

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

December 11, 1990



The Message of Christmas

LIGHT on the WAY

meditations on God's Word

Volume 28 Number 23

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

is published biweekly (except for the first issue of July and the second issue of August) by the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441.

Rev. Robert Lee, Editor

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Editorial Board:

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Subscriptions: \$11.00 per year.

Write to:

The Lutheran Ambassador
3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

All communications concerning contents of this magazine should be addressed to: Editor, 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441.

Second-class postage paid at Minneapolis, Minn., and additional mailing office.

USPS 588-620 ISSN 0746-3413

Postmaster: Send address changes to *The Lutheran Ambassador*, 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441.

In the Christmas season we are continually bombarded with things that have little or nothing to do with the true meaning of Christmas. While we may enjoy some of the traditional trappings of the Christmas season, we must beware that they do not distract us from celebrating in spirit and in truth the rich meaning of our Lord's birth almost 2,000 years ago. As Christians, we must be jealous to put Christ back into Christmas; and we must take time to reflect on the true meaning of our Lord's birth.

As we all know, Christmas is the wonderful celebration of our Lord's incarnation. The Eternal Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). In the Christmas season we take time to ponder the greatest of all miracles. Jesus Christ the eternal Son of God became man—the God-man; and He will be true God and true man in one person for all eternity.

It is impossible for us to fully comprehend the awesome marvel of the incarnation. Jesus Christ, the eternal, omnipotent Son of God, became a tiny baby who was born in a cow barn and laid in a feeding trough (Luke 2:7). Through the birth of Jesus in a barn, we see the incredible humility of our Lord. He did not come with bold fanfare and proclamation as a worldly king might have done. Rather, He came as a child in the most humble of circumstances. When Jesus was born as a helpless infant He was still the Almighty! He was still the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace, the Everlasting Father. As Isaiah writes in his great Christmas prophecy, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). When Jesus lived on earth, He was truly Immanuel—God with us (Matthew 1:23). When we look at the man Jesus, we see God (John 1:18; 14:7); for Jesus is true God and true man.

Why did Jesus leave the glory of heaven and become man? Jesus left

His heavenly throne and became man so that He might be our Savior from sin. As the angel told Joseph, "she will bear a Son and you will call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21; see also Luke 2:10-12). In the Christmas season we reflect upon our Lord's coming for us and for our salvation.

We cannot overestimate the significance of our Lord's birth at Bethlehem almost 2,000 years ago. If Christ had not come, we would have no hope and no salvation. If Christ had not come, the darkness of the world would be more than we could bear. All of the blessings we enjoy in our Christian faith and in our nation have come through Christ. Without Him we would be without hope and without God in a world of incredible cruelty and wickedness. In the Christmas season we need to remember with thanksgiving all of the blessings that come to us through Jesus and His coming at Bethlehem.

As we reflect upon the wonder and blessing of Christ's coming, we worship our Lord just as the wise men (Matthew 2) and the shepherds (Luke 2) did on the first Christmas. The Christmas season is a special time to worship and adore our wonderful Savior. "O come let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord."

In this Christmas season may we meditate upon the meaning and wonder of our Lord's birth at Bethlehem. And may we pray with the hymn writer; "O holy Child of Bethlehem descend to us today, cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today!"



—by Rev.
Mark R. Bateson

Thanks be to God for His Indescribable Gift

II Corinthians 9:15

The Apostle Paul was delighted with the gift he had received through the birth of Christ. What do you really need this Christmas that will give you that same reaction? When you Christmas shop for your family and friends, you have the same question in mind, "What do they really need?" The problem with most people seems to be that they have more than enough of everything, so it's difficult to find out what such people really need.

The merchants in the shops know you are having this problem, so they bend over backwards to supply you with all sorts of exotic gifts that will provide solutions for such a problem. The youngsters now can have remote controlled vehicles and singing dolls. For the older folks you can buy vacuum sweepers for the desk tops or, if you're rich, spend sixty thousand dollars on a ZR1 Corvette that will amaze and amuse your friends.

But of what value are these physical gifts to people, if all they do is eclipse the true meaning of Christmas? If our Christmas preparation does not touch the dynamic event of Christ's birth, then Christmas degenerates into nothing more than another end-of-the-year festival — the party with the boss, a few days away from school, a lot of decorations, food, then parades and football games.

Christmas is much more than just another end-of-the-year holiday! For hundreds of years, people knew that our Savior would be born. Isaiah, the Hebrew prophet, foretold the coming of Jesus as far back as 758 B.C. But what he saw down through the ages was much different from our big celebrations and parties of today. He prophesied that, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined."

For many years, I did not understand the true significance of these words of Isaiah because I was brought up, as many of you were, in a Christian home. Even though there was a depression at the time, people were happy. Our church was like an extra room connected to our home that affected all of our thinking and planning. In that fellowship, the love of

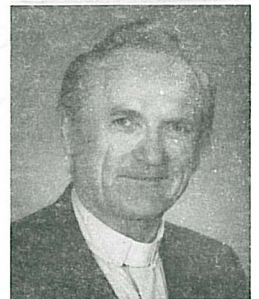
grandparents, relatives and friends flooded our lives and found expression through such things as the beautiful German and Scandinavian hymns. Christ was the center of our Christmas at home, school and church. But this darkness that Isaiah talked about never entered our vocabulary.

Since that time, much turmoil has changed the way people of our world think, act and live. The farmer, who used to run over and help his neighbor put out the fire in his barn, now watches from his pick-up saying, "Sure hope he has insurance!" Much of the attitude based on, "Love your neighbor as thyself," now has changed to "suspect your neighbor as yourself." Many pastors find it difficult to preach about the love of Christ to people for whom material wealth is almost holy and the country club of their choice is heaven. Darkness now invades almost everything you do, because our country is more and more walking in darkness. Spiritual knowledge is now regarded as the lowest form of knowledge in most of our institutions of learning where it is so easy for students to grow blind to the spiritual values that were so precious to our forefathers. I can imagine that the next generation of people, finding it difficult to understand why our country ever regarded the presence of Christ as a guiding principle, should become ashamed of it and consider the development of atheism as a sign of progress.

In the midst of such darkness, can we as a nation and as a church become alive to the Light that God is still permitting to shine on us this Christmas? It is quite evident that our civilization is in need of redemption. The evil, the falsehood, and the vulgarity of our way of living cry to high heaven. Yet many in our world are waiting to hear for the first time the news that the angels gave the shepherds. Sadly, ◇

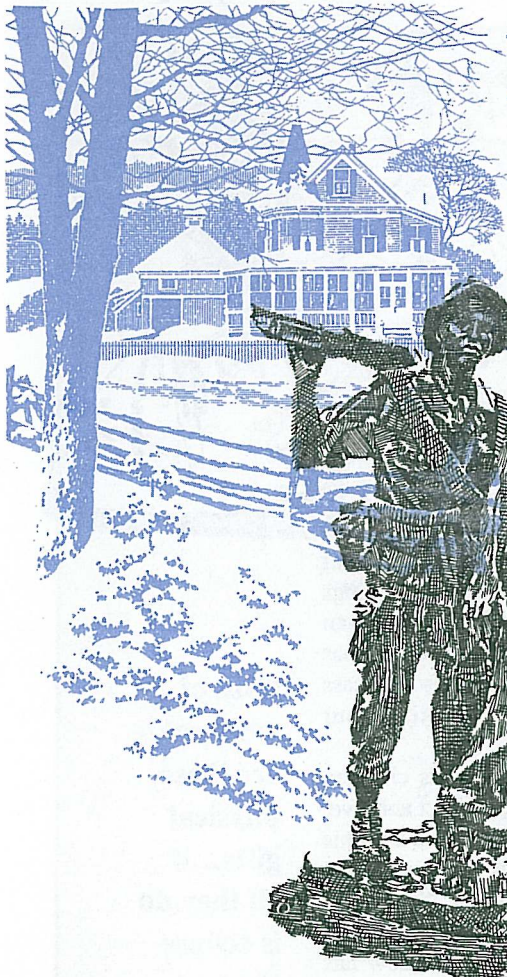


"But of what value are these physical gifts...if all they do is eclipse the true meaning of Christmas?"



— by Rev.
Vincent Will
Springfield, Missouri

FAR FROM HOME AT CHRISTMAS



This Christmas will be different for many thousands of American soldiers because they will be far from home. It is impossible to predict what will happen in the Middle East, but the depth of emotions at this holy time of year will certainly go beyond our normal experiences. The following glimpses of Christmas are seen from an Army Chaplain's point of view. As he wanders from one true experience to another, think of how you might feel and respond to these souls in crisis.

"Christmas is supposed to be spent at home with family, not in this awful place!" The soldier looked down, half-surprised at his own words. He was not sure what the Chaplain might think of such an admission of homesickness. One thing was certain, he could never tell his buddies at the barracks.

The Chaplain, however, had heard the story many times before and knew some of that pain in his own heart. He thought of the First Sergeant who is often looked up to as a substitute father by many of the young soldiers. What

GIFT

those who are now called to utter that Word are often confused and weak in faith.

Do not permit the angels' message to be replaced by a mere creed, or your love will degenerate into a habit that will cause your message of hope to be meaningless. Never has there been a generation that so needed this Savior to redeem us from futility, and to save us from ourselves and our selfish ways.

"Therefore," let us join, as we say in our Communion Service, "with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven" to laud and magnify His Name! Or in the words of the Apostle Paul, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift." But what about you personally? In the midst of a confused world that is walking in darkness, is this great Gift of the Lord Jesus really precious to you?

I know He is to a little mother in my town. In a couple of days I will be conducting her son's funeral. He is a young man in his thirties who has walked in darkness for most of his life and now died of AIDS. While he was in the hospital, his mother called again and again for spiritual help. Repeatedly we could not help but sense

that there is no human misery more strongly felt than the state of being forsaken by God. Then in the midst of his darkness came the Light of the Gospel and he soon discovered that his ultimate problem was not evil but his relationship to his Savior. Turning from his bed, after he closed his eyes for the last time, his mother said, "I can't give him any presents this Christmas,...but this will be the best Christmas he has ever had?"

"Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!"

As you gather with your family or in your church this Christmas, may God grant you the shepherds' attitude, that you may "glorify and praise the Lord for all you have heard and seen."

(Rev. Vincent Will, pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Springfield, Missouri, has been in the ministry for 31 years, serving as a pastor, teacher, counselor, author, and missionary. He is married to the former Eunice Hult, and they are the parents of five children. Pastor Will is a member of the AFLC Fellowship Clergy Roster.)

the Chaplain thought was going to be a short "Hi, how are you" visit, turned out to be an hour long counseling session. The First Sergeant and his wife had divorced a few months before and this Christmas would be his first without his partner of fifteen years and their children. The tears and pain in his eyes spoke of grief, remorse, and thousands of things he wanted to say but could not.

The Chaplain walked into the labor and delivery ward to visit a young woman who had given birth to a beautiful baby boy just three hours earlier. Her first reaction to the Chaplain was fear. Her husband was sent to Saudi Arabia last week and she associated the Chaplain with news of her husband's death. The Chaplain and nurse quickly assured her that this was a pastoral visit and we had no news of her husband. Loneliness coupled with fear and anxiety created a deadly force. The Chaplain wondered how this young nineteen-year-old mother of a new baby would handle the next few weeks without her husband or family. What does the birth of the Christ child mean to this young mother? Her very first visit by a pastor/chaplain was on the day her son was born. Somehow the Chaplain hoped that she would eventually come to know the Savior who would help her with the dark fear she felt inside.

Christmas Eve had come upon the German countryside as quietly as the gentle snow. Everyone who could go on leave or be with friends had made their exits as quickly as possible. To stay in sight of the commander might mean a last minute order to work in the motor pool or some other task which could ruin all plans for holiday fun. The Chaplain entered

the almost deserted barracks. As he stopped to visit, pass out cookies or candy, one of the men asked about Christmas services. Yes, the Christmas Eve service was this evening and there would be a service in the morning. The Chaplain wondered at how Christmas services seemed to attract so many who otherwise stay away from chapel. As he left the barracks, he drove to the more desolate spots. The guards would be working tonight like any other night. Broad smiles and firm handshakes were exchanged as the men and Chaplain wished each other "Merry Christmas!" A portion of the Christmas story was read, a prayer given, and a brief message of the gift of God's love was shared. The men were used to such informal "field services" yet the Chaplain marveled at how the message of the birth of a baby in a lowly manger could cause grown men to listen so intently and discreetly blink away a tear.

This Christmas will be different and yet the same. Fear, anxiety, boredom, loneliness, anger, and sadness will be the focus for many who are away from home. The illusion for many is that if they were only home all would be well. The reality of life is that Christ alone can bring peace and fill the void in our hearts.

One of the great joys of being a child of God is that no matter how far we may be from family, home, and friends, the Savior will never leave us (Hebrews 13:5). Christians may become lonely and long for traditional family gatherings, yet there is a peace that can come knowing that someone is praying for you. Please remember to pray for those far from home this Christmas.

"The reality of life is that Christ alone can bring peace and fill the void in our hearts."



—by Chaplain
Tim Skramstad
Fort Carson
Colorado

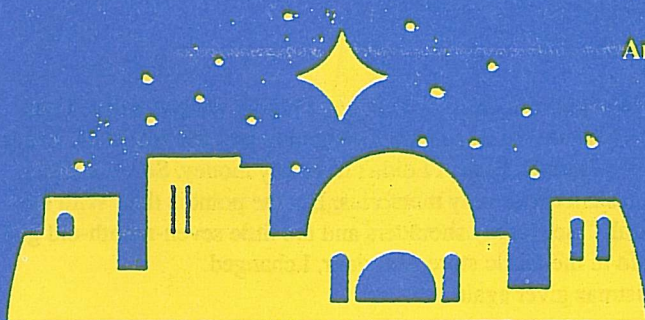
TRUE CHRISTMAS

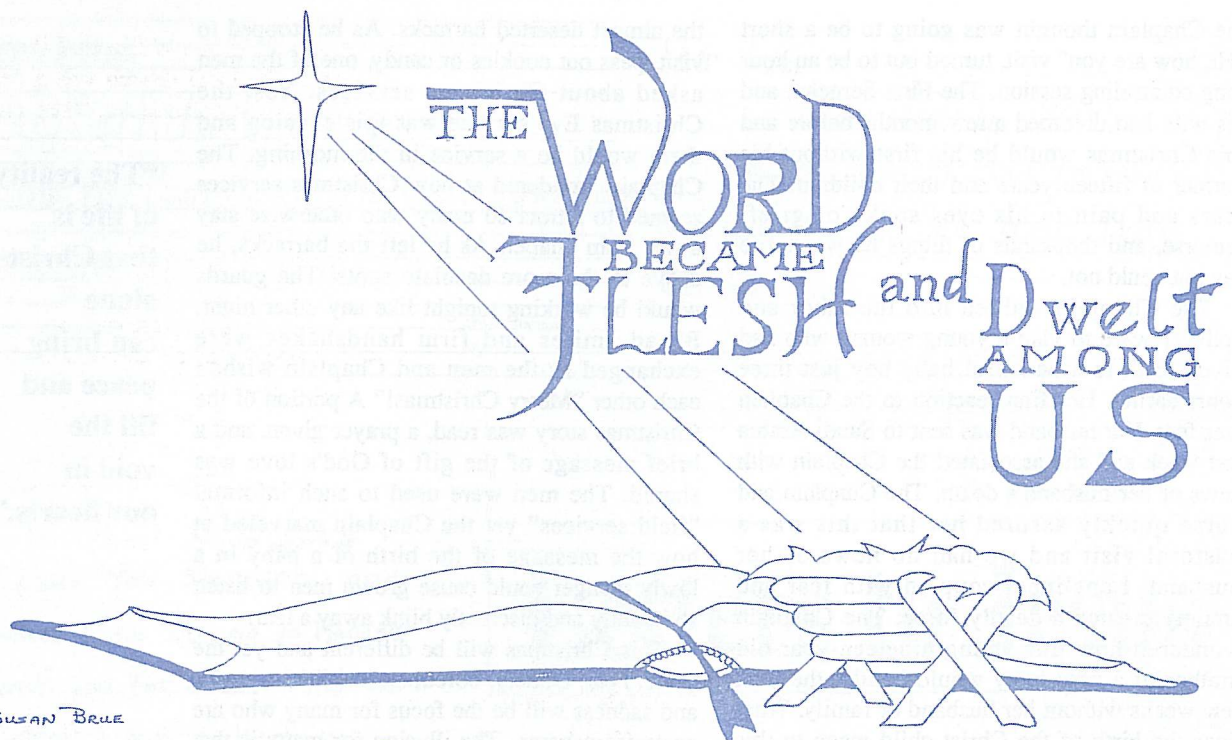
If one should walk the midnight hills
outside a quiet town
And suddenly should see the sight
of glory blazing down.

If one should search with humble men
to find a manger dim
And kneel in simple worship there
as welcoming for Him.

Then would this season hold much less
of tinsel, gilt, and sound,
For peace would fill the heart that came
to seek the Christ, and found.

—Author Unknown

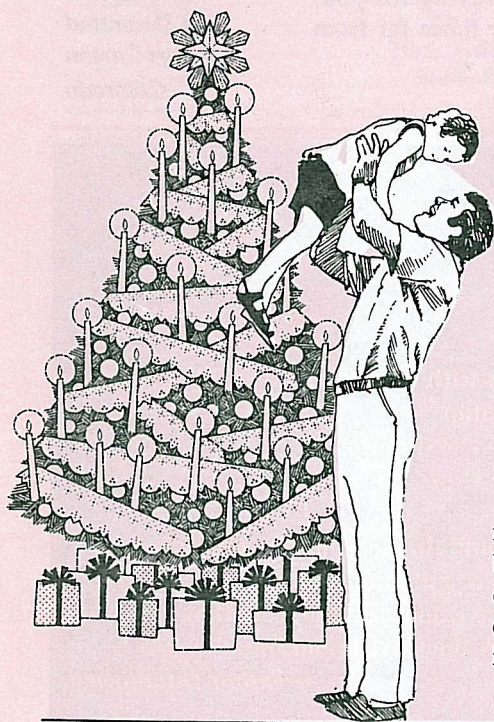




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Kids, Dads and Christmas



One Christmas Eve in a small suburban house, a little blond-haired boy about seven sneaked downstairs into his father's workshop. His Dad was a carpenter, with lots of tools, and the kid began rummaging through the drawers of the workbench. He pulled out a hammer. ("a nice Christmas gift," he thought). Then a tape measure. ("Not bad.") Then a set of screwdrivers. ("Won't be hard to wrap.") More than anything, the boy wanted to give a few presents to his Dad, the pride of his life. He couldn't wait until his father would open them.

I can still remember the very place I stood in our living room, 20 years ago this Christmas, waiting for my Dad to open them, right by the table ten feet from his chair. That's where I was when he opened the first. "Look," he laughed. "Jimmy gave me my own tape measure!" The relatives roared; my cheeks burned.

I tried to smile, but couldn't. By the time Dad opened the second present and laughed again, "my own hammer," and the room erupted, I had slipped down the hall, out of the room, away from the laughter. Nobody noticed. Even now I can feel the tears running over my lips.

I only wanted to be the giver.

I still want to be. A case in point: my first trip to the toy store.

Just last month, for the first time in my life (I'm dead serious), I walked into a Toys R Us store. OK, I know that such stores have spread, like salad bars, to every corner in every town and every place in the country, but I've avoided them. I hate kiddie commercialism.

But it's Christmas.

And . . . I'm a dad.

So with my little two-year-old on my shoulders, I boldly walked where I had never walked before — and loved it! I mean, I wanted to buy the **WORLD**. Every bike, slide, playhouse was mine. Except I didn't have any money. So we walked out together 90 minutes later with only memories. But the point is this: With the cuddly little girl we call "Pie" on my shoulders and the little seven-month-old girl in the arms of my wife in the fabric store next door, I changed.

I became the Christmas giver again.

Fireworks and Flapjacks

An Interview with Mr. William Williams, Wichita Falls, Texas.

—by Pastor Michael Crowell

Times were hard, but we shore had a lot of fun," related Mr. Williams. "It was a lot different than now; we couldn't afford a lot of gifts, but a hand-made handkerchief or a pair of socks meant something." Mr. Williams (who will be 100 years old on his next birthday) recalled his childhood in the Reno, Texas, area with a smile. "We would have fireworks on Christmas Eve, and us kids did get into some mischief sometimes," he said with a twinkle in his eye.

Mr. Williams also recalled the time of festivity, with turkey cooked over the big fireplace, and a boiled ham in a pot on the hearth, with a long table decked out with all the holiday "goodies," including "flapjacks" (dough cooked in hot oil), and everything covered over to keep it warm for the family and friends who would come by throughout the day.

"It'd get cold, with ice and wind, but not much snow, though, not like up north where it would really pile up,"

remembered Mr. Williams. Like other places, the local church was a central point of the celebration. "The church there was down on Maple Creek, made out of yellow poplar wood, pretty rough, but it served a long time. Mr. Parker, the local school teacher, would have the kids put on a program on Christmas Eve there at the church, reciting spelling and such things. Us kids would play all afternoon, different games. And then everyone would meet at the church, where they had a big cedar tree put up. We'd put on the homemade tallow candles, with their woolen wicks...they'd burn up real nice and bright!" Finally they would have "dialogues" (Christmas plays), to round off a very special day for the whole community.

"I remember in 1907, we went up to Uncle Harrison Clemmer's place in Grandfield, Oklahoma. Aunt Effie and he had moved up there and we went up to visit for Christmas. Uncle Harrison cooked more than Aunt Eff, and they had a big slice of beef that he had made up, and that was shore good eating! We went out and shot a bunch of quail, too, and that was a grand meal. I remember after eating, a bunch of us went out on a coyote hunt!"

Other Christmases, Mr. Williams recalled, his grandparents, with whom he lived, would always make sure there was a piece of fruit and a shiny nickel for the children on Christmas morning. Throughout his memories, he noted how the center of Christmas was Christ and being together with family and friends, good food and fellowship, rather than gifts and "things." A return to a simpler time? Perhaps this is what Christmas should be for us, to better honor the One who came on this day, two thousand years ago.

(Note: Mr. Williams and his wife, Nannie, live with their daughter, Mary Kilgore, in Wichita Falls, Texas. They celebrated their 80th anniversary in October. Nannie is currently in ill health and in need of prayer. The Williams' and Mrs. Kilgore are members of Christ Lutheran, Wichita Falls, an AFLC Home Mission Church, served by Pastor Crowell.)

Kids have a way of making you into givers.

Take Cincinnati Red's pitcher Tom Browning, for example. Last October, during the seventh inning in game three of the World Series, Browning heard word from a clubhouse attendant that his wife (stuck in the stadium parking lot) was in labor and was going to drive herself to the hospital. Without delay (and without telling his teammates and coaches), Browning ran out — in uniform — to drive his wife to the doctor. And so, even though Browning was scheduled to pitch the next inning (in a panic, the Reds coach, Lou Piniella, not knowing about the baby, put out a call over the radio broadcast for the pitcher to call the Reds or come back), the dad-to-be dropped everything to ensure that Tucker Thomas Browning, who was born after midnight, would be OK. "You can't imagine how weird I felt walking into the hospital wearing my uniform," he said later.

You see, when you're a dad, you don't care if you're supposed to pitch in the World Series. You go. It's your child. You give.

Problem is, we think that way about Christmas — and turn everything around. Like a seven-year-old boy from the suburbs, or like me in the toy store with my daughter on my shoulders, we say, "Christmas is for giving."

It's not.

No way.

Christmas, as God ordained it, is for receiving. Receiving Christ. Receiving grace. Receiving others. Receiving the message He has for us in the Word. Receiving forgiveness. But the sad fact is, we turn it around (especially as dads and seven-year-olds) and make it a time to focus on what WE give — our hammers and tape measures — (which belong to God in the first place) to make our children feel good, or so that we can feel good. To be the giver, not the "needy one," that's what we want to do.

And that's why God gives verses like I John 4:10, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins."

—by James L. Johnson, Lake Stevens, Washington

*God sent His only Son to fill the world with glory,
He sent His only One to bring us peace.
The shepherds on the hill were startled by the angels,
They knelt around them stilled — Great News of Joy.
Glory to God, Christ came for us...*

Our portable tape player made it impossible to understand the next words — but this song was very special to us last Christmas.

Our family was midway through a school year of teaching English in a university in Harbin, China. Ensuring that Christmas would continue to be the meaningful season we'd always tried to make it, was

going to be a challenge this year in the midst of a communist country.

Music had always been important to our family, so we made sure we had brought several Christmas tapes with us. We were glad. If there was to be anything to put us in the Christmas spirit, it was going to have to come from within ourselves. For although shopping every day of the year in China is like braving the crowds of a mall the day after Thanksgiving, there was little else to remind us of the approaching season.

Without the usual heavy schedule of programs, concerts and family get-togethers in December, we had plenty of time to listen to our tapes this year. But there was this one song — we'd never really noticed before, "The Gift of Love," that really spirited us. The massive operatic voice of Placido Domingo soared... "Glory to God. Christ came for all." But our small portable tape player kept us from understanding the next line. No matter. The beauty of the music never failed to lift our spirits.

We were afraid at first that the absence of all those things which were a normal part of our Christmas would still leave us somewhat empty. But we had goals to make this a very special Christmas for the wonderful Chinese students and friends we had grown to love—people who desperately need Hope in their lives.

Our culture lectures were decked with candles and decorations, courtesy of our family back home. Our children, 11-year-old Sarah and seven-year-old Noah, became Mary and Joseph. (Did you know Mary towered about ten inches above Joseph?) An old box

became a manger. We rehearsed Christmas songs and printed out copies for the students. Although these culture lectures had to include the secular side, the sacred side always seemed to spill over into Easter as well. It was a wonderful time. Our students always wanted to know as much as they could, and Christmas held a particular fascination for them.

We decided to hold special Christmas parties for our classes in the evenings. We fortunately had a room in our apartment that was big enough. (None of our Chinese friends could say the same.) The university let us borrow a small potted evergreen and we set about decorating as best we could. It was beautiful to us and our students. We taught them songs, exchanged gifts (a strict one "kwal" limit — 20 cents) and played games. It was during one of these games that we realized that our commitment to God to teach for a year in China was indeed being used by Him. As we went around the room with a memory game stating what we wanted for Christmas, one girl quietly announced that she would like a Bible—wow! Two or three students later, a student stated that she thought she would like to become a Christian in the future! It is very difficult for us in America to realize the courage it took for these girls to speak like this in front of their classmates. These two gift requests helped to make this Christmas the best ever. Both of them got their presents and we were thankful to God as we watched Him work the rest of the year among our students.

There were disappointments, too. Our open house for friends and colleagues left us cold as we had shed our practical northern China multi-layered clothing for our Sunday best. We baked cookies nine at a time in our toaster oven for a week for the 40-60 people we expected. Nine showed up as we shivered and gorged ourselves on cookies. We discovered later that

The Gift of Love



—by Rollin and Gloria Varness
Morris, Illinois

any who attended our Christmas event would have to "register" with the communist party secretary. At least the cookies didn't go to waste.

Christmas Eve came and we were thankful for several Christian teachers in our city who gathered together for a time to share food, singing, candlelight communion and prayer — for one another, for our families at home, and for the people whom God had placed in our paths to serve.

If Christmas is to be a special time it must come from within us where God's "Gift of Love" dwells. As we look ahead to this Christmas, we are of course thankful for the many events and opportunities of the season that we missed last year. Yet the desire to keep our family focus on the Christ child will no doubt be our challenge this year, too.

Yes, we have already started to listen to Christmas music. Which one first? A quick decision found us trying to understand the next lines of that song. Tears come as we hear it now... "Glory to God, Christ came for all. **Share this Good News with all who wait in Hope.**" It is this line of the song, which commands us to share the news of this "Gift of Love" that will make this a season of purpose and fulfillment for each of us.

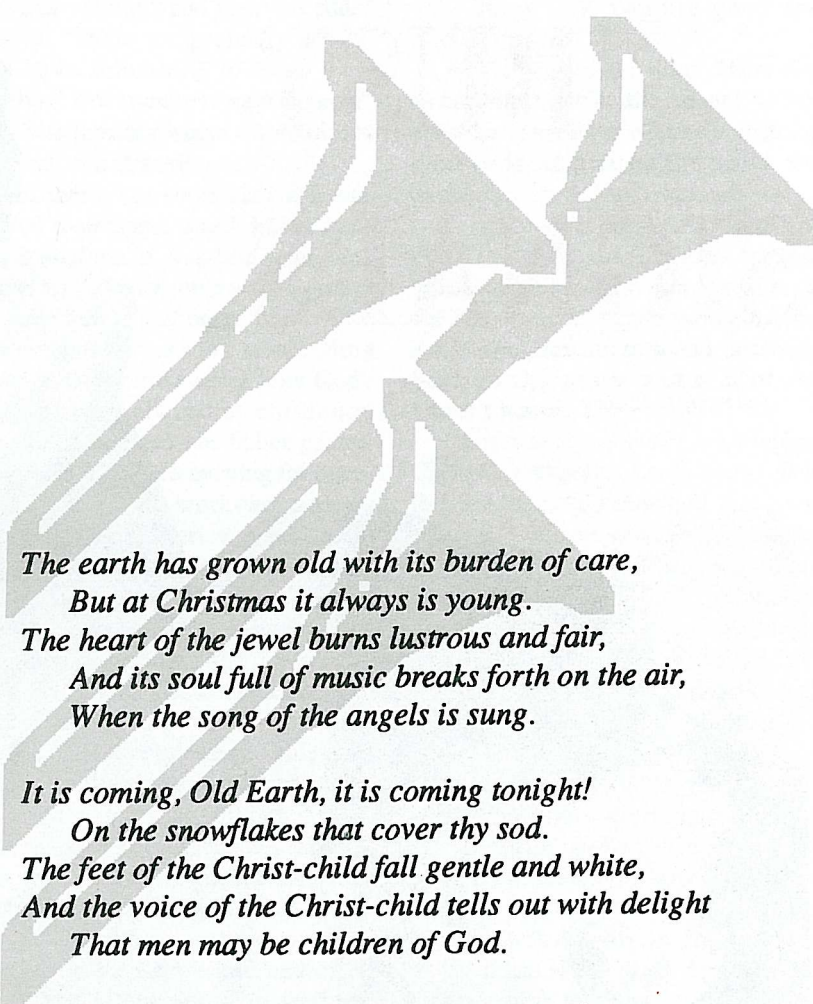
When man closes one door, the Lord will surely open another door. When the Morris (Illinois) schools cut back staff, the Lord opened the door for the Varness family to spend a year teaching in Red China. "English Language Institute/China" is a Christian ministry that works with the communist government to place English teachers at their universities.

Their apartment was below 60 degrees all winter, and they were restricted in their witness. But the students were hungry for hope.

The Varness family are members of Fox River Lutheran Church, Norway, Illinois.

—M. Meyer

CHRISTMAS CAROL



*The earth has grown old with its burden of care,
But at Christmas it always is young.
The heart of the jewel burns lustrous and fair,
And its soul full of music breaks forth on the air,
When the song of the angels is sung.*

*It is coming, Old Earth, it is coming tonight!
On the snowflakes that cover thy sod.
The feet of the Christ-child fall gentle and white,
And the voice of the Christ-child tells out with delight
That men may be children of God.*

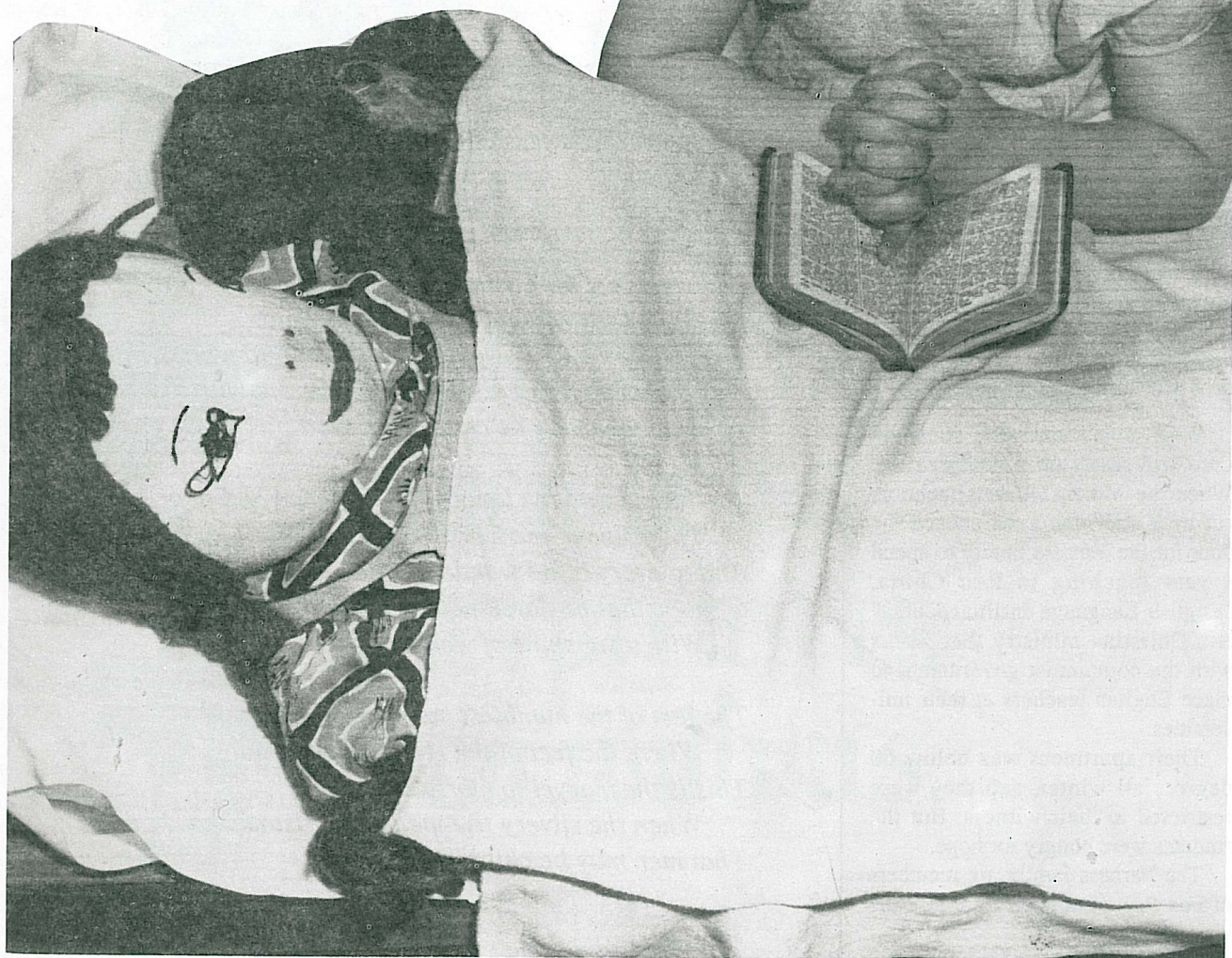
*On the sad and the lonely, the wretched and poor,
The voice of the Christ-child shall fall;
And to every blind wanderer open the door
Of hope that he dared not to dream of before,
With a sunshine of welcome for all.*

*The feet of the humblest may walk in the field
Where the feet of the Holiest have trod,
This is the marvel to mortals revealed
When the silvery trumpets of Christmas have pealed,
That men may be children of God.*

—Phillips Brooks

No BUSY SIGNALS

Photo by Roger C. Huebner



A Christmas Story for Children

The autumn sun was slowly sinking beyond the horizon. Its beautiful red glow reflected on the lake. God creates very colorful sunsets, and they are a joy to watch. As the day disappeared into eternity, we knew that we were one day closer to the Lord's coming again.

Eric, age ten; Todd, nine; Dawn, eight; Tobias, six; and Jay, five, were watching the sunset with me. Eric turned to me and asked, "Grandma, who is the greatest in the world?"

Without any hesitation, Todd answered, "God is."

"Oh, no," replied Eric. "Our president is the greatest. He lives in the White House... has his own big jet... and he tells people what to do."

Todd stubbornly defended his answer. "God is Almighty! He is all-knowing and loving to everyone AND WE CAN TALK TO HIM IN PRAYER ANYTIME!"

Eric, sensing defeat, said meekly, "Well, we can talk to the President, too, but it would take a lot of red tape and we would have to have identification... guess you're right, Todd; God is the greatest."

Looking at the others, I realized that little Tobias, for all of his six years, had already learned about talking to God in prayer. At the age of nine months, he had flown to Chicago with his mother to be a patient in a childrens' hospital for surgery on his palate. Since then, they had to return to Chicago twice a year for checkups.

Tobias had learned to trust in God, and, as the plane was landing in Chicago on his last trip, he quietly prayed that all would be well. Hours later he learned that his prayer had been answered. The doctors told him that he would not have to go back for any checkups again.

"Yes, children," I said, "God hears and answers our prayers. We can call on Him any time and any place. He is always there for us, if we have asked Him into our hearts and believe on

Jesus Christ as our Saviour. There are no busy signals when we call on Him in prayer, and there is no red tape, either... He knows us by name."

"Oh!" said Dawn. "My dad told a story about that once. He wore glasses when he was a little boy, and had a habit of losing or breaking them. One day after school he and his brother and sister were playing in the silage pile. The men were cutting corn silage and piling it in a long pile. A tractor would drive over it to pack it down after each load."

"There are no busy signals when we call on Him in prayer... He knows us by name."

"My dad had been warned to be careful with his glasses, so he carefully took them off and placed them nearby. Hours later, after darkness set in, the children came into the house. By this time, many loads of silage had been placed on the pile."

"David, where are your glasses?" his mother asked. "Oh, I took them off..." and he started to cry. "I can't find them in the dark... what will dad say?"

"Grandma, why don't you finish telling it?" begged Dawn.

"Well," I replied, remembering the incident as if it were yesterday, "everyone was very quiet during supper, and

the glasses weren't mentioned at all. But at bedtime each prayer included the lost glasses."

"The next morning David showed his dad where he had laid them. The spot was now covered. Grandpa carefully lifted several fork loads of silage, and, unbelievably, there lay David's glasses! Many silent 'thank you, Jesus' prayers were prayed that morning."

Jay wanted to share, too, and said, "When Mama told us that we were going to have a new baby at our house, Dawn and I argued. She wanted a sister, and I wanted a brother. Finally I said, 'I'll pray that we have two babies!' But we only got Jenna Lee, and I love her."

Looking up at me with a smile, Jay made it clear that he didn't care if his prayer wasn't answered. God knows what is best for all of us.

God does answer prayer. Christmas reminds us that sometimes it takes years for the answer to come. We read in Luke 1:5-20 (KJV) that the angel told Elisabeth and Zacharias that they would have a son. Zacharias didn't believe it so he became dumb (not able to speak) until the prayer was answered. Later their son, John, the forerunner of Jesus Christ, was born.

Luke 1:36-37 tells us that Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Elisabeth were cousins. It ends by saying, "For with God nothing shall be impossible."

After 1,990 years we still continue to celebrate the birthday of the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, who lives eternally, the One who was born to die and give His life a ransom for many.

The heart of the Christmas message is that God's Son came into the world so that through Him the world might have salvation and be reconciled to God.

Let our prayer this Christmas be that those who still do not know Him would call upon Him while there is time. There will be no busy signals!

—by Mrs. Lydia McCarlson
Langford, South Dakota

Christmas Message from our President

*"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."
John 1:14(a)*

It is a joy and a wonderful privilege to greet you, the readers of *The Lutheran Ambassador*, in this Christmas season. We are again commemorating the greatest event in man's history. God became man. What condescension! What voluntary humiliation! The Son of God, creator of the universe, left heaven to dwell with mortal men. In the body of a man He dwelt for some thirty years among men on earth.

The dwelling of God among His people was one of the realities of the Old Testament. In Exodus 29:45 we read: "I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God." God's purpose in bringing the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt was in order to fulfill this purpose. The Old Testament concentrated on the externals. The people of God dwelt in tents, so God said, "Make a tent for Me, and I will dwell there in your midst." The cloud and pillar of fire provided the assurance that God was in their midst. Later on, when they became the settled inhabitants of a land, God permitted them to build Him a house; but the purpose was exactly the same—you are my redeemed people, and I will dwell in the midst of you.

In the New Testament the promise of God to the redeemed is not simply that God will present Himself in the company of His people, but that God will dwell in the individual. That truth is stated in Ephesians 3:17, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." Paul states the same truth in 1 Corinthians 3:16, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" He takes the truth a step further in 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20. There we read, "What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price." God has purchased a dwelling place for Himself; He has purchased people with the precious blood of His Son, and He purposes to live in those people.

Jesus was made flesh and dwelt among us so that He could provide salvation for us. The obedience of Christ in humbling Himself to become flesh was completed by His death on the cross. There as the Lamb of God He took our sins upon Himself. God can only dwell in cleansed temples. We today can know the reality of God's dwelling in our hearts. "Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit" (1 John 4:13).

May the joy of this Christmas season not only be in the first coming of Jesus as He was made flesh as the babe in the manger. That coming made it possible for Him to dwell within our hearts. May your joy be centered for Him to dwell within our hearts. May this truth bless your homes and your relationships this Christmas.



Rev. Richard Snipstead



Christmas Memories from our Editor

One of the priceless gifts of the holiday season is the memories of Christmas past. Let me share some of mine with you.

When I remember Christmas, I see a tree. Some of you will recall the aluminum designer-trees of several decades ago...none of those for us, thank you! Even some of the long-needed evergreens did not seem right; it had to be a spruce, a real storybook Christmas tree.

An old custom was to trim the tree on Christmas Eve. This was not the custom for the Lee children. My sister Carol and I coaxed our parents to put it up as early as possible, and even the merchants could not compete with our zeal to hasten the holiday. Dad and Mom tell about the year when their little pre-school son tried to drag the tree from the woodshed up a flight of stairs all by himself.

I see decorations on the tree. The lights and ornaments created a magical blend of holiday color, mirrored in countless strands of shimmering tinsel. The figure of an angel with white hair and flowing garments adorned the top of the tree.

I see gifts beneath the tree. Often they were a bit shopworn before it was time to open them, due to the shaking and poking and squeezing and peeking that they endured. "Please let us open one early!" was a common plea at our house. Even the paper on the packages began to seem like familiar friends, probably because my mother carefully salvaged the best of the wrappings each year for use in Christmases to come.

Santa Claus was eliminated quite early in my memories. "Why would he give more presents to rich people?" I wondered, and soon came to the conclusion that there was a better explanation closer at hand. Also, Grandma Lee quietly disapproved of the custom, confiding in me that she didn't think that parents should lie to their children. But we still hung up our long stockings anyway.



Rev. Robert Lee

I see our family on Christmas Eve, gathered around the tree as soon as we finished supper and completed cleaning up the kitchen. It seemed like there was no end of dishes to wash and wipe, and my sister and I even forgot to fight over whose turn it was to do what.

We opened the packages one by one, sharing the joy together of gifts given as well as gifts received. All of our expectations were usually satisfied, and there were always some special surprises, too. Suddenly there were no more presents to open, and it seemed like only a moment had passed since we started.

I see our church, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Escanaba, Michigan, was a stately old white frame structure with a tall steeple and large stained glass windows. The Christmas Eve service was at eleven o'clock, and our family left home with lots of time to spare so that we could slowly drive through the city and see the decorated houses, especially along Lakeshore Drive.

There must have been a time when the first candlelight service was held at Immanuel, but in my memories it has always been the same. The dimly lighted sanctuary with the large decorated trees by the altar. The anthem by the senior choir, the congregation singing Christmas carols. The small candles that were given to us when we entered, to be lit by the ushers after the sermon as we sang by candlelight:

*Silent night! Holy night!
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and Child,
Holy Infant, so tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.*

What do you see when you remember Christmas past?

May each reader of The Lutheran Ambassador have a holiday season filled with the joy of Jesus Christ, God's Christmas gift to us all!

Ole and Svein, both 11 years old, were earnestly talking on their way home from school. Ole had big news to tell. Old Martha*, or "Egg Martha," as she was also called, had been with Ole's mother at their house the day before with a sack of eggs for the Christmas baking. She had many hens, and it was through the sale of eggs that she made her livelihood. She was also known by everyone in the community for her childlike piety and fear of God.

The conversation in Ole's home soon turned to God's wonderful help and care, as was the custom when Martha was there. Such a topic was not a common one for this household, and so it was mostly Martha who, in her own way, witnessed to God's grace toward her. This time she also told about several experiences in which God heard her prayers and helped her when she needed it most.

Ole, sitting in the room with his homework, had heard what Martha said and listened intently. The idea that God gave a person what he prayed for was something for him to ponder. He had probably heard his mother talk about it before, but this seemed to be a different thing of which Martha spoke. It was so full of life, so simple yet absolutely certain.

He thought at once about the jumping skis that he and Svein had talked about for so long and which stood in the window of Pettersen's Sport Shop on the corner.

And now he had also told Svein about what he heard from Martha, and about his own thoughts.

You could just pray to God and He would give you the skis!

"Yes, but do you think it really happens like that?" Svein's voice sounded doubtful.

"Sure it does!" Ole was eager. "Martha said so herself that she had it happen several times."

Svein walked on thinking for a while, and then he said, "But old Martha surely can't have any use for skis, can she?"

"No, you are a funny one," Ole laughed. "Martha on skis beats all...an old woman with rheumatism! But there

are certainly other things she has needed, you can be sure. Think of it, Svein, if it is so, then we could probably take part in the school ski competition in January, too!" Svein jumped and

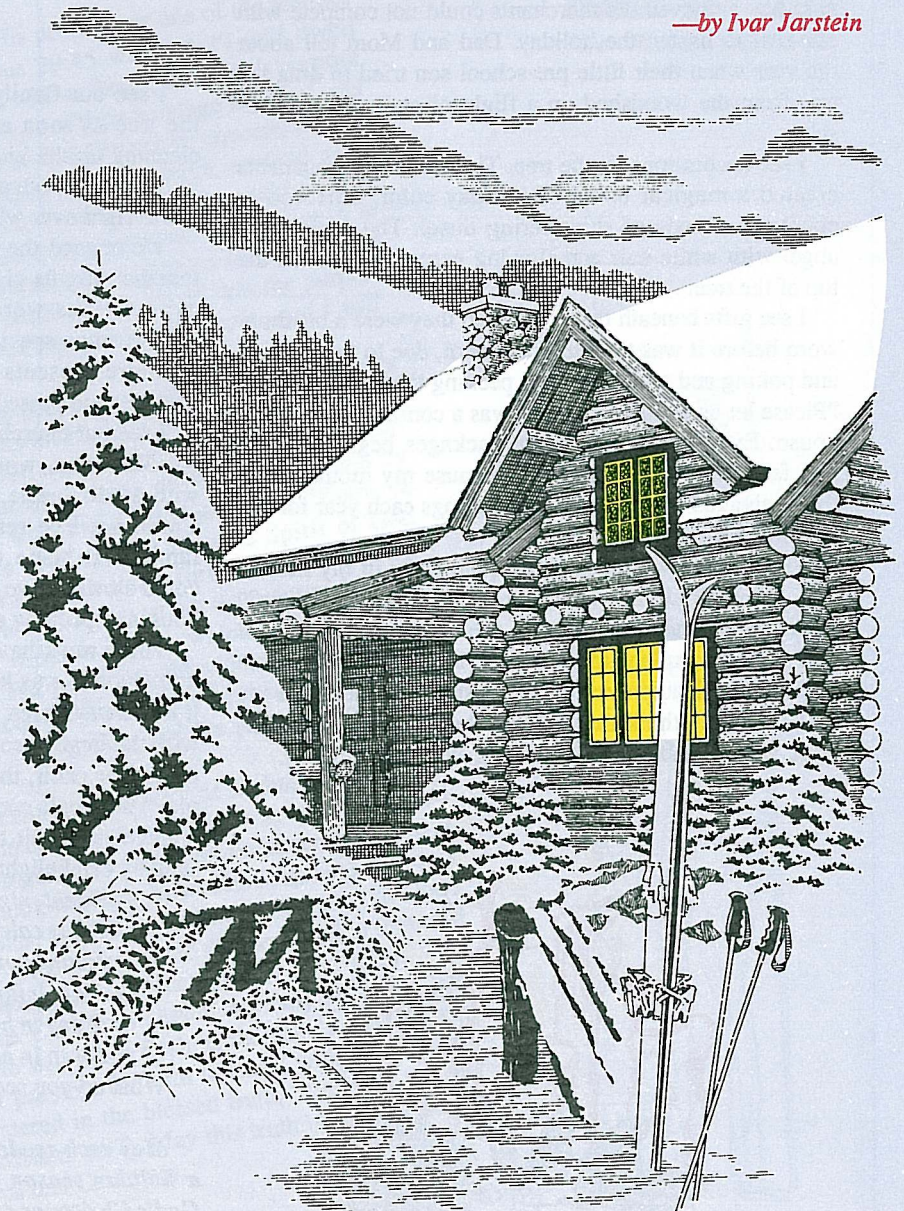
danced, knapsack on his back, as if he were already on the slopes.

The boys parted, and Svein went thoughtfully toward home. If it was as simple as Ole said, then why weren't

The Skis in Pettersen's Window

A Christmas story from Norway

—by Ivar Jarstein



there many more who prayed to God? Perhaps they didn't know about it...or was it faith that made a difference with God?

If only he could talk to Mother and Father about this, like Ole could. But they wouldn't understand. If it were true, then Mother could even have the winter coat she talked about. No doubt the best thing would be to talk with Martha herself...but how? Wait, now he had it!

"Mother, are you going to get eggs from Martha for Christmas?" Svein tried to make his voice sound as natural as possible.

"Yes, why do you ask, my boy?"

"Well, then I can go and get them."

"It's a ways out there, you know."

"That doesn't matter; I'll go at once." He took the spark (a type of sled — trans.) and off he went. Svein really didn't know how he should begin, but he knew that he had to talk with Martha about the subject today. There would surely be a way to do it.

The eggs were packed up, but Svein made no move to go. He stood and twisted his cap a little...then it came. "Have you ever wished that you had skis, Martha?"

Martha laughed and straightened her stiff back a little. "No, my boy, I have never had skis nor wished for any. Why do you ask?"

"Well," he hesitated, "because you would only need to pray about it at any rate, as one who talks to God in prayer."

Martha understood that there was more the boy wanted, and so she said, "Come here, my boy, and sit down. Then we can have a little talk together."

They had a long talk in the cottage. Svein told everything about the skis and what Ole had said. And there he had his first Bible lesson, simple and clear, about God's will and God's goodness.

It was almost dark when he pushed and rode the spark on the way home. That night Svein prayed an evening prayer for the first time, but he didn't mention the skis.

There were many trips to see Martha in the days that followed. Mother and Father talked about it and

understood that there was something happening in the boy.

"I don't like it that he runs over to old Martha so much," Father said.

"Oh, that doesn't hurt him," replied Mother. "The boy is almost like we don't know him back again. Always kind and willing," and then she added quietly, "There are probably several who have something to learn from Martha." No more was said about it, for it was territory where they both felt uncertain and strange.

But there was something that had entered their home which hadn't been present before. It was like something in the air...heavy, oppressive, yet at the same time full of hope.

Both knew that God was calling them. Mother remembered how God's peace had dwelt in her childhood home. She pictured her father gathering the children each evening for devotions, and his old work-worn hands folded in prayer. There was something so secure and trusting about the folded hands. But as soon as she left home, life's work and troubles shaped her so that today she had nothing left of childhood's warm peace and security.

Father was also restless that day. He, too, had something to look back upon, a God-fearing mother who was left alone with eight children, six of them boys. Early he had to make his own way, and the struggle for life's needs had become the center of his life. It didn't help, either, that the sawmill where he worked had often been shut down for two or three months during the year.

Now Svein, their son, without knowing it, had turned their thoughts back to childhood's peace and childhood's God. And the whole thing had begun with a pair of boy's skis in the window at Pettersen's on the corner.

Christmas was four days away. It was evening. Svein was in bed, and Mother and Father were sitting in the living room. Father was reading and it was quiet, with only the rustling sound of the newspaper breaking the stillness.

Suddenly they heard a sound from the bedroom, Svein's voice, low and earnest. Mother looked over at Father, laid down the mending bag and went over and carefully opened the door.

Then she heard: "And so You know, dear God, the skis I spoke about, never mind them after all, even though it would have been nice to have had them. But it is more important that Mother and Father learn to pray to You, as Martha says, because then they will know that You are good and answer prayers."

Mother closed the door. There was something wet in the corner of her eyes. Father suddenly found something else to do, laid down the paper and went out.

A battle took place that night. The conflict was in solitude first because there was so much to talk out. Late in the night there were two prodigal, tired souls who once more found their way back to the peace and rest of the Father's house.

Christmas Eve dawned with typical Christmas weather. Large snowflakes fell one upon another and laid their white cloak over cottage and house. The spirit of Christmas was both inside and outside. Svein had never experienced such a day before. All three went to church and sang the beloved Christmas songs. And when the church bell rang the Christmas in, Mother and Father took Svein by the hand...and hand in hand they walked home.

And at home there was surprise after surprise. Father, who had unexpectedly received a Christmas bonus from work, had purchased the coat that Mother wanted for so long. Svein received handsome laced ski boots, but his happiness was almost overwhelming when Mother came in with the skis from Pettersen's with wishes for a blessed Christmas from Martha.

The evening prayers that night didn't seem long to Svein. Tired and happy, he fell asleep with this thought: "Thank you, dear God...not even Martha realized how good you are."

From Kristen Jul (translated by Rev. Raynard Huglen, Newfolden, Minnesota).

(*Translator's note: The designation of someone as "old," as in "old Martha," was and is common in Norway, although the term is not usually used here. It indicates that one is of the older generation, and it is not necessarily disrespectful.)



Behold, a virgin
shall be with child,
and shall bring
forth a son, and
they shall call
his name
Emmanuel,
which being
interpreted is,
God with us.

Matthew 1:23

Calligraphy by Rosalie Paulson, Fosston, Minnesota

Reflections and Memories of a Missionary's Kid

—by Jonathan Abel
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Christmas is that special time of year to be together with the family. Reality, however, does not always permit this to be possible. In fact, even Joseph and Mary were dislocated from their family on that first Christmas night. They were with strangers in a cold and smelly stable. Yet what a glorious night it became for you and me!

Growing up on the mission field meant dislocation for our family. Though we were together in Brazil, we did not enjoy the presence of grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. I remember one Christmas Eve dinner of lefse, lutefisk, chicken and cranberry sauce sent to us from the United States. It was tremendous! We ate that meal at three in the morning. This was not uncommon. Mom and Dad often had four programs between Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

Our family tried to have as normal a Christmas as possible. This was in the midst of the hottest time of the year when people would escape to the beaches or some other vacation spot. Our family maintained certain traditions that are increasingly precious to us.

As we began to leave home, the challenge to keep these traditions became greater. Sometimes we would celebrate Christmas early just so that we could do so as a family.

Being part of a missionary family, the inevitable finally came to me. It was a few years ago and I was to be alone for Christmas! I most certainly was not looking forward to it. Then the Lord gave me the opportunity to go to InterVarsity's Bear Trap Ranch in Colorado. I knew some international students who were also going to be alone and invited them to come along. We ended up being a group of fifteen representing five continents. It was a wonderful Christmas with numerous

A Canadian teenager shares

WHAT CHRISTMAS MEANS TO ME

—by Debbie Schindel, Junior, AFLBS
Calgary, Alberta

Being a Christian teenager, Christmas is a very special time of the year. The celebration of Jesus' birth means it's a time of sharing with family and friends as well as reaching out to others.

Luke 2 tells us of the great birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is why I celebrate Christmas. If it were not for the birth of Jesus, we would not have salvation.

Many of my friends in Calgary do not follow the teaching of the Bible. They make Christmas materialistic—as a time for only food and gifts. Living in a multi-cultural city brings exposure to many different religions and teachings. I find myself saddened to see so many of my friends unable to truly celebrate Christmas.

I thank God for my family. We keep the true meaning of Christmas. We take time to go to church and to worship our Christ Jesus. Our whole family gets together to share our love for one another and for our Savior, which makes Christmas a very special and meaningful time for me.

Christmas is also a special opportunity to reach out to others. Those who do not know Christ need to hear the Gospel message. Giving to the poor and going around singing Christmas carols to the shut-ins make the season even more special. Christmas is a time to show the world that Jesus really is Lord and Savior.

opportunities to share the Gospel message.

As I reflect on past Christmas times, I thank God for the strength of traditions passed on to me by my parents on the mission field. Christmas is for families, for friends and above all, Christmas is for people; for Christ was born that all people might come to know Him as Lord and Savior.

(Jonathan Abel, son of missionaries John and Ruby Abel, is a graduate of the Lutheran Brethren Seminary, Fergus Falls, Minnesota. He is presently enrolled at AFLTS for a one-year colloquy program.)

**Christmas is love
tugging men back to
God with the powerful
clasp of a tiny
hand reaching out
from a bed of straw.**

Hark, the herald angels sing
 "glory to the newborn King.
 Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
 God and sinners reconciled."

"God and sinners reconciled"—there in a nutshell you have the Gospel. Christ came into the world to save us, not just to relieve us of the burden of personal guilt, but to end our separation from God. Christ, who was fully God, became fully man.

"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.

By faith through Christ we can become the children of God, and heirs through Christ to the Kingdom. Our love for this Savior, the Reconciler, should propel us out to the ends of the world to declare His love and His-story that God and sinners are reconciled.



—Rev. Eugene Enderlein
 Director of World Missions

"It is Christmas time! Christmas means many things to many people. Can you tell by the way people prepare for it what it means to them? What does it mean to you? Christmas is a happy time. God sent Jesus to earth to be our Savior. Why do we need a Savior? It is because we sin. What do we need to do when we sin? We need to ask Jesus to forgive us. Then He will forgive us and live in our hearts. Then we can say He is our Savior because He died on the cross to take away our sins. The Bible tells us this wonderful story."

(Excerpts from *The Ambassador Sunday School Series, Grade 2 and Grade 5.*)

May this wonderful story prepare our hearts to let "the dear Christ enter in" this Christmas!



—Katha Tjelta
 Director of Parish Education

FOR
 GOD
 SO LOVED
 THE WORLD THAT
 HE
 GAVE HIS ONLY
 BEGOTTEN SON
 THAT WHOEVER
 BELIEVETH IN HIM
 SHOULD NOT PERISH
 BUT HAVE
 EVERLASTING
 LIFE.

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

In Isaiah, Chapter 9, the Prophet speaks of the child to be born as the Prince of Peace. The prophet Micah states that "this One will be our Peace." Nearly two thousand years have passed since the fulfillment of those prophecies. How grateful we are that Christ, the Prince of Peace, still reigns. Even though world peace is threatened, His peace continues to give calmness, hope and joy to the heart of the believer. May this true peace reign in your heart and home at this Christmas season as you celebrate His birth and as you look forward to His return.



—Pastor Elden Nelson
Director of Home Missions

"The Word became flesh!" These are the words that greet our seminary students every day as they view the front of our main classroom on the campus. This is the foundation of all Christian ministry, the reality that the eternal Son of God assumed human flesh for the purpose of fulfilling the Law of God on our behalf and atoning for our sin through the shedding of His precious blood. And this is the greatest theme of the Christmas season. May our worship and our witness this Christmas and always be on the Word who became flesh!

(John 1:14)

—Dr. Francis W. Monseth, Dean
Free Lutheran Theological Seminary



"For you a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord!" Luke 2:11
What a wonderful message the story of Christmas brings: God has provided a way of salvation for us in the person of His only begotten Son. Here at AFLBS, Christmas is a very special time. The choirs prepare all fall for a festive time of praise, honoring the One who gave His all for us. The good news of Christ's coming is shared in local nursing homes, the surrounding community and in the times of fellowship together. We trust that is true in your church as well. On behalf of all the faculty, staff and students at AFLBS, we wish you all a blessed Christmas. May this be for you and yours a time of drawing near to Jesus as Savior, and of living in the Lordship of Christ.



—Rev. Donald Greven
Dean of AFLBS

Dear Jesus,
 Happy Birthday I Love you
 You are my Hero Jesus, is my Birthday Hero.
 I Love you Love Eric of Jesus

Eric Holland
 age 6
 Camarillo, CA

Dear Jesus,
 Happy Birthday We love you and
 I read my bible I love your home
 and you are my best friend. Happy
 Birthday Jesus.

Love, Amy

Amy Hauptman
 age 6
 Camarillo, CA

To Jesus

I Love You So much and
 when I die I'll go to Heaven
 with you for ever. And when
 I pray I pray to keep my
 parents and my Grandparents
 and my friends and all my
 animals and I thank you for
 every thing and my teachers
 too. And I do Love You.

And I'm in
 the Lambs
 book of life.

Emmy Swenson
 Age 9
 Warroad, MN

Dear Jesus,

I thank you for everything you
 have done for me. Thank you for
 Christmas. If you didn't come to
 earth, we would die and be
 in hell right now. I praise
 you for I am fearfully and
 wonderfully made.
 Help me to know you better.

P.S. I
 Love
 You


Nick Thyrd

6th Grade, 11 years old
 Crystal, MN

Letters to Jesus


To Jesus,

I love you, and your the best.

I don't know whos better than
 you. 

I love reading the Bible because

I know you died on the cross
 for me. and you saved me.
 And you rose from the dead. Thank you for my

 home and parents and for my
 brother and sister. Thank you for

my Christain School and Teacher

and my class and monitor. Thank
 you for my friends. Thank you for

my cloths and shoes. I'm thankful
 for everything you gave me.

Lara Nash

Age 7,
 Warroad, MN



Dear Jesus,

Thank you for dying on the cross to give us salvation. I'm glad that I accepted you as my Savior when I was seven and I'm sure you forgave me!!

Thank you that America is a free country and we have freedom to go to a christian school, a christian church, and be free to read the Bible without sneaking and trying hide.

Will you say hi to my grandpa for me? Please tell him that I can't wait to meet him! Please say hi to everyone I know in heaven and everyone I don't know.

Please stop the war in Iraq and change the leader's heart so no more people have to go over there and that no more people will die.


Love

Sarah Dyrud

Gr. 4

Golden Valley, Mn.

Dear Jesus



I thank you for dying on the cross for are sins. I thank you for coming into the earth, what you do for me is very nice. I thank you for ~~solving~~ all the problems I have. You help me with everything. I am glad that you made Christmas.

I thank you for loving me and for what you've done for me. I love you very much.

You are the strongest person I know. I care for you, and I love you a lot.

Love Kari Casuette
Brooklyn Park MN
Gr. 2

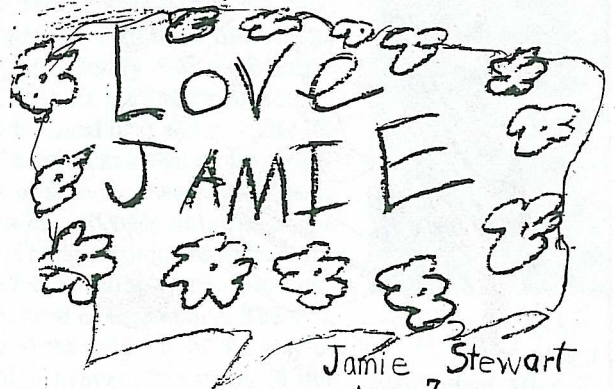
love John

I love you Jesus
very much for
saving everyone
and me.



John Wanless
Age 7
Amery, WI

Dear Jesus
I Love you Jesus.
I will like to hug you.
I will help my mom & dad.
thank you Jesus for dying
on the cross.
thank you for coming.
thank you for making a
school teacher.
thank you for coming
to the earth.
thank you for making me
and my brother and sisters.



Jamie Stewart
Age 7
Amery, WI

It's one of my favorite times of the year. I wait for the Christmas season. In October the search begins for projects in new craft magazines. I anticipate carols and baking Christmas cookies. A Christmas cactus buds in November, just on time. A heightened awareness of many things to do threatens to change plans. I want to celebrate Christmas in time to make plans. Our prayer is right for us. "Thank you, God, for the gift of Christmas. Help us to save it."

Doing something the same way
three times makes it a tradition, I read
once. Traditions do tie us together. Our
traditions begin on the first of Decem-
ber when we light a candle each
evening at supper. A variety of Advent
calendars help mark the days until
Christmas. We like a homemade one
that has pockets where Mom can insert
notes for each day. On the outside of
the pocket is a felt ornament to be hung
on a green felt tree. The star for the top
is saved for Christmas Eve, when we
also light every candle in the house.
Perhaps because we lived for so
long where there were no big stores
we never got used to going back to

Teaching children to put the emphasis on "doing" helped take the focus off an exaggerated "wish list." When Dad and boys made me a manger for our creche I noticed that package was chosen above all others to be delivered first. They stood around me as it was opened and listened proudly to my

a prized possession.
 We've had a few traditional
 gatherings. Most were quite untra-
 ditional. One of our most memorable
 Christmases took place literally "on the
 road in Madagascar." The axle in our
 borrowed truck broke. We were coming
 home from a visit to friends at a village
 some miles from us. It took hours to
 get repairs. The weather was hot and
 dry. A branch was propped in the spare
 tire and placed in the middle of the
 road—no traffic there. Ornaments were
 fashioned from gum wrappers and wild
 flowers. Fresh fruits from the lunch
 box were placed in the rim to represent
 God's gifts of goodness. Carols were
 sung. We arrived home too late for our
 traditional Christmas celebration. I
 dare to believe that God works in
 our traditions; He also is honored
 as we praise Him in the exceptions.
 Struggles ensue every
 year. Parents who want
 a child

Struggles ensue every year for parents who want to give just what a child will like. There hopefully will be in each person's life the memory of a "special" gift, one that exceeded all expectations. For this reason I think being frugal should have exceptions.



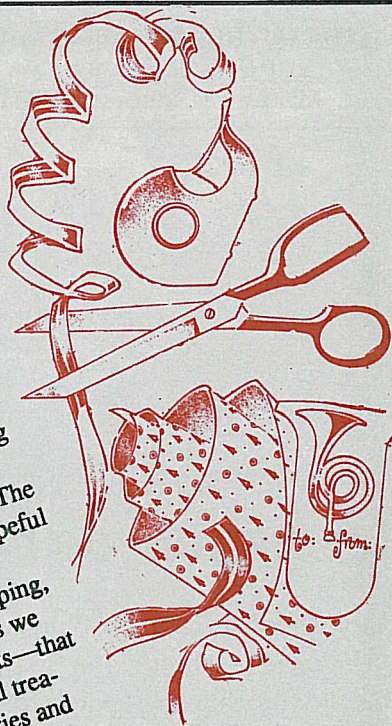
One Christmas my husband shocked me by buying new bikes for each boy—at the exaggerated prices passed on to those who buy imported goods in Third World countries. Somehow we survived; the boys spent many happy hours and made good memories on those bikes. I remember yet with awe a doll with real hair and eyes that closed, given to me during an otherwise bleak time of the Depression.

Times of adversity sometimes make for creativity. Several times when money was short we did our shopping on December 23. There was still a good selection and plenty of sales. The challenge was to stay calm and hopeful when friends commented on the progress of their Christmas shopping, and I had not begun. Sometimes we gave "tickets" for special events—that came after Christmas. The real treasures of music, scripture, stories and drama cost little. I respect a friend's diligence in collecting special Christmas books. The coffee table holds them each year and provides both memories and good reading. Some years we received from friends, whose generosity surpassed our understanding, a live goose carried to our home early Christmas morning. Now we hope the small plate of cookies and candies we make and take to friends carries a big message, "We care for you." Cards and notes link us to others.

Being faithful to devotions and quiet times helps me to remember to keep preparations simple. I will not this year, either, make all the crafty items, nor bake all the cookie recipes, nor finish my shopping before December 1. I will, with the Lord's help, reflect the joy I feel. On Christmas Eve, lights and hymns from churches and family gatherings will mingle with those from battlefields and prisons, hospitals and shelters, and I will still stand in awe. People all over the world will acknowledge that Jesus Christ was born. My prayer is that they would also know that He lived, died, rose again and will one day return.

—by Delores Berkas
Wallace, South Dakota

**"We want
to celebrate
Christmas in
a way that
is right for us."**



What's Wrong with Christmas

A mother, concerned when she heard Christmas denounced as a heathen, idolatrous revelry, wished to know if it would be wrong to brighten the home at Christmas and provide gifts for her children. I say we should make Christmas a bright spot in the lives of those we love. There is nothing wrong with Christmas; the wrong comes in the way it is observed. The King-Saviour must not be lost sight of in a vulgar display at Christmas. We must remember that at Christmas we commemorate the birth of Him who "was wounded for our transgressions ...bruised for our iniquities" and with whose "stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

—E. S. Williams



Christmas is a gift from God that a man cannot keep until he gives it to someone else.

.....

A lot of people are like Christmas trees. They get all spruced up at Christmas, decorate their homes and businesses, and even hang wreaths in their churches. But underneath all of the tinsel and decorations they are dead, joyless, bored people. Surrounded and entwined by the symbols of Christmas, they are putting on a happy front, trying not to let the world and themselves see that they have missed the whole point of the celebration.

—Gary Collins

...and the shepherds returned

Now it was all over. They went back to their fields...back to their sheep...back to work. They had celebrated the first Christmas. They had waited for it, but they really hadn't prepared for it. No rehearsals, no programs, no cards, no shopping, no parties—only one service. It was short and sweet. And now it was over.

Reminiscing, they spoke of the bright light. Not man-made, it was the glory of the Lord. The preacher...he said it all in a few words: "Unto you is born a Savior which is Christ the Lord." The choir...it was the heavenly host—the largest ever, the best ever, for the smallest congregation ever.

Let's go...they came...they worshiped...they returned....Now it was all over. They were the first to celebrate the first Christmas.

But it really wasn't all for them. It was just starting...glorifying and praising God...telling people. Now a new life, a new purpose, a new start, a new goal.

For us it's all over now—or is it?

Praising God and telling people! This is really the response of God's people. It is the result of celebrating Christmas.

Those who celebrate the birthday of the King will want to rededicate themselves to the King and reconsecrate themselves to basic Kingdom activity—praising the King and spreading the Word.

For you—is Christmas all over—or is Christ over all?

—Dr. Ted Raedeke