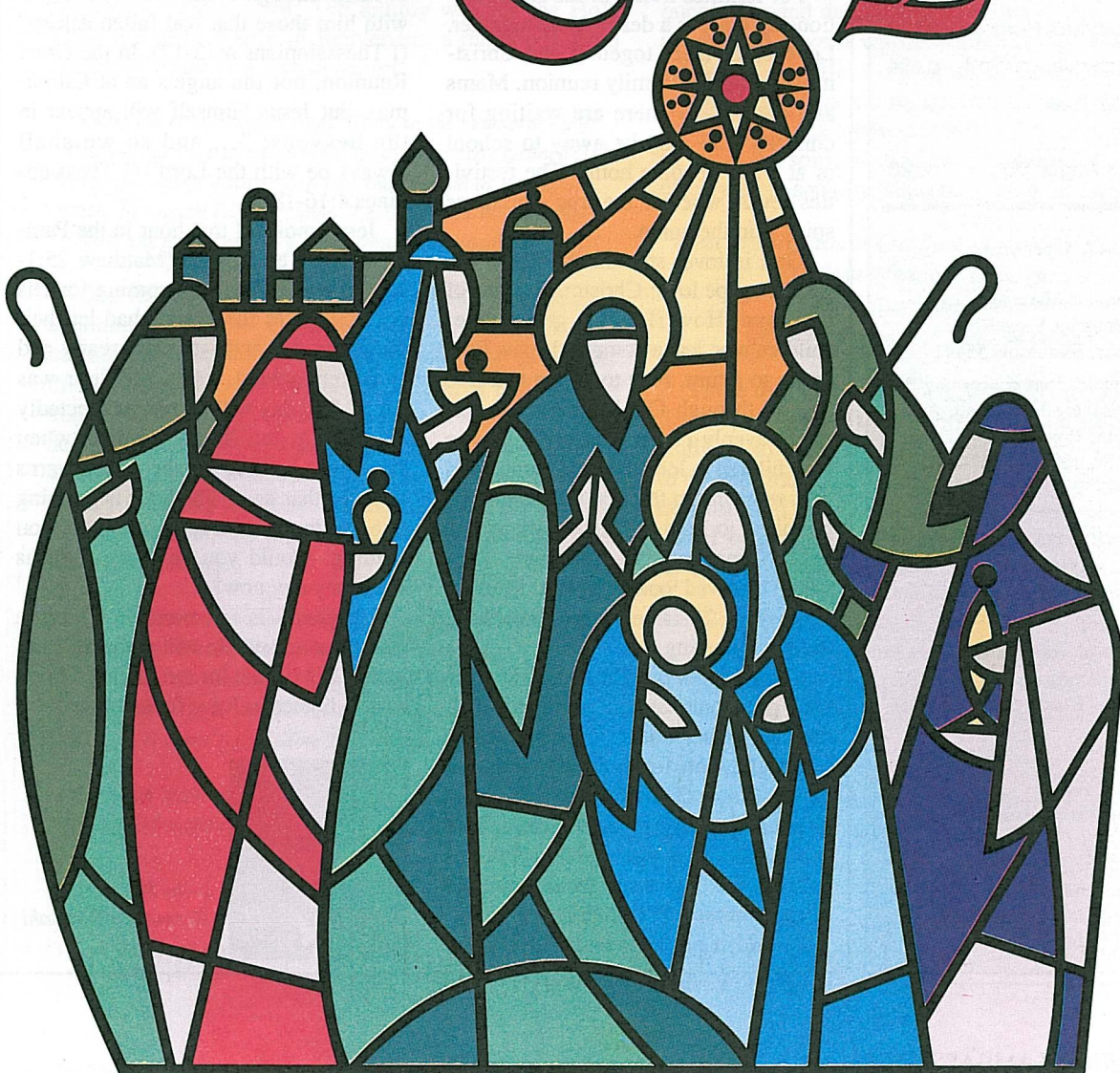


THE LUTHERAN  
AMBASSADOR

December 10, 1991



# Peace on Earth





# THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

December 10, 1991 • Vol. 29, No. 23

## THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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## The Great Reunion

Over these last months, we have been thinking about our fellowship with a great and holy God. Sinful man had a problem with his fellowship with the holy God. But the Apostle John wrote: "Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (I John 1). Thus we have considered some of the aspects of establishing and maintaining that fellowship. We must make sure we are not deceiving ourselves regarding that relationship, for John added in I John 1:6: "If we say we have fellowship with Him (Jesus) while we walk in darkness, we lie, and do not live according to the truth." We need to pray often: "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! (Psalm 139:23-24).

For families living in the right relationship there is a desire to be together. Love binds them together and Christmas is a time of family reunion. Moms and dads everywhere are waiting for children who may be away to school or at work to come home. The festivities reveal whether the true Christmas spirit is in the home.

God is love, specifically the more perfect agape love! Christmas speaks of that love. How He must grieve over children who leave home and show little desire to return. First to Adam and Eve and all through Old Testament times, the Heavenly Father sent invitations to His children to look forward in faith and with rejoicing to the first Christmas. He promised to send the Redeemer to blot out the sins that separated them. They would be saved looking toward Jesus, as we in New Testament times look back to Jesus's coming.

Christmas is the Father offering the hand of reconciliation, inviting his children to gather about Jesus and come home and find forgiveness purchased by the blood of the Saviour, the great gift: "the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Is the Father still waiting for you to come home this Christmas?

Would it not be wonderful to meet

Jesus in person some Christmas? He has planned just such a great reunion hour with His family. We are told: "Christ having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him" (Hebrews 7:23). The Apostle had told the Thessalonians Christians about the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. As they waited, they grew fearful that Jesus had come and they had missed Him. Paul reassured them that a great apostasy and the Anti-Christ must come first. They were also worried that their loved ones that had died would miss out, but Paul said, "As Jesus died and rose again, even so through Jesus, God will bring with him those that had fallen asleep" (I Thessalonians 4:13-17). In the Great Reunion, not the angels as at Christmas, but Jesus Himself will appear in the heavens: "... and so we shall always be with the Lord" (I Thessalonians 4:16-18).

Jesus spoke of that hour in the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), as the Bridegroom coming for His Bride. Five of the virgins had let their lamps go out and were not ready and were left behind. "And the door was shut!" The day will come unexpectedly as it did at the first Christmas when Jesus was born as a babe. Jesus warns often of that hour. The hour is growing late and many are the signs of His soon coming. Would you be ready if Jesus came any day now?

Christmas is for eternity! He came first to save, and He will come again to gather His people for the Eternal Christmas to rejoice in Jesus forevermore.



— by Rev.  
Kermitt C. Grundahl



# THE GIFT OF SALVATION

**G**ifts make up a crucial part of our lives. Without them, we would all be impoverished. Gifts not only enrich the recipient but the giver, also. As the days swiftly fly towards Christmas, and we scurry about to find the right gift for loved ones, let us pause for a moment to reflect upon the greatest of all gifts — the gift of salvation.

What makes this gift so great? It is found in its source and its nature. The Apostle Peter aptly describes it in his first epistle wherein, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he wrote: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ... who has begotten us again ... to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away ..." (1:3,4 NKJ).

No doubt many of us, perhaps all of us, have received gifts which have been valued treasures from special people in our lives. Not only have these gifts brought joy because of their worth and value in themselves, but they have increased value because of those who have given them.

So it is with our salvation. Only God, the Almighty, could give such a gift! He is the source of our salvation. This is one facet of this gift's value. James reminds us of this greatness saying that it has "come down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning" (James 1:18). In other words, God, our dear heavenly Father, has given us this gift, not because we deserve it or have a right to it, but because He is love and His love is constant, not changeable. The greatest expression of His love is in this that He has given "us His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). What God has given to us in inner peace and joy in this world because our unrighteousness has been exchanged for the righteousness of Jesus Christ. And beyond this, He has given us the fullness of the glory of heaven. This is so beyond human expression that even the Apostle John on the Isle of Patmos could not adequately describe it in the revelation that was given to him. The richest man in all the world or any of the richest companies listed among the "Fortune 500" could not give such a blessing to us!

Furthermore, what gives a gift its worth or value is its nature. We may receive or give some things that seemingly will not wear out. But no matter how durable "things" are, they are still a

part of this realm where they are subject to rust, thieves, and insects. Not so with that which we receive from the Lord. First of all, this gift of salvation is incorruptible. It will never diminish in vibrancy, intensity, splendor or glory.

Second, this gift is undefiled. The reason it is undefiled is because it has not been touched by human hands. God, the Son, is the "author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). How grateful we can be that our Lord Jesus Christ has so completely fulfilled His work of salvation on our behalf that we need not add any effort or work of our own to it. This salvation has been so thoroughly forged in the furnace of God's affliction that no human thoughts or efforts can make it more perfect or holy. Whatever we would do, it would only defile it. Our Lord, alone, could truly say His work was finished when He allowed His spirit to leave His human body on Calvary's cross.

Furthermore, our salvation is so fully wrought within us by God's grace that no one can say, "I have done this!" Our salvation is our Lord's doing. It was for this joy that He was willing to endure the cross and suffer the shame. Praise God that we do not have to try to save ourselves. If we had to, we would be always burdened with insecurity, for we would never know when we have done enough. Or on the other hand, we would be filled with guilt and fear since Satan could accuse us of our failures and sins. Salvation, as a gift, frees us from all of this. Glory to God, we can sing as the songwriter has written: "Not what these hands have done can save this guilty soul: Not what this toiling flesh has borne can make my spirit whole. Thy work alone, my Savior, can ease this weight of sin; Thy blood alone, O Lamb of God, can give me peace within."

Third, the greatness of this gift of salvation is found in the fact that it does not fade away. It is not a mere dream or unfounded hope. It is as sure and steadfast as God Himself. There may be times when the trials and tribulations of life in this world will enshroud us in gloomy darkness. We may lose sight of the heavenly City to which we are going. But be assured, my friend, there is not a mere "pot-of-gold fantasy" at the end of a rainbow; there is "the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, having the glory of God" (Revelation 21:10f).

**"How much  
do we  
appreciate  
this gift?"**



— by Rev.  
Wayne Juntunen



## SALVATION

Since God gives such a precious, inestimable gift, we need to consider two vital truths: (1) How much do we appreciate this gift? (2) Do we own this gift ourselves? Most of us, I believe, are eager to let others know what we have received for Christmas from others. It shows what we think of the gift, and it expresses appreciation to the giver for being so kind and thoughtful. Conversely, how grieved would our benefactor be, if we left the gift unused or worse yet unopened. How are we letting our heavenly Father know how much we appreciate this gift of salvation, which He reveals to us through His Word? Are we eager to read, study, and meditate upon His Word? Are we excited about worship? Do we make time for personal communion with our Lord in prayer? How important is Jesus Christ to us really? Do we make opportunities for telling others this greatest story that has ever been told? These are but a few of the questions we ought to be asking ourselves. During this advent season, as we are busily preparing for Christmas, let us take time to examine our own hearts, seriously and frankly, in the light of these questions!

Finally, in regard to owning this gift ourselves, we can have the inner witness of God's Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that "we are children of God" (Romans 8:16). Is this gift of salvation by grace through faith ours, personally? Do we have the assurance that our sins are forgiven through the blood of Jesus Christ? Let us not allow this Christmas to slip by without this assurance! For all the gifts we give or receive at Christmas or at any other time, for that matter, none can be compared to this great salvation. Let us not neglect such a blessing! Let us heed the admonition of the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews: "... if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him ..." (Hebrews 2:2, 3)?



To us is born a blessed child,  
To us a Son is given,  
Born of a virgin undefiled,  
He is our hope of heaven;  
Had not this Child to us been born,

We all had been in sin forlorn,  
He is our sole salvation.  
All thanks, Lord Jesus Christ, to Thee,  
That You were pleased a man to be:  
Save us from condemnation!

— Anonymous German hymn writer



# THE GIFT OF SONG

— by Rev. Bruce and Karen Dalager

Imagine Christmas without music: no ringing bells, no carolers, no choir cantatas. It would certainly not be the same, would it? In fact, Christmas could not occur without music. Above all, Christmas speaks to us of the presence of God. And where God is, there is music.

Song surrounds God.

When God created the earth, angels were present to sing praises to the Creator (Job 38:7).

We do not know that the angels who visited the shepherds outside Bethlehem sang. The words they spoke, however, have inspired some of the greatest music ever composed. Pargolesi's "Glory to God in the Highest," is just one example. On that glorious night the hosts of heaven must have sung grander songs than ever before for none of the other acts God had performed could compare to this one when, in fulfillment of His promises, He sent His Son to be born of a Virgin.

In his vision of heaven, the Apostle John saw angels sing praise to God. He records that not only angels, but all creatures join in singing praises to the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, (Revelation 5). Music fills heaven (Revelation 14:3, 15:3).

So we see from the beginning to the end of Scripture that God is constantly surrounded by songs of praise offered to

Him by His creation. Thus, it is natural and right that the celebration of the birth of the Savior be observed with music. The occasion gives birth to song.

It is an unfortunate but indisputable fact that man perverts and misuses the gifts that God has given him. God, in Christ, invites mankind to join the angelic hosts in singing the song of praise to Him. But fallen mankind does not want to glorify God. He rejects the song just as he rejects the Savior the song glorifies. Fallen man replaces that glorious song with the impoverished drivel that originates in his carnal nature, exchanging the truth of God for a lie and serving the creature rather than the Creator. Even some of those who claim to know the song foolishly allow themselves to be caught up in the "spirit" of the season as interpreted by the world, doing things and singing songs that feed the flesh rather than the spirit.

The Psalmist expresses what all God's people must acknowledge. "He put a new song in my heart, a hymn of praise to our God" (Psalm 40:3). What a glorious honor has been given to the people of God! They are made members of the chorus that sings praise to God. They have been given new hearts, hearts that both know and desire to sing the song God wants to hear. May that song be found in our hearts now and forever.

## The Gift of a Child-like Heart

— by Dawn Johnson

Christmas is a time of the celebration of the birth of our Savior. It's a time of gift giving which has extended from that first Christmas when Jesus came to earth as a babe in a manger and the wise men brought this precious child gifts. Many times we limit our thoughts of gifts today to material things which are given to us. But there are other kinds of gifts as well which are not found in our material surroundings: gifts **only** received through Christ and a life that is surrendered to Him. One such gift is that of a child-like heart. What does a child-like heart consist of? I think the answer is found in Psalm 131.

Verse one of this Psalm reads, "O Lord, my heart is not proud, nor my eyes haughty; nor do I involve myself in great matters, or in things too difficult for me." Here we see that a child-like heart, first of all, consists of humility. What better example of humility do we have than that of Christ? He was the son of God — yet He was born a babe in a lowly stable to earthly parents. He gave up all the riches of heaven to live a life of poverty on earth (Philippians 2:6ff; II Corinthians 8:9)!

One day His followers were discussing who among them was the greatest. Jesus answered them by calling a child to Himself and saying, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the

kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3-4). Children are good examples of humility for us today, too. They are not concerned with making an impression on others, nor do they worry about things which are "over their heads."

Another aspect of a child-like heart seen in Psalm 131:1 is trust. Not a trust which is placed in ourselves or others for "cursed is the man who trust in mankind" (Jeremiah 17:5), but a trust that is placed firmly in God. "Trust in the Lord forever, for in the Lord, we have an everlasting Rock" (Isaiah 26:4). A child jumping down from a high place into the outstretched arms of an adult **trusts** that adult to catch him or her. So should we put our trust in our Lord who is waiting to fold His almighty arms around us in our times of need and each day of our lives!

Next, as we see in verse two of (continued on page 7)



**L**ord, give us Thy joy — the joy that no man, no poetry, no circumstances,  
no conditions can take from us.

Sometimes, oh God, I have wondered about  
whose God you are —  
and there have been other times in my life  
when I have approached Christmas  
with question and misgiving.  
Is Christmas only for children  
and the very rich?

There are so many who cannot afford to give  
and there are more who seem to be deemed  
unworthy to receive.

The message of Christmas became garbled  
and I groped endlessly  
for the peace the angel promised.

I have hated the people who are easy prey  
for the plastic holiday trappings;  
I knew what I wanted Christmas to be —  
I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit,  
but there was no room in the Inn.

And even as I tried to make it  
a season of everything for everyone —  
I resented the preparation  
that seemed always to celebrate the glory of self  
rather than the glory of God.

I wanted to make them happy —  
the people I loved;

I wanted always to give them a Christmas  
they would never forget,  
and that if they remembered little else in their lives  
they would remember Christmas.

— I don't really know when or how it came about —  
that the angel came to me  
and said — "be at peace."

But suddenly there was peace  
in my entire being  
in expectation and celebration.

I learned the truths,  
the feeling in my heart was what counted.

I learned that love given freely  
is the ultimate gift —

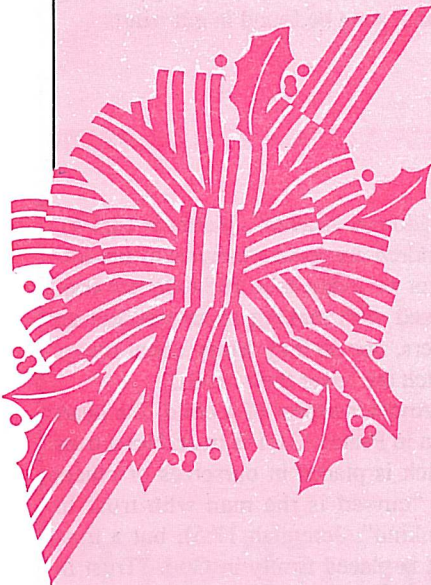
Christmas and everyday.

If I could then, I would give you the world  
but there is really little of it  
that is mine to give.

I cannot give you joy,  
not even a parcel of that which now is mine.

I can laugh when you need me to laugh,  
I can listen when you need me to listen.

I can hold on gently  
to the fragments of your life



— by *Norma Brick-Samuelson*



and I can pray for you —  
 that you too will learn,  
 that you, only you/me — us alone  
 with God's help  
 make our own joy!  
 Nor can I give you peace —  
 the tranquility we all seek,  
 the feeling of fulfillment,  
 acceptance —  
 accepting ourselves for what we are,  
 accepting pain as well as happiness  
 and accepting God's will —  
 We must also make our own peace.  
 But — I **can** give you love,  
 an abundance of feelings that I have nurtured  
 over the years.  
 Some shared  
 but many never unleashed from the heavy heart  
 that has held them captive.  
 This is a love that does not exclude or discriminate,  
 that does not demand  
 or misuse,  
 that is not prefaced by expectation  
 or dependency.  
**It is the gift God gave to us**  
**in the birth of a Saviour who is Christ the Lord.**  
 Thank God for the gift  
 that was  
 and is to all people.  
 I am no longer groping —  
 may we live everyday in the spirit of Christmas;  
 peace be with you — this day and always.

Doing it with love — including wrapping packages — which few like to do.  
 Extending ourselves — even when it may seem there is little to give — comes  
 back to us in rich rewards.

"If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then  
 shall thy light rise in obscurity" (Isaiah 58:10). Christmas is a beginning — as  
 it was **in** the beginning — it is not just a day, it is the birthday of Christ — it  
 needs also to be a way of life.

Love is another word for Christmas.  
 Give us then this day, and other days  
 to be kinder,  
 to be committed  
 to be gentle,  
 to endear,  
 to be strong,  
 to be needed  
 to be brave  
 to be here.

Life can be beautiful today, and all of those tomorrows we are privileged to  
 live. Our faces may glow with promise and our eyes discover the reality of being,  
 in doing something to enrich our own person by reaching into the lives of others.

In the words of James 4:8, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to  
 you." Thank **you**, dear Lord, for the gift of your love, so freely given. Please  
 teach us all how to give freely and joyfully to your glory.



## CHILD-LIKE

Psalms 131, a child-like heart consists  
 of contentment. "Surely I have com-  
 posed and quieted my soul; like a  
 weaned child rests against his mother,  
 my soul is like a weaned child within  
 me." The Bible speaks much of con-  
 tentment which is defined as "an  
 uncomplaining acceptance of one's  
 share." When we think of a child going  
 through the process of being weaned,  
 we are reminded of how he or she  
 complains and struggles throughout  
 this time — yet when the process is  
 complete he or she is filled with con-  
 tentment! Through this example we  
 can see that contentment is something  
 that we must learn as Paul himself con-  
 fesses in Philippians 4:11, "... for I  
 have learned to be content in whatever  
 circumstances I am."

Finally, in Psalm 131:3 we read, "O  
 Israel, hope in the Lord from this time  
 forth and forever more." Where would  
 we be without the expectation of what  
 our future with Christ holds for us?  
 Once again we think of the example of  
 a small child; it is so beautiful to see  
 the hope in the heart of little children!  
 They accept the Word of God with no  
 doubt that its promises are true.

Children in themselves are a large  
 part of our Christmas celebrations!

So as we think of the giving and  
 receiving of gifts this Christmas sea-  
 son, let us not forget the gifts that Jesus  
 offers to us — especially the gift of a  
 child-like heart! Let us ask Him for the  
 grace to have a heart of humility and  
 trust like that which was evident in the  
 life of Christ; of contentment in all that  
 God has given us and of hope that  
 looks to that glorious future that Christ  
 has planned for us!



# Warm Memories

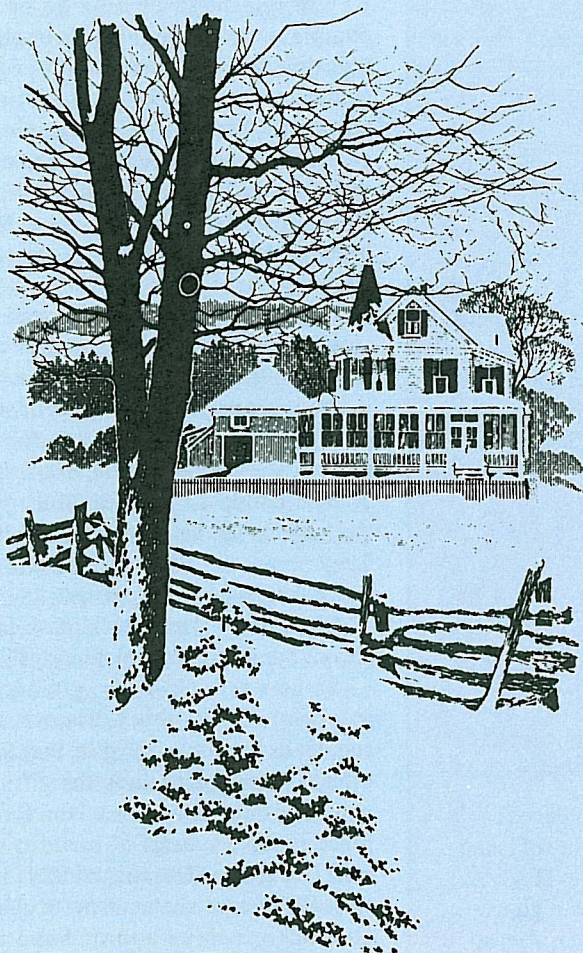
The snow is falling. No, it is more like “sneet” — a combination of snow and sleet here in our southern Nebraska community. But the warmth of a good friend sharing memories of years past takes the briskness out of the cold, blustery winter afternoon. Louise will be 90 this December 13. She is a lady of indomitable spirit! Just a year ago she spent the winter months with family in California. What did she do for excitement? Just took a helicopter ride!

With our cups full of steaming coffee, Louise began telling her story.

Buechenbronn, Germany, 1901, was Louise Aschbacher Goeking's birthplace. Growing up brought a variety of responsibilities, especially after her father was hurt in a factory accident in Goeppingen. The accident happened when Louise was seven and after that, her mother, an excellent seamstress, assumed responsibility of the farm work as well as running the household. For Louise, being the oldest daughter of eight children, hard work became second nature. Schooling was not

neglected and while attending school, knitting, crocheting and counted cross-stitch were a part of the curriculum, along with the regular school work. The three-mile walk to school meant leaving home at 7 in the morning — after the chores were done. After school, it was more farm responsibilities and for the girls it included baby sitting the neighboring children. As the brothers became older, they worked in a factory in Ebersbach as well as going to school and working at home.

## The Gift of Memories



*How lusterless would be our days  
without the gift of memories.  
They are the precious threads that weave  
the Present with the Past;  
both sweet and bitter moments  
that last and last and last.  
How wonderful that we can have  
the privilege of instant replay.  
In some manner every memory  
brightens the tapestry of today.  
Thank You, Lord, for darker strands,  
the times that were so hard,  
that remind of lessons You have taught  
when we were hurt and scarred.  
Shining golden filaments  
are woven here and there,  
remembrances when You've been close,  
... the Mary-times  
... the answered prayers.  
yes, thank you, Lord, for memories.  
As we savor these times again,  
life is given an added dimension  
... because of them.*

— Doris Stensland



# on a Cold Afternoon



— by Elaine Klug

Even with all the expected responsibilities, the Aschbacher family had those special times that all children remember with fondness. Louise remembers her father always getting the Christmas tree, most of the time from the forest by permission. It was never put up until Christmas Eve and the oldest sons would always decorate it with dad sitting on the sofa supervising. He was the boss and no one crossed or played tricks on Father! Every Christmas morning was family time with each receiving a gift, not expensive and most of the time, handmade. Maybe gifts didn't abound, but family love was there for each one.

By the age of 14, Louise had finished the seventh grade and was ready to "go out" to work. That meant leaving home and staying with those for whom you were working. As a hired girl, working in the fields of hay, wheat, oats, barley and potatoes in their season was expected as well as the other chores. Chores like cleaning the barn, currying the cows before milking, and feeding the hogs and chickens were all in a day's routine! The lady of the house did the cooking and baking so Louise didn't have that responsibility — only keeping the hardwood floors clean! Those floors were never washed with soap and water — only oiled, and it was a must to keep them looking clean and shiny at all times!

At age 20, Louise chose to go to America. It was a difficult day when she and her father set out for Stuttgart. she could see that her leaving was taking its toll on her father. After all, she was his first-born daughter. Perhaps he was wondering if he would ever see his

lovely daughter again? Sensing that it was difficult for him at Stuttgart, she sent her father back home insisting that she could go on her way by herself. And she did! On to Hamburg and on to America! It was not a pleasant trip. While on the ship the shots she had taken before leaving Germany, made Louise extremely ill. Arriving at Ellis Island, she was detained for one month while she recuperated. A young lady all alone in a foreign land was formidable, but God was her daily companion and she put her trust in Him.

An aunt and uncle lived in Nebraska and Louise became their hired girl. Later she discovered that they had a husband picked out for her. When she met the man, he proceeded to inform her just what her responsibilities would be with the farm and field work as well as her household responsibilities and he told her how many children she would give him. Louise thought otherwise! She hid out in the bean stalks. The pre-arranged marriage was off. With help from neighbor friends, Louise set out for Lincoln, Nebraska. She would make her own choice for a husband!

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## "God was their daily companion, not just at Christmas."

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Louise, strong in her faith, prayed that God would guide her life in America. Now living in Lincoln in 1923, she worked as a housekeeper and attended night school. It was there that she met a fellow student who was to become her future husband. On April 10, 1928, she married Bill Goeking and they moved to his farm near Gilead, Nebraska. Bill had been responsible for his mother and she continued to live with Bill and Louise on the farm for six years.

Farm life was happy and Louise joined right in to help where she could. This was a life familiar to her with

chickens, cows and horses. God blessed Louise and Bill with four children, but heartache came when the first-born came stillborn. As in the past, Louise, along with her husband, Bill, chose to believe that God knows best and in the midst of their tears, kept their faith through this difficult and sad time. God was their daily companion. Two more sons and a daughter were born to this couple. Traditions carried on. Bill always got the Christmas tree and the sons decorated it on Christmas Eve. Of course, daddy's little girl "helped out." They were a happy family. Attending worship services on Christmas Eve became a part of their lives each year — after the chores and tree decorating had been accomplished. And Christmas mornings arrived with the eagerness that children exhibit. And each received their special gift of love.

Heartaches seemed to touch the lives of Louise and Bill. Trusting in God for their strength became evident when their only daughter was killed in a car accident. (It was with their daughter's children that Louise spent the winter and took the helicopter ride.) Just a few short years later, their handsome young grandson was also taken from them in a car accident. Having witnessed their faith, many lives were blessed in our small community. God was their daily companion, not just at Christmas.

Louise says that she didn't have time to learn cooking and baking as a child at home. She has certainly learned it over the years. Her homemade caramel rolls are wonderful! Louise lives by herself in the home Bill built for the two of them. Bill is at home with the Lord since March, 1988. They served the Lord in their everyday lives as parents, neighbors and friends. I'm grateful God blessed my life by getting to know them. Louise is an inspiration and I treasure knowing her as she continues to serve the Lord in her church and community.



# The Gift of a Special Child

— by Jan Norr

**T**his is the season of the year when our thoughts and our worship center on the birth of a special child, Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Saviour. This gift from our Father God, who would make available salvation for all of us. We would like to tell you about the special child God has given to us. His name is Matthew, our fourth son.

Matthew means, "Gift of God," you see. He may seem to be a gift with a few imperfections in the eyes of the world. Matthew has Down's Syndrome, but in the eyes of God, Matt is a beautiful treasure.

We believe that, early in the year 1971, there was a meeting in Heaven. God said: "I have a special child to send to earth. I will send him to parents who will accept him and love him. He will receive an excellent education with every opportunity to learn and succeed. I will use him in miraculous ways to be a blessing to many. This little one will be a witness of My love and My mighty deeds, that many may be touched and know how much I love all of my children."

When Matthew was born, the obstetrician told us that perhaps we should



Left to right: Roy Smalley, Executive Director, Special Olympics 1991 Summer Games; Matthew Norr; Stephanie Wannabo, Female State Special Olympic Athlete of the Year; and Mr. Jack Grace, Chairman of the Board, Minnesota Special Olympics.

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**"We did not realize at the time that the love this little one had to give would become an inspiration to us and to many others."**

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not take Matt home. We should consider putting him in an institution. There was no way of knowing how retarded he would be. When the pediatrician came in two days later, he said, "Take him home and love him." That is exactly what we did.

We did not realize at the time that the love this little one had to give would become an inspiration to us and to many others. We did not realize that, as we began to call on God, He would show us great and wondrous things in His marvelous love for us. We began to raise our boys with a new awareness of a Father God who was so near and dear.

When Matthew was 11 months old, we placed him in an early intervention

program. This school was one of the first in the state, another of God's marvelous provisions. At the age of two, God began to use him in our church. Matt would try to sing; he didn't know the words, but he sure was loud. When we sang the doxology, he would raise his little hands in praise to God. Many times people would come up to us after the service, some with tears in their eyes, and say, "I was so blessed by Matt today," or "We should all be so free in our worship."

God worked many miracles in Matthew's life. I have to backtrack a bit here. When Matt was only two weeks old, he became very congested and could barely breathe. We decided



to take him to the hospital. As I was wrapping him up to go, I cried out to God: "Lord, you have just given us this little one, we love and accept him. Are you going to take him from us? Your will be done." Immediately Matthew began to breathe easier, and the terrible rattle in his chest disappeared. When Matthew was five, he swallowed a penny. He gasped desperately for air and was gagging up phlegm, but no penny appeared. I grabbed a towel, and we rushed him to the hospital. We had to wait a long time for a doctor. As a distraught mom, I was thinking the worst: "They will have to operate ... maybe he will die." I put my head on Matt's shoulder and I cried to God: "Father, I don't know what you have planned for this little one ... is he going to die? Whatever your will, Father, I surrender him to You." Immediately Matt coughed, and a large amount of phlegm came up onto the towel, and the penny rolled out on the floor! We were to realize later that God caused the penny to roll out on the floor, or they may have operated to no avail. We told the nurse and she said we could go home. No need for a doctor's services that day. We had the Great Physician assisting. Praise be to God!

Another great moment was after Matt won two gold medals at a Special Olympics state meet. The pastor asked him to get up and tell the congregation how he won the medals. Matt then proceeded to tell them that he had prayed to God to win those races and that they all had a race to run, also, and if they prayed to God, He would help them to win their race, too. I looked around and there were many people with tears in their eyes. The pastor said: "Well, we can go home, we have had a sermon already." As Matt walked back to this seat, the congregation gave him a standing ovation. One of the dear ladies from church commented: "When Matthew smiles and gives us a hug, our hearts just melt."

We could go on and on telling you about all of the ways God has touched people through Matt. He graduated from high school last June. He was accepted so wondrously by all of his peers. His Special Education teacher

says that he laid the ground work for all Special Education teens at the high school. He has been involved in other Special Olympic events. He was on the International Team that competed in the games in Minneapolis this summer and was chosen Minnesota Athlete of the Year. The people in our little city have taken him into their hearts, and he is spokesman for "Outreach," a program to promote Special Olympics. He has become very outgoing and is an excellent speaker.

Matthew is going to a technical college now. He is in a vocational program to prepare him for a job in the community. When his English teacher asked him to write a paper on what he planned to do, he shared a few of his thoughts: "I am really worried and scared about going off to school and not have the support of my family with

me. There is something I can do, I can ask God to help me, He will see me through this and that is good to know. My fear will go away just by talking to Him. He will provide me with a good and healthy life. He will lead me whenever I feel troubled, and His love and guidance will make me feel happy and secure."

We are so thankful to God for giving Matthew to us. When he was only about six years old, we came to the point in our faith where we could honestly and without any doubt say: "Lord, if You were to say today, 'I'll make Matthew normal,' we could say, 'No, Lord, we wouldn't have him any other way.'"

We don't know what the future holds for Matthew. He will always need some supervision, but we are putting him in God's hands, trusting Him to care for Matthew's future.



*The meaning of gifts is in  
the love that they express, the  
love both given and received.*

— Paul Tournier



We'll take both buggies tonight," Ole Overseth advised his hired man. It was Christmas Day, 1893, and tonight was to be the first Sunday School Christmas program at the Lands Church. Since Nordlie, Overseth's hired man, was president of the newly organized Sunday School and Overseth's 17-year-old daughter, Helmina, was one of the teachers, it was necessary that they go on ahead to see that everything was in order before folks began to arrive.

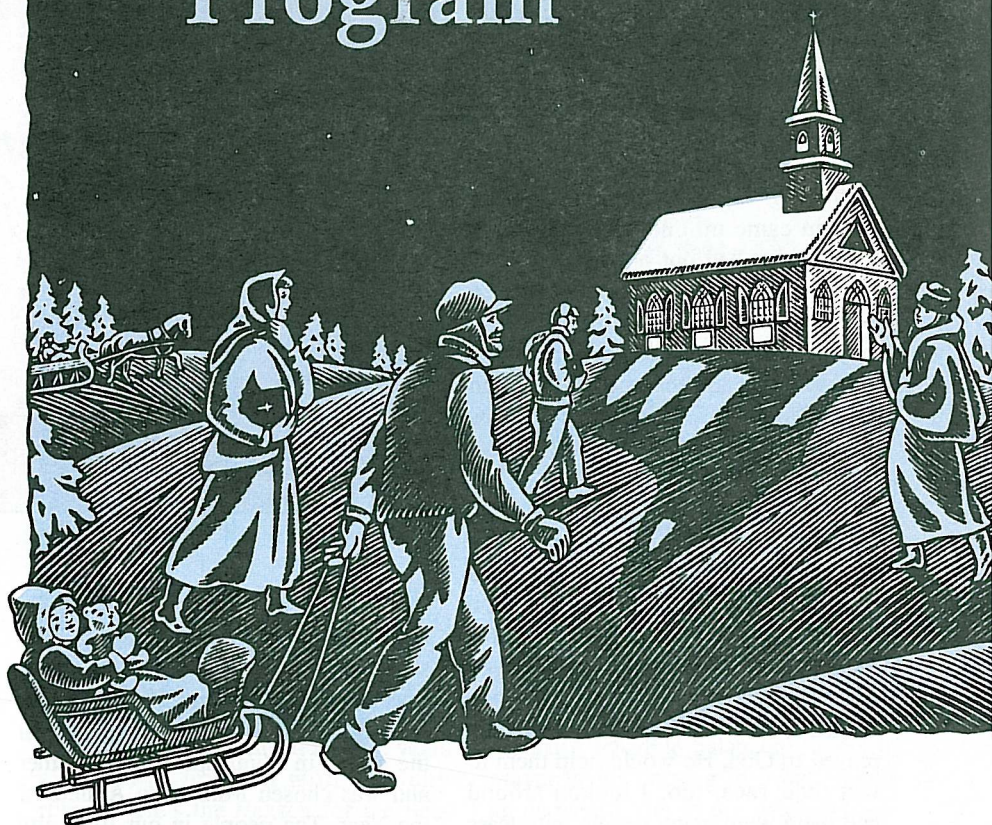
Nordlie harnessed up the teams and hitched them to the buggies so they would be ready to go. There was hardly any snow on the ground this year. It wasn't like Christmas back home. This was the sixth Christmas since he left Norway and today, memories of mother and the Christmases in Hurdal had been flooding his thoughts. Christmas Eve it had been even worse.

Nordlie had been tense all day. He wasn't good at trying new things. And he wondered about the outcome of this new undertaking of a Christmas program by the Sunday School. Perhaps people wouldn't come after all the practicing and work the teachers and he had been through. I guess you always feel a little insecure when you are a newcomer and only a hired man. Anyway, he hoped the parents would be there and that the Christmas story would be told.

As Nordlie was washing and shaving, he bolstered his confidence by reminding himself that it was Pastor Hauge who had chosen him for the job of president of the new Sunday School. He felt that this year had gone well. There were 70 pupils attending. He put on his white shirt and trousers, and looking into the little mirror in his room, he attached the stiff white collar with the collar buttons and tied his necktie. After breathing a short prayer, he slipped on his suit coat and headed downstairs. "Well, tonight we'll see how it goes."

The little church soon filled with many people, both downstairs and in the balcony. The teachers had tried to decorate a little with a few evergreen boughs and ribbons. The lamps had been lit and there was an excitement in

# The First Christmas Program



—by Doris Stensland

the air. Something new was about to happen.

When it was time to begin, Nordlie stood up and welcomed the audience. He opened his Bible to Luke 2:5, and read the invitation ... "Come, let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing which has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." He paused a moment and added, "It is the wish of the teachers and the children that the first Christmas will come alive for all of us tonight."

He closed his Bible and announced, "Let us begin by singing together 'Et Barn er Født i Bethlehem.'"

Nordlie motioned for Minnie Sogn to begin playing the pump organ and Jens Bjorlie stood up and placed his violin in position. As the music began, Nordlie faced the audience and led in the singing.

"A babe is born in Bethlehem, in Bethlehem,  
Therefore rejoice Jerusalem.  
Hal-le-lu-jah! Hal-le-lu-jah!"



Ole Nordlie watched the people as they sang this familiar Christmas carol in their native tongue. Even up in the balcony where many of the newcomers and bachelors sat, he noticed the enthusiasm of their singing. Looking across the audience, his eyes rested on Stener Paulson, at whose place he had worked as a hired man several years ago, and sitting on the women's side was Paulson's kind wife, Thora. And there were Lars and Maria Sogn who had come from the same area in Norway as he, and there were Ole and Johanna Overseth. Everyone seemed to know the many, many verses by heart.

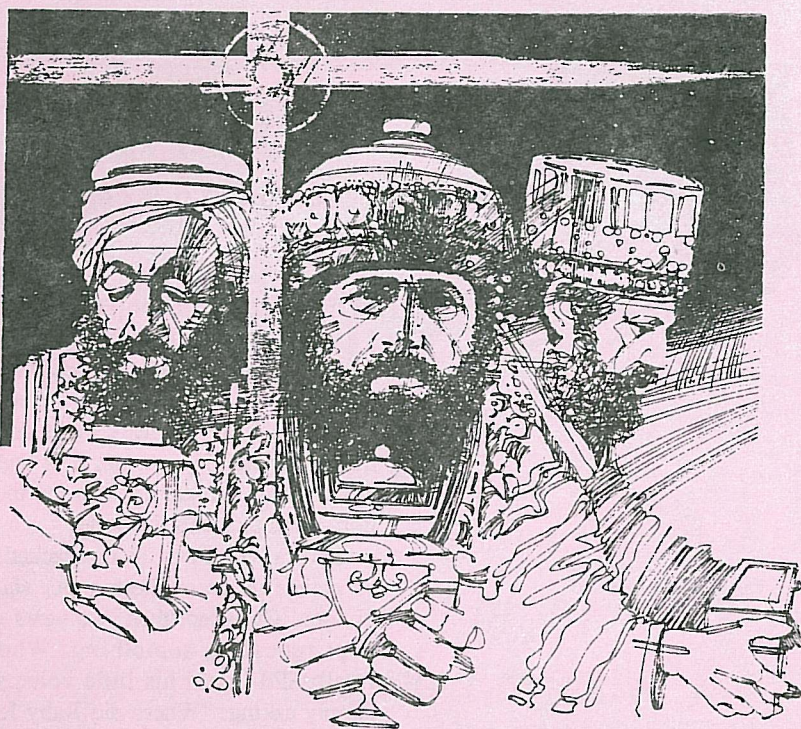
"Hal-le-lu-jah! Hal-le-lu-jah!"

He glanced at all the Sunday School children, their eyes sparkling with the excitement of this night. There sat Carl, who would probably be too bashful to speak up when it was his turn, and beside him were the Ekle boys with their fine voices. He had had these boys in his Sunday School class. And there was the little Sogn girl who had a song to sing tonight. The lamplight was shining on her long, golden hair.

**"Everyone seemed to know the many, many verses by heart."**

Nordlie knew the whole audience would thrill at the great sound the Sunday School produced as together they sang "Her kommer dine Arme Smaa (Thy Little Ones Dear Lord Are We), and "Jeg er saa Glad hver julekveld" (I Am So Glad Each Christmas Eve). He knew, for he had listened to them practice. Pastor Hauge would read the Christmas story and have a short message. The first Christmas program in Lands Church would end with the congregation and Sunday School singing "Glade Jul" (Silent Night).

Love and Christmas warmth seemed to fill the sanctuary. It was good to be there among these familiar faces. Suddenly he realized something ... and it surprised him. But it was true. This community in Norway



**They presented  
unto him gifts;  
gold,  
and frankincense,  
and myrrh.**

**Matthew 3:11**

Township in Nordamerica was beginning to feel like home.

**Note:** But the event didn't really end that night, because unto this day the celebrating of Christ's birth with a program by the Sunday School children has continued in Lands Church every Christmas since Grandpa Nordlie led the first one in 1893. Now, almost 100 years later, there still are

excited children with their happy voices singing many of the same songs they sang that night, only now it is not in Norwegian. And every young person who has grown up in the community has memories of these Sunday School Christmas programs. In fact, when they think of Christmases past, it includes Sunday School programs in which they participated.



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## “Lord, let us please You in our celebration of Your birth”

# Where Did Baby Jesus Go?

—by Beth Christian Talley

The weekend after Thanksgiving always finds our home strewn with boxes as we pull decorations out of the closet and set the scene for Christmas. Like so many other activities of the holiday season, it is one of those rituals that can lose its joy in the light of all that must be done.

Several years ago, as I unpacked the ceramic figures of the manger scene, our son, Christian, then two years old, kept repeating something. When I finally did listen, his little voice was simply asking: “Where did Baby Jesus go?” Christian was not satisfied until I found Baby Jesus in the wrappings and placed Him in the center of the scene.

If we were to be honest, there is a little voice inside each of us asking, amidst all of the Christmas rush, “Where did Baby Jesus go?” We are so preoccupied celebrating Christmas, that it is hard to find room in our schedules to worship the King. The Holy season easily could be renamed the “hurried” or “harried” season. It is not a problem that has just surfaced in our fast-paced world of the 90s. Twenty years ago, the slogan “Keep Christ in Christmas” challenged us. Ten years ago, it was updated with a catchy rhyme: “He’s the Reason for the Season.” The last few years, in keeping with the country-craft trend, it has become, “Jesus is the Heart of Christmas.” Two thousand years ago, the phrase used was, “No Room at the Inn.” Let us not deceive ourselves: it is

not really a matter of our busyness, it is the nature of our humanness.

If we could only get past what our world offers us at Christmas and meditate on the gift God offers the world: a relationship with Him through His Son, Jesus Christ. The trappings of this season may grow old, but never the reality of Jesus Christ in our lives. It could even make us go through the shopping crowds with a smile on our face, a Christmas carol on our lips and patience in our hearts!

God’s people have great cause for celebration as we commemorate His first coming and anticipate His second. Let us use this season to proclaim “Immanuel” to an ever darkening world. Let us show the world that no matter how many manger scenes are ordered disassembled, how many plugs on lighted crosses are pulled, or how many school Christmas pageants are re-named “holiday programs,” God is still with us and man’s need for Him has never been greater.

As I finish last-minute shopping and attend festive dinners (trying all the while to keep the checkbook and the daily schedule balanced), a simple prayer keeps coming to mind. “Lord, let us please You in our celebration of Your birth” are the words on a little plaque hanging over my kitchen sink. If I were wise, I would breathe that prayer often during this season. Then I wouldn’t end December asking: “Where did Baby Jesus go?”





“And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word. ...”

Matthew 2:13



# They Saw The Light

— by Lydia McCarlson

That night some shepherds were in the fields outside the village guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly an angel appeared among them and the landscape shone bright with the glory of the Lord. They were frightened.

Tobias, who had been listening intently as I was reading the Bible from Luke 2:8-12 (Living Bible), suddenly interrupted me.

"Did the shepherds run and leave their sheep?" asked Tobias. "No," and I kept on reading... "The angel reassured them. Don't be afraid. I bring you the most joyful news ever announced, and it is for everyone! The Savior — yes, the Messiah, the Lord — has been born tonight in Bethlehem. How will you recognize him? You will find a baby wrapped in a blanket, lying in a manger."

I closed the Bible and finished telling Tobias the story of the shepherds. They had seen the light. They returned glorifying and praising God for the visit of the angels, for they had seen the child just as the angel told them.

As I placed the Bible on the table, I noticed the evening shadows approaching. Winter days were becoming shorter and shorter. "Tobias, please turn on the light."

"Okay, Grandma," he answered as he jumped up.

The light revealed everything in the room. "Look," Tobias exclaimed, "Light is really great!" He paused, then turned to me and quietly asked: "Remember, Grandma, a while ago you said, 'I was blind but now I see.' What did you mean by that?"

I thought back to a few months ago. A cataract had developed on my left eye and it completely blocked my vision. After the lens implant and the bandages were removed, I was overjoyed. I could see the light again. I continued to explain to Tobias that this is what happens in our lives. Sin blinds us. But the grace and forgiveness of God lets us see the light again.

As if thinking aloud, Tobias said: "Grandma, I wonder if God will heal my eyes so I can always see the light. I pray

everyday that the patch I wear on my eye will correct the problem. Then my doctor can do surgery on my other eye."

## THE GIFT





With tears running down my cheeks, I hugged him and said: "God knows what is best for us and He loves little children. So have faith in Him and He will not leave you."

It was Christmas vacation and Tobias was spending the night with us. When it was bedtime, he timidly asked: "Do you care if I leave the light on? Mom always lets us at home."

I had hardly left his room when he called out: "Grandma, I guess I don't need the light on because God's light is shining through the window." Sure enough, it was a clear moonlit night. I turned out his light with a smile.

As I left his room again, I thought about a recent devotional we had read in *Our Daily Bread*. "I heard about a little boy who didn't want to get out of

bed one day. He told his parents: 'I won't get up until I see Jesus.' At first they didn't know what he meant. But when he pointed to a picture on the wall, which was a painting of Christ, they understood. He wouldn't get out of bed until it was light enough to see the face of Jesus.

That little boy's remark reminds me that our first thoughts when we wake up to a new day should be directed to the Lord in heaven."

I went and sat in the living room where Grandpa was reading the paper. My mind was filled with thoughts of the day. I reflected on the Christmas story ... Mary's blind faith in God's promise to give her a son, called Jesus ... Joseph's blind faith to take Mary to be his espoused wife. Joseph saw the light. The shepherds believed and followed the light. Later the wisemen followed the star to Bethlehem.

So should I daily walk in the light; then when the darkness comes, I will not be afraid. He is there if I call upon Him and believe. John 8:12 says: "I am the light of the world: he who follows Me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

# OF CHILDREN

— by Lorilee Mundfrom

*Children are a gift of the Lord ... Psalm 127:3*

**N**ovember 23 and December 26, will always have special meaning to my husband, John, and me. These are the days on which God gave us our two boys. Timothy, now eight, came to our family the day before Thanksgiving in 1983, and Joshua, now 19 months, came the day after Christmas in 1990. We are privileged to have adopted these two very special boys, these precious gifts He has given to us.

There are many nights when I tuck our older son into bed that he says, "Mom, tell me about when I was adopted." It is fun to relive those days that seem just like yesterday. To relive the excitement of the phone call that came at work is wonderful. I could not tell you what business was being transacted at work that day, but I can tell you the words that I heard on the other end of the phone line "Lorilee, we have a little boy for you, if you are interested!" You can be sure we were interested! And we had less than 24 hours before we would go from being a childless couple to having our own little baby boy! I can tell you that the stormy weather of Minneapolis could not stop us from meeting our appointment that next day.

After arriving at the adoption agency, we were taken into a room where a lady was lovingly holding a little baby boy. As soon as we laid our eyes on him we knew he was "our Timothy." Tears of joy flowed from our eyes. The time spent alone with him in that room was precious indeed. What a dear child God had given to us.

Today, Timothy is a busy second grader who loves Jesus, school, reading, music, bugs, rocks, Legos, and his little brother!

In the fall of 1990, we received a phone call from an agency asking if we would be interested in adopting a little baby with Down's syndrome. We said we would consider it.

After thinking and praying much about this, we felt very confident that the Lord was leading us in that direction. So we began meeting with the social worker. We have known a few families with Downs children, and these children have been such blessings to their families.

As we came closer to the time of having Joshua come to our home, we met him at the home of his foster parents. It was certainly love at first sight. We waited with great anticipation for the day he would come to be part of our family. On December 26, we received Joshua, a very special gift from God. We have received him in love but we truly are the ones blessed by his great capacity to love. He does very typical 19-month-old things like playing with paper, crawling all over, and giving lots of hugs to Mom, Dad, Timothy, and his stuffed animals. We know there will be challenges ahead for all of us, but God's grace is sufficient for all things.

Yes, "children are a gift of the Lord ..." We are so thankful to be recipients of His gracious gifts.

*For to you  
is born this day  
in the city of David  
a Savior, who is  
Christ the Lord.*

Luke 2:11





Grandpa sat and hummed in the sleigh. Now and then Arne caught a few words, but those he did grasp did not make sense. More than once he felt like grabbing Grandpa by the arm and asking: "What is it you are singing to yourself?" Yes, it often seemed as though Grandpa was far away while he sat in the sleigh and held the reins.

The sleigh bells sent their jingle out into the stillness of the forest. The snow under the runners creaked as Blakken was anxious to get home. Grandpa and Arne wanted to get home, too. Their mission was accomplished.

Grandpa and Arne had been deep in the forest to find a beautiful and appropriately tall Christmas tree. When Grandpa had finally found one, he took the sharp little ax in his right hand, went close to the tree and said: "Ja, ja, and so it will be you that will stand in the holder and bear stars and light for Jesus!"

Strange and wonderful talk, thought Arne. "Can a Christmas tree, a common spruce, understand anything?" Arne mused. Both Grandpa and Arne sat comfortably in the sleigh with their legs under a fur robe. The Christmas tree laid beside them. The stars began to appear in the heavens. They twinkled so brightly and friendly. "And so it is you who will bear the stars and light for Jesus!" It was like Grandpa's words lay in the air. Arne seemed to hear them over and over again. The blinking stars seemed to be rejoicing. They must be God's own Christmas tree decorations. All were as light and stars for Jesus.

What had Grandpa meant by those words? Arne thought and pondered. Suddenly it dawned on him: "Grandpa acted as though he was talking to the tree, but he meant me!" Arne's thoughts continued: "Remember he said: 'Bear stars and light for Jesus.'"

Arne looked up at Grandpa, and again he seemed to be in another world. He began to sing, only this time Arne could hear the words clearly: "My heart always wanders to the place of Jesus' birth; my thoughts gather as

# The Christmas Tree

What Arne  
Learned from  
Grandpa

in the answer to life. There my longing finds a home, there my faith has its treasure. I can never forget you, blessed Christmas night!"

Oh, so beautifully Grandpa sang! A couple of times it sounded as if Grandpa was crying. Arne glanced at him. Yes, he had large, bright tears in his eyes. Now it was as though Grandpa forgot Blakken, Arne and everything. He quietly sang again and again: "... there my longing finds a home, there my faith has its treasure ..."

"Hey, now you must get going, Blakken!" Grandpa stopped his singing and spoke gently to Blakken, who began to pick up his trot. Arne sat with his own thoughts. Grandpa looked over

"Grandpa and Arne had been deep in the forest to find a beautiful and appropriately tall Christmas tree."





— by Sverre Seim  
from "Ved Juletid," translated  
by Rev. Raynard Huglen



at him. "Now what are you thinking about, Arne?" he asked. But Arne didn't think he could talk about it.

"Oh, you can tell your old grandfather. I'm not going to spread it around the neighborhood," he added, with a warm twinkle in his eye.

Arne took courage and said: "Well, I've been thinking about what you sang: 'There my faith has its treasure ...' and also what you said to the Christmas spruce before you cut it down: 'Bear the stars and light for Jesus.'"

"Well, now, my boy, I can explain it to you. Without Jesus I am so poor and wretched that I would be lost. Yes, I deserved that. But then Jesus came down to us. He took the sin and punishment upon Himself. And then He told us that all He had done, I should have had to do. He wanted to save me all by grace and make it so that I at last would come home to Him in heaven. Shouldn't I be glad and sing? Jesus gives me all and is everything to me. Therefore, I sing again and again: 'There — in Him and with Him — my faith has its treasure.' I am rich only

because Jesus calls me His own. And I can say He is mine."

For a long time nothing more was said. Then Arne broke the silence: "But what is that about bearing the stars and light for Jesus?"

"Haven't you learned the song where one of the stanzas tells about the shining star high on top? What does it represent?" Arne knew. Grandpa continued: "If you can only hear what the

**"There my  
longing finds a  
home, there my  
faith has its  
treasure. I can  
never forget you,  
blessed Christmas  
night."**

spruce has to tell you, you will hear a good sermon. Here is a little of it. As my branches bear a light, so should you and I who are branches on the Vine, Jesus Christ, be lights and shine for Him. We are never ashamed that we belong to Jesus, but gladly make it known. This is bearing witness that Jesus is the treasure of our hearts. Now you know what it means to bear a light and a star for Jesus."

Again the two rode along in silence. Blakken trotted across the snow covered road. The stars were now so many that they couldn't be numbered. Suddenly Arne spoke: "Grandpa, there was something else I really must say to you this Christmas Eve."

"Now, what can that be?" asked Grandpa kindly.

"I would so like to bear a star and light for Jesus."

"Ah, bless you, my boy! That is the best Christmas gift you could give me. And I know One who is even more glad than I could ever be with such a gift."

Blakken stopped suddenly, turned his head and looked at the two in the sleigh.

"Look, Arne. It's like Blakken has understood what we are talking about. It's like even he, though only a horse, wants to both bear and pull a star and light for Jesus."

They turned into the farm yard. Arne's father came out and welcomed them.

"My, what a beautiful Christmas spruce you got!" he said as he lifted the tree out of the sleigh.

"That's for sure," answered Grandpa. "But the best of all is that Arne, the Christmas spruce, Blakken and I want to bear stars and light for Jesus."

Father thought that Grandpa was talking in riddles. But Arne ran to his father and said: "I'll explain everything to you later."

When Arne and his father turned around, they saw Grandpa trudging up the steps and singing: "There my longing finds a home, there my faith has its treasure. I can never forget you, blessed Christmas night."



— by Rev. Craig Johnson

The little angel fell asleep. It was understandable. Being an angel in the church's living Nativity scene can be tiring work. He was asked to stand relatively still for two hours. That's a pretty impossible challenge to present to an active five-year-old boy. Especially in a situation so full of rather irresistible temptations. All around him were animals to pet, friends to play with, people to talk to and hay to throw. In the midst of it all, he was expected to be an angel. It just got to be too much. He laid down in his big sister's lap and fell asleep.

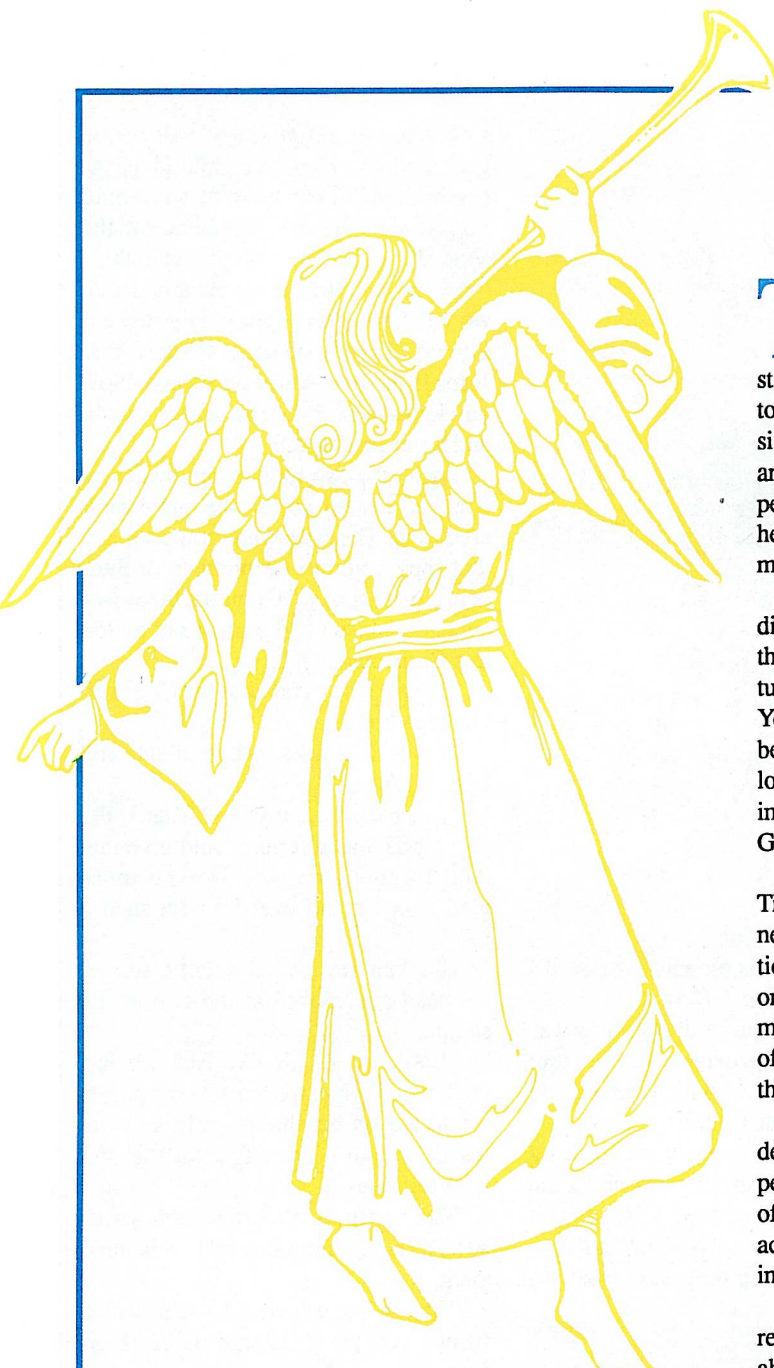
Being an angel is tough in a nativity scene and more difficult still in real life. Trying to resist the temptations that surround us and present to those who view us a picture of perfection is not only tiring work, it's impossible. Yet, we often in our own strength try to do it. We think being an angel is necessary for us to be acceptable and loved by God. We work hard at trying to play a role, trying to be the perfect angel we think we have to be, before God will let us into His kingdom.

Jesus didn't come into the world to honor angels. I Timothy 1:15 tells us He came into the world to save sinners. He came for those who have fallen for the temptations, who haven't always played the role right. Our lives on display do not resemble pictures of perfection as much as problems splattered all over the canvas. In spite of that, Jesus loves us greatly. He wants in His kingdom the one who has failed at being an angel and admits it.

On the night of Jesus' birth, God sent angels to declare His goodwill towards people and His offer of peace. He didn't send these angels to the spiritual giants of the land. He sent them to common shepherds. In that act is the message that the common person, through faith in Christ, can have peace.

Philippians 4:6, 7 encourages us not to worry but to receive God's incredible peace. We don't have to worry about whether or not we are good enough for God. We don't have to try to be perfect angels in order to be acceptable to Him. We, even though we are far from perfect, are made acceptable through faith in Jesus. We have done lousy jobs of being angels and yet we can be at peace because of what God has done.

Like the little boy who fell asleep, I get tired of trying to play the part of an angel. I usually don't do a very good job of it. Yet, like that boy seemingly was, we can be at peace. Jesus came to forgive and offer peace to those who are not angels. The peace He offers is not something we achieve or earn for being angels. It is something we receive when we admit we have failed and when we trust in Jesus.



## The Tiring Work of Being an Angel



## Our President Writes

# God Gave

**C**hristmas is a time when most of us think a good deal about giving. God's Word reminds us that it was God Himself that has provided us with the motivation for our giving at Christmas time. The heart of the Gospel is found in that familiar verse, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

It was because God gave that we have Christmas. That which has the deepest meaning and the greatest value for us this Christmas is rooted in the fact that God gave.

The Gift that God gave us the "unspeakable gift" of His own Son. The Bible tells us that it was God's love that moved Him to such action. We can only marvel at so great a love for a worthless, sinful world. We cannot comprehend why a holy God should have any love for us. But we need not understand this blessed truth. We are to believe and be saved.

Yes, the great Gospel mystery is revealed to us. God so loved. He gave His only begotten Son. God provided the proof that He loved the world. We now know that He loved the world so much that He was willing to offer His best for its redemption. We now have the proof that He loved you and me to that extent also.

In our day to day living we often experience discouragements, disappointments, heartaches and pain. The times come when we may even begin to question God's love for us. The apostle Paul brings us the reassurance that God's love and purpose for mankind has not changed. In the words of Romans 8:31, 32, we are told: "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Paul gives us the evidence for today that God loves us, He is for us. "He spared not his own Son." What encouragement and strength is there for us. God gave.

Not only did God give His own Son, but He continues to give. Romans 8:32 assures us that because He has given His Son, He will with Him freely give us all things — all that I need for salvation, all that I need for the trials of my faith, all that I need for living a life pleasing to Him. All of that is God's gift that comes to me through His Son.

God has not changed, nor has His purpose for mankind changed. He continues to love the world with an everlasting love. He continues to offer the gift of a full and free salvation to all who receive His Son.

A blessed Christmas to each of our readers. May the joy of this season be centered in the great truth that God gave.

—Rev. Richard Snipstead



## Our Writers

**Norma Brick-Samuelson**, author of "The Gift of Love," is a nationally published and award winning writer. She is the author of three books, and has been employed as a news magazine editor, columnist, television journalist and producer. Married to Faith, South Dakota, rancher Bob Samuelson, she free-lances as a consultant and motivational speaker. The Samuelsons are members of Bethel Lutheran Church, Faith.

**Rev. Bruce and Karen Dalager** express their shared love and concerns for church music in "The Gift of Song." They reside in Grand Forks, North Dakota, where he serves Trinity Free Lutheran Church. Pastor Dalager is also a member of the AFLC Hymnal Committee.

**Rev. K.C. Grundahl**, who continues his "Light on the Way" series with a special article for this Christmas issue, lives in retirement at Colorado Springs, Colorado, after a full career as a pastor and teacher at the Lutheran Bible Institute.

**Rev. Raynard Huglen**, no stranger to our readers, is the former editor of *The Lutheran Ambassador*, and has once again translated a Christmas article from the original Norwegian for this issue. He continues to live at Newfolden, Minnesota, and serves as the part-time pastor of Telemarken Lutheran Church, rural Thief River Falls.

**Rev. Craig Johnson** is the pastor of Spencer Creek Lutheran Church, Eugene, Oregon, and the author of "The Tiring Work of Being an Angel."

**Dawn Johnson**, the wife of Rev. Leslie Johnson, Lake Alma, Saskatchewan, where she is a busy mother and homemaker, is the author of "The Gift of A Child-Like Heart."

**Rev. Wayne Juntunen**, author of this year's Christmas sermon, is introduced to our readers for the first time as the pastor of Bethel Free Lutheran Church, Grafton, and Aspelund Free Lutheran Church, Vang, North Dakota, where he has served since June 1. He was born August 5, 1933, at Cloquet, Minnesota, and after graduation from the Esko, Minnesota, high school, he attended Suomi College and Augsburg College, graduating from the latter with a B.A. degree. He then enrolled at Suomi Theological Seminary for one year before returning to Minneapolis, transferring to Augsburg Seminary from which he graduated in 1963. The Apostolic Lutheran Church of America was his home church body, and he served congregations in Duluth and Esko, the latter for 17 years. In 1982 he joined the faculty of Inter-Lutheran Theological Seminary, Plymouth, Minnesota, and became dean after receiving the Doctor of Ministry degree from Faith Evangelical Lutheran Seminary, Tacoma, Washington, in 1987. He and his wife, Patricia (Ylitalo), have five children and five grandchildren.

## Adopted

a greeting from the  
WMF president

Adoption is a miracle, and we thank God for our two sons whom God has given us in this way. I'll never forget the incident that happened several years ago when Nathan was small. I was reading to him from a Bible storybook about Moses, and it made the statement that Pharaoh's daughter "adopted" him as her son. He looked up at me, his eyes wide with excitement, and said, "Moses was adopted too — just like me!" We rejoiced together over this truth, and in my heart I thanked God for this revelation to our son from His Word.

Some months later we were reading in another Bible storybook, only this time it was about the life of Jesus. To help a child understand, it explained Jesus' situation this way: that Joseph was His "adoptive" father. Wow! I'd never thought of it that way! Again we were both amazed to think that Jesus Himself had, in a sense, experienced "adoption" too! I'm grateful that my son could identify with these Bible examples. Again God's Word was just what we needed.

As we think about Christmas, did you know that Jesus came to earth so you could be adopted? "But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Galatians 4:4-5). "In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will" (Ephesians 1:5, NIV).

What a miracle it is to be adopted into God's family! That's the whole reason for Christmas! Have you accepted God's free gift of salvation in the person of Jesus? Have you been adopted?

— Mrs. Lyndon Korhonen

**Elaine Klug**, author of "Warm Memories on a Cold Afternoon," an interview with a lady who was born in Germany 90 years ago this December, is the wife of Pastor Ray Klug, Fairbury, Nebraska. She has previously served with her husband in a parish and Bible camp ministry in Minnesota and North Dakota, and is an accomplished vocalist and speaker.

**Lydia McCarlson**, Langford, South Dakota, continues her tradition of writing a children's story for our Christmas issues. She resides with her husband, Arnold, on their family farm, and is an active member of Tabor Lutheran Church, rural Webster.

**Lorilee Mundfrom**, the wife of Pastor John Mundfrom, Eben Junction, Michigan, is a graduate of the AFLC Bible School and Concordia College, Moorhead, Minnesota, where she majored in music. Her article, "The Gift of Children," is drawn from a busy life as the mother of two adopted children.

**Jan Norr**, Proctor, Minnesota, author of "The Gift of a Special Child," is married to Lay Pastor Donald Norr, who serves Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Virginia, Minnesota.

**Doris M. Stensland**, a familiar name to our readers, is the author of both an article and a poem in this Christmas issue. Her writings on devotional and historical topics are always well received, and a novel entitled "Haul the Water, Haul the Wood," continues to grow in popularity. She and her husband, Hans, live on a farm near Canton, South

Dakota, where they are active members of Redeemer Free Lutheran Church.

**Beth Christian Talley**, a full-time wife and mother of three children, recalls a special memory from an earlier holiday season in her article, "Where Did Baby Jesus Go?" A graduate of Wheaton College, she serves as church librarian and leader of a "Moms-At-Home" (M.A.H.) Bible study group, as well as through the Sunday School and musical activities of her local congregation, Helmar Lutheran Church. The Talley family lives in a farm home near Newark, Illinois, less than five miles from the farm where she was raised.

## PEOPLE AND PLACES

**Rev. Curtis Emerson**, Shakopee, Minnesota, has accepted a call from Granite Free Lutheran Church, St. Cloud, Minnesota, where he served before becoming the pastor of Faith Church, Shakopee, in August, 1990.

**Rev. Thomas Gilman**, Beresford, South Dakota, has been placed on the AFLC Fellowship Roster upon acceptance of a call to serve St. John's Lutheran Church of Schwer, Milford, Illinois. Pastor Gilman, whose new ministry begins in early January, previously served as an assistant to his father in the Beresford ELCA parish.



## BETHLEHEM 1991

**I**t was a warm afternoon in late September. The tour bus traveled along the main thoroughfare toward the city, and 50 modern-day pilgrims were filled with excitement as they approached the place which they knew so well from the words and songs of so many Christmas seasons. The few short miles from Jerusalem seemed to stretch out for hours instead of minutes as the anticipation swelled.

*O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by;  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light;  
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.*

The streets seemed almost abandoned, and the windows of the shops were tightly shuttered, covered with bold splashes of graffiti only partially concealed by blotches of black paint. The unholy war for the Holy Land is a grim reality in Bethlehem, a rebellious Arab city in the midst of a Jewish nation.

*Hark, the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King;  
Peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!"  
Joyful, all ye nations rise, join the triumph of the skies;  
With the angelic host proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem!"  
Hark, the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"*

One lone souvenir shop opened its doors by special appointment for the pilgrims, securing the locks safely behind them when they entered and releasing them after their purchases were completed. The tourist industry is a major source of income for the Arabs in modern Bethlehem, and most of the shoppers selected beautiful olive wood carvings as mementoes of their brief sojourn in the city. A few bold peddlers waiting outside tried to pressure the reluctant tourists to purchase their trinkets as the bus was reloading.

*O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,  
O come ye, o come ye to Bethlehem;  
Come and behold Him, born the King of angels;  
O come, let us adore Him, o come let us adore Him,  
O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.*

The bus traveled only a short distance before unloading its passengers again, this time at the Church of the

Nativity, an ancient stone structure almost unnoticed in the midst of the large structures built against its walls. The low entrance compelled every pilgrim to stoop as he passed through its portals into the cavernous sanctuary. The feuding between denominations that claim the historic building has delayed necessary repairs, and sunlight finds its way through the holes in the high ceiling, highlighting the stains on the neglected walls.

*O sing a song of Bethlehem, of shepherds watching there,  
And of the news that came to them from angels in the air;  
The light that shone on Bethlehem fills all the world today;  
Of Jesus' birth and peace on earth the angels sing alway.*

The traditional site of the birthplace of Jesus Christ is a grotto located beneath the floor of the church. The pilgrims arrive at this destination by bowing their heads once again and descending a narrow stone stairway into a crowded cavern whose walls are blackened by the smoke of countless oil lamps and candles. Soon the sound of familiar carols echoed throughout the small chamber, but the ornate fixtures and decorations seemed far from the spirit of the Saviour whose birth was being celebrated in song by believers from a far away land.

*Come to Bethlehem and see Him whose birth the angels sing;  
Come adore, on bended knee,  
Christ the Lord, the newborn King,  
Gloria in excelsis Deo, gloria in excelsis Deo.*

Three different dates for Christmas are celebrated by the denominations that compete for the Church of the Nativity, so even in a literal sense it almost seems futile to try and find Christmas in Bethlehem 1991. But Christmas can find us, no matter where we are, in the City of David or in distant cities large and small, in the Holy Land or in other homelands.

*O holy Child of Bethlehem! Descend to us, we pray;  
Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!*

May God open the hearts of each reader of *The Lutheran Ambassador* during this holiday season so that the real Christmas may find us all!



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THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR  
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Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

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Second-Class

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*The happy  
Christmas comes  
once more,*

*the heavenly  
Guest is at the  
door,*

*The blessed  
words the shep-  
herds thrill,*

*the joyous tid-  
ings: Peace, good  
will.*

— N.F.S. Grundtvig