

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

December 13, 1988

*"Joy to the
World,
the Lord is
Come."*

~ISAAC WATTS

LIGHT on the WAY

meditations on God's Word

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Text: Isaiah 9:1-7

"The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them...For a Child will be born unto us, a Son will be given to us (vs. 2, 6).

One of the most reverent moments in the decorating of many homes for Christmas is the assembling of the Nativity scene. In some homes this is done at the foot of the Christmas tree. Little children, eyes filled with wonder, watch as angel lights are placed in the bows above the manger of the baby Jesus. The animals, shepherds, and Mary and Joseph, are solemnly placed in their appropriate positions behind and to the sides of the manger. All are placed so as to gaze upon the infant Jesus.

In the ministry of Martin Luther, the Nativity also had its place of importance. Luther wrote, "We must both read and meditate upon the Nativity. If the meditation does not reach the heart, we shall sense not sweetness, nor shall we know what solace for humankind lies in this contemplation. There is such richness and goodness in this Nativity that if we should see and deeply understand, we should be dissolved in perpetual joy."

For Luther, of course, this meditation went far beyond sentimentality. He was most concerned with faith and with the message of Christmas, "that in Christ God became flesh." "He was simply amazed that all the characters in the Christmas story were themselves able to believe. Had he been in their places he would certainly not have done so." On one occasion, he said, "If it were only the Turks, the Jews, and the mad princes, it would be bearable, but we Christians are the ones who despise Him," and, as he said, "I do it myself." "I cannot believe in Him as I should. In my heart it is just as bad as it is in the world." Certainly, we do well to confess, along with Luther, the same darkness of natural man which lies in our hearts.

In the end, though, it was for Luther just as it is for all believers. The Word of Christmas and of Christ conquered. The faith of Mary and Joseph, the

Luther on the Nativity

shepherds and the wise men, Anna, Simeon and others became his faith. In a meditation on the angel appearing to Mary, Luther said, "She held fast to the word of the angel because she had become a new creature. Even so must we be transformed and renewed in heart from day to day. Otherwise Christ is born in vain. This is the word of the prophet: 'Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given' (Is. 9:1). This is for us the hardest point, not so much to believe that He is the Son of the Virgin and God Himself, as to believe that this Son of God is ours. That is where we wilt, but he who does feel it has become another man. Truly it is marvelous in our eyes that God should place a little Child in the lap of a virgin and that all our blessedness should lie in Him. And this Child belongs to all mankind. God feeds the whole world through a Babe nursing at Mary's breast. This must be our daily exercise: to be transformed into Christ, being nourished by this food. Then will the heart be suffused with all joy and will be strong and confident against every assault."

"Why should the Lord of all the universe care enough about us mortals to take our flesh and share our woes? Why should God humble himself to lie in the feed box of a donkey and to hang upon a Cross?" These are the questions of Luther's Nativity meditation. What dreadful darkness! What glorious light! "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given." That is the blessedness of Christmas. (Quotations are from *The Martin Luther Christmas Book*, by Roland H. Bainton, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1948. Readers are encouraged to acquire this small booklet for their Christmas meditations.)



by Pastor
Ralph Tjelta

(The main incident in the story is true and comes from the author's childhood.)

A star and a tree. Such a humble request. The snow came to just above my ankles, fresh flakes powdering the shoulders of my coat. The memory of Jill's wistful brown eyes haunted me as I struggled to open the sliding door of the barn.

The calico cat with a crumpled ear, an ever gracious host, met me as I stepped inside. The cows were standing patiently in their stalls, waiting for the milkmaid and her pail.

I could visualize the noisy chaos within the house – my four children were making Christmas cookies, candy sprinkles and drops of icing decorating the floor, their faces, the table cloth and, hopefully, a few of the cookies. Charlie was supervising from a kitchen chair, his smashed leg in its bulky cast propped on a hamper, the leg which was responsible for keeping him from his winter job as a garage mechanic.

The chicken coop had been my first stop and as I spread the corn in the feeder, I had avoided looking at the heat lamps which would have to be run 24 hours a day in bitter weather. The heat lamps reminded me of the electric bill lying in the unpaid pile in the kitchen drawer.

Tonight was Christmas Eve and before going to bed I still had to put the yarn hair on Jill's rag doll, hem Donna's skirt and sew the buttons on the boys' shirts. Christmas Eve, and there was no tree.

I had broken the news to the children less than a week ago. The breakfast table had been the scene of a stimulating debate as to the placement of the tree and very little oatmeal was being eaten. Jill waved her spoon in ecstasy, seeing inner visions of evergreen splendor. "I want a star on the tree. A pretty star like the one I carried in the Christmas play! Jesus was born under the Christmas star, you know."

I could wait no longer. Joining them at the table, I explained that we couldn't afford to buy a tree this year. "We can't cut down any of the trees Grandpa planted, can we?"

Four heads shook a vigorous "no." "But where will we put our presents?" David, age nine, inquired plaintively. "They always go under the tree."

"We'll find a special spot." No one smiled. "Please don't talk about the tree in front of your father, children. He feels terrible about being unable to work and I can't get a job because he needs special care."

My voice broke and Donna jumped up to put her arms around me. "We can string popcorn

The Star of Bethlehem

it shone
over our
house that
night

and put it on the spruce outside the family room window. That way the birds will have a Christmas tree."

David and I can have fun making snowmen," Jeff chimed in.

Jill was silent, but a crystal drop rolled down the babyish cheek and plopped into her untouched oatmeal.

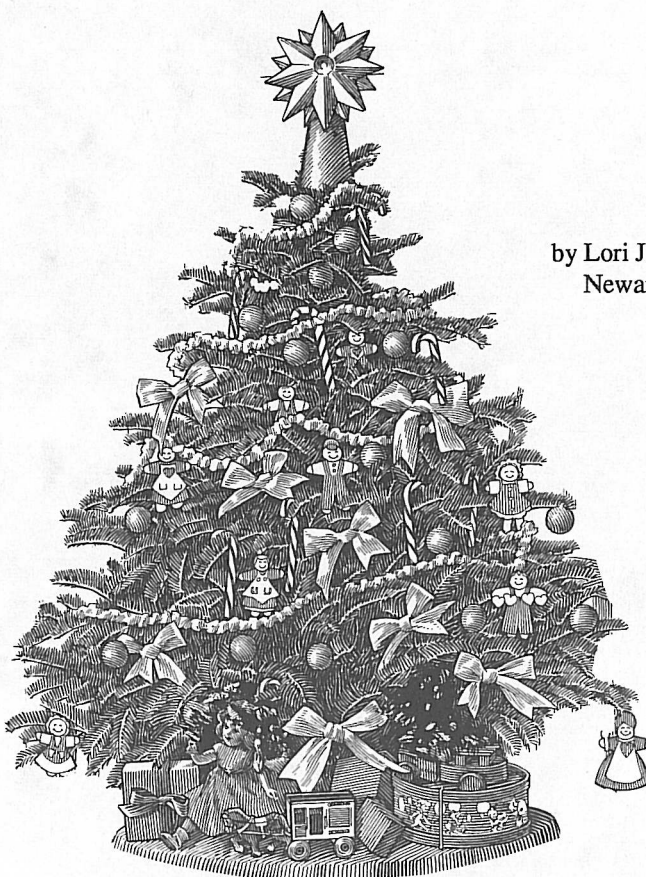
I was a failure as a mother – couldn't even supply a tree to put my homemade gifts under. A honk signalled the arrival of the bus and triggered a wild scramble for coats, books and mittens.

Wrapping a scarf around my kindergartner's parka hood, I kissed the tip of her nose. "We'll have fun this Christmas, Jill. Leave it to Mommy."

(cont. on p. 6)

"Please
don't talk
about the
tree in
front of
your father."

by Lori J. Ness
Newark, Ill.





MICAH 5:2

I.

On the brow of a high hill
About six miles southward from Jerusalem
Is situated a little town with a long history.
Near this town are the fields
Where young David watched his flocks
And gazed upon the starry sky.
And near this town is the field
Where the angel of the Lord
Came upon the shepherds
And the glory of the Lord
Shone round about them.
The name of this little town in the Land of Judah
Is known and loved by Christians everywhere.
Old people know and love its name.
Even children know and love its name.
The name of the little town is Bethlehem.

II.

The little town of Bethlehem
Is very old indeed.
The prophet Micah, who lived about
Seven hundred and fifty years before
the Christian era,
Mentions the town and
tells of what would come
To take place there at some future time.
Says the prophet:
But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah,
Though thou be little among the thousands
of Judah
Yet out of thee shall He come forth
That is to be ruler in Israel,
Whose goings forth
Have been from old, from everlasting,
And who shall be great unto the ends
of the earth.
The town of Bethlehem is no longer
The least among the cities in the land of Judah
Or in the world.
To the Christian heart it has come to be
The greatest of all.
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in the town of Bethlehem.

III.

It is not the size of a place
But what occurs in the place that counts.
A seemingly small spot on the face of the earth
Has very often been the scene of
Great and glorious events.
Battles that have changed the history
of the world
Have been fought in or near small villages.
Little Bethlehem in the land of Judah
Has become glorious and greatly loved
Because He Whose goings
forth from everlasting,
The eternal Father's only Son,
There took a manger for His throne

And the everlasting Fount of good
There assumed our mortal flesh and blood.
To fallen man himself He bowed
That He might lift us up to God.

IV.

When the angel of the Lord
Had announced to awestruck shepherds
The tidings of great joy:
Unto you is born this day in the city of David,
A Savior which is Christ the Lord,
The shepherds said one to another:
Let us now go even unto Bethlehem
And see this thing which is come to pass,
Which the Lord hath made known unto us.
Nor did the shepherds say this merely.
They went with haste to Bethlehem
And to their joy
Found what the angel had told them:
A Babe lying in a manger,
The Savior which is Christ the Lord –
God manifest in the flesh:
The patriarch's joy –
The prophet's song –
The heavenly Dayspring looked for long.

V.

This very night, old people,
Young people and little children
In Christian homes throughout the world
Will gather about a Christmas tree
Full of lights and rich in gifts of love.
The thoughts of Christians everywhere
Will wing their way
To the little town of Bethlehem
In the land of Judah.
Let us join the millions that at this time
Think of Bethlehem and the Child
That was born there nearly two thousand
years ago
Come, let us hasten yonder –
There let all, great and small,
Kneel in awe and wonder.
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met this night in the town of Bethlehem.
For He Who doth within a manger lie,
The Son of God,
The Son of Mary,
Savior of mankind
And Whose eternal throne is set above the sky,
For our sakes became poor,
That we through His poverty
might become rich.
Now let us all with gladness cheer
Follow the shepherds and draw near
To see this wondrous Gift of God
Through Whom the sinful world is blest.
Amen.

Gerhard Rasmussen (*Vesper Meditations*)

STAR

The brown eyes looked at me solemnly. "I'll ask Jesus for a tree and a star. The star is really for Him."

The silence in the barn allowed Jill's words to echo in my mind. The radio in the house had been playing Christmas carols and I switched the radio set on a shelf to the same station and turned it on, hoping to soothe my inner turmoil. A tree and a star. Jill prayed every night for Jesus to bring her a tree and a star.

If I couldn't supply a tree, would her faith be shattered? Seated on the milking stool, I leaned my head against the warmth of Buttercup's flank and ran through a mental list of friends who would be happy to loan me the money. Charlie's pride would be hurt, however, realizing as he did that it couldn't be paid back. The doctor, the hospital and the various utility companies all claimed first priority.

Dippy, part-Siamese, as his crossed eyes attested, rubbed his cheek against my leg and purred. He was waiting for a squirt of milk and I obliged. Opening his mouth wide, he gulped happily and licked off the drops which had splattered across his whiskers.

As I fed Fawn, who was still nursing her calf and therefore couldn't be milked, I began to feel more at peace. The animals, the scent of straw from the loft and the manger I was filling with hay reminded me of a stable in long ago Bethlehem. Jesus was born in humble circumstances among the animals and grain because there was no room in the inn.

I froze, pitchfork upraised. No room in the inn? There was no room in my heart for Him, either. My worries about bills, the children and Charlie had crowded out the love and warmth of the Christ Child. No wonder I stumbled from task to task with a heavy heart.

I found myself singing along with the radio, anxious to get back into the house and enjoy the wonder and majesty of Christmas with my family; the tinsel and glitter now seemed unimportant – we had each other.

I poured some milk into a pan for the cats and wished them all a "Merry Christmas" before going back out into the falling snow, the lights from the kitchen beckoning me with their warmth and cheer.

Jill was very quiet during supper. Throughout the day she had kept checking the spot in the family room she had reserved for her "tree" in hopes that it had been delivered, but without success.

After the meal, Donna and I cleared the table and David brought the family Bible to his father

A CHRISTMAS STORM

- By Petra Fleischer

When we get older and look back on the years which have gone by, we realize that we don't remember everything. Much has been forgotten and nothing can be done about that. At the same time, there are many experiences, large and small, which we haven't forgotten because something in them had made a deep impression on us.

We had so many happy Christmases in that cozy old parsonage in an out-of-the-way, quiet valley in western Norway where I grew up. We always were very happy at Christmas and espe-

"...the scent
of straw from
the loft...
reminded me
of a stable
in long ago
Bethlehem."

for the reading of the Christmas Story.

Charlie had just reached the point where the wise men inform King Herod, "For we have seen His star in the east and have come to worship Him," when the strains of "Silent Night" became audible.

Jeff ran to the window. "Look, everybody! we've got carolers!" There was a scraping of chairs as his brother and sisters ran to join him.

The snow fell softly, muffling the sound of young voices. I opened the window and we listened as our visitors sang three more songs. Donna and David ran outside to invite them in for cookies and hot chocolate. Al Miller, a Sunday School teacher and a good friend, was the leader of the group and warned his charges to wipe their feet on the mat before turning to Charlie.

"We brought you a surprise" Al said. "I sent some of the older boys back out to the station wagon to get it."

The surprise was a three-foot-tall evergreen set in a tree holder and decorated with

cially on Christmas Eve, naturally. It's that way for all the children. Christmas Eve, now as then, is the greatest, the number one and big event of the year. We talked about Christmas long before it came. The days became shorter and darker – yes, now Christmas would soon be here. We counted the days. Snow had fallen– Christmas snow, white and beautiful. Maybe there would be moonlight, too, we thought.

The parsonage was very busy; preparations for Christmas Eve were in full swing; there was butchering and baking and cleaning to do. And wonderful odors came from the kitchen. We children also had our small secrets, little packages to be laid under the Christmas tree on that great evening. And we had learned the Christmas songs: "O How Beautiful the Sky," "Ring, O Ye Bells, O Ring Out," and "Silent Night."

In our towns and communities there aren't the poor people now such as there were some years ago. Then there were many poor homes. And there were also in the community where I grew up and I remember how glad I was when my mother sent me to some of these poor homes with a little basket of good things for Christmas. In the basket she had put Christmas bread, a sausage, and besides that a little of several things, all homemade. Everyone was so glad when they got what had been brought for

"There was
a knock at
the door.
A man stood
there,
soaking wet."

Christmas and they thanked and thanked.

There was a Christmas Eve I have never forgotten. For a long time we had had such beautiful weather, with a little snow and frost so we could go sledding in the hills. And we believed that the weather would be like that over Christmas, too. But that isn't the way it was. On December 23rd rain threatened and the wind began to blow. The wind increased. Christmas Eve day the rain came in torrents and there was almost a storm. But the Christmas tree was brought in from the woods and set in its place in the parlor, where there always was fire in the stove during the days of Christmas. And there the tree was decorated.

At last Christmas Eve itself came, the time we had long awaited with anticipation. The day had been dark and the rain poured down. The wind blew quite strongly.

There was a knock at the door. A man stood there, soaking wet. He had to talk with the pastor and was shown to the office. The man had rowed over from the other side of the fjord. The errand was of great importance. His aged father lay very sick with pneumonia. But he had a request they wanted very much to grant, if it were possible to do so. The father's wish was to receive the Lord's Supper before he died. The son said to his ailing father that it was Christ-

◇

construction paper chains and handmade ornaments. Jill danced around excitedly, stepping on people's feet and strewing cookie crumbs on the family room carpet as the tree was carried in in triumph.

Her cup of joy overflowed, however, when Al reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a star trimmed in glittering gold. "This belongs on top of the church tree," he told Jill. "But I thought it might be happier here for a few days."

He lifted Jill so she could place it on the top of the tree. The chatter of people in the kitchen rang in my ears as I stared at the sweet smelling evergreen.

Al was grinning at my shocked expression. "My Sunday School class wanted to do something special for a family and I happened to think of you and Charlie. They've been slaving away on ornaments and paper chains for a month – just as excited about their surprise as this little sprout seems to be." He nodded at Jill who was seated cross-legged before the tree,

"The falling
flakes melted
and mixed
with the
warm tears
on my
cheeks..."

head tilted back as she gazed up at the star.

I managed to stammer our thanks and Charlie pressed Al's hand fervently. At the door, Al stopped to slip an envelope into my hand. "A Christmas angel left this at the church office for you folks."

He winked and began shepherding his charges, who were making snow angels with Jeff and David on our front lawn, toward the station wagon and the van.

I counted the bills inside the envelope. I would be able to pay the utility bills and there was enough left over for groceries.

The vehicles pulled out of the yard in a flurry of snow, snatches of "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen" drifting back to my ears.

The falling flakes melted and mixed with the warm tears on my cheeks as I whispered, "Let nothing you dismay – remember Christ our Savior was born on Christmas Day." I looked up into a haze of white, and although I couldn't see it, I knew the Star of Bethlehem shone over our house that night.

One of our pastors writes

Christmas: what it really means to us and to the world



by Rev. Alvin J. Grothe
Astoria, Ore.

An artist drew a picture of a winter twilight – the trees heavily laden with snow, and a dreary, dark house, lonely and desolate in the midst of the storm. It was a sad picture. Then, with a quick stroke of a yellow crayon, he put a light in one window. The effect was magical. The entire scene was transformed into a vision of comfort and cheer. The birth of Christ was just such a light in a dark, dreary, sin-cursed world.

Christmas! What does it mean to you, to me and to the world? That is a very searching question, is it not? Observing what takes place each year, it is not too difficult to discern what Christmas means to people. This old world was dark when Jesus came that first Christmas and it is yet a dark place. Unregenerate men demonstrate their ignorance or rejection of the “essence of Christmas.” To them it is a mere celebration, empty and devoid of any spiritual meaning. It is a time of impulsive spending. In the world of commercialism the Christmas spirit is “the spending spirit.” Decorating trees in early October to get buyers in the “mood,” just another holiday vacation,

parties, Santa Claus, that benevolent, bewhiskered old man (who has become like a mythical god to many), dashing, scurrying, buying, wrapping, mailing, cooking and a myriad of other feverish activities – the true “essence” of Christmas is obscured, if not totally lost. Then come the post-Christmas deficits and depression.

The pagan practices of the world are the devil’s diversion and attempt to blot out the real meaning of this sacred event with all his imitations. Sad to say, we Christians often seem to get caught up in this same web. Many family traditions are good in themselves, but if they crowd out the tradition of Christ they are wrong.

What does Christmas really mean? What is the essence of Christmas? In this world there are those who knew it and lost it by neglect or carelessness or love for the world. There are those

Christmas is the difference
between light and darkness,
life and death, heaven and
hell...”

STORM

"When the
need is
greatest
then God
is nearest."

mas Eve and the weather was stormy, so that it would perhaps be difficult to cross the fjord. And the pastor would have to travel the sameway. The old one didn't listen, but begged his son to go. And so he had done that and now sat in my father's study knowing it was rather difficult to fulfill his errand, and anxious to know what the answer would be. My father said "Yes, of course, I will go with you." And while my father got ready, the man sat in that cozy, warm kitchen and drank coffee. And then they left. It was stormy.

Many prayers were prayed that Christmas Eve, both in the home of the sick one, and in the parsonage where my mother went about praying silently. She heard the storm without and was uneasy about what might happen.

When the need is greatest then God is nearest. He heard the prayers. The old man took part in the farewell meal he had longed for.

It became completely dark before my father could begin the homeward journey. Two helpful neighbors offered to row the pastor home again over the fjord in a large boat. It rained, and the

wind was against them and the rowing was hard. Everything went well, but it was long past midnight when the two men got back to their homes. And they likely never forgot that unusual Christmas Eve.

For my father it was quite a long trip to make from the parsonage dock in rain and darkness. But the joy among young and old was quite indescribable when he had come safely home.

On Christmas Day the weather was much better. But it was a "black" Christmas because the rain took the snow away. At church there were also people from the other side of the fjord and they could report that the aged pilgrim had slept quietly away early Christmas morning.

And in the church we sang – as always – Brorson's powerful Christmas song with its many stanzas, which we learned by heart:

"For when the heart is most oppressed,
The harp of joy is tuned the best,
The better strains are ringing."

("In This Our Happy Christmastide")

Hjemmenes Julehefte

(Translated from the Norwegian)

who know it and have rejected it. But, praise God, there are those who do know it, have experienced it and also show it. They shine like the star of Bethlehem against the black backdrop of this world steeped in sin.

Christmas! What does it mean? Could we sum it all up with this? It is the difference between light and darkness, life and death, heaven and hell, hope and despair, peace and turmoil. It boils down to the question, what is the essence of Christmas? It is answered with the words of Matthew. "And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins." So, "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."

Christmas means salvation. *Jesus* our Savior is born. The first step. Emmanuel, "God with us." But we must look beyond the cradle to the cross and to the crown. His name shall be called *Jesus*, embracing His entire nature and His life's purpose. He is the Savior who has come to save His people from their sins. He came "to seek and to save that which was lost." He was born to die that you and I might live. He, *Jesus* is the essence of

Christmas. I think of a little booklet written by E. B. Simpson titled "Himself." The central theme: Jesus is enough. Are we satisfied with *Him*. Christmas is *Jesus* and step one in God's plan of salvation for a lost and dying world.

Christmas is light. "In Him (Jesus) was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not...That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:4, 5, 9). Just as food is for the hungry, medicine for the sick, water for the thirsty, so also light is for those who sit in darkness. Now those who "walked in darkness have seen a great light" (Isaiah 9:2). And, "through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:79). That is Christmas. *Jesus* our light has come. *Jesus* our Savior is here. *Jesus!* Is He enough? Does Christmas mean that to you?

Christmas means "glad tidings" and "joy." "Great joy!" (Luke 2:10). This is a universal message "which shall be to

"Our Savior has come!"

all people." It is to be told to all the world even though all will not hear. Not all think they need a Savior. They are not convinced that they are sinners, but all we need to do is place ourselves under the searchlight of God's holy Word and our total depravity is quickly revealed. "As it is written, 'There is none righteous, no, not one,'" (Romans 3:10). "There is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Romans 3:12b). Sin is darkness; righteousness is light. *Jesus* the Savior, the "Light of the world" has come. What glorious news! What "glad tidings" to the sin-sick, guilt-ridden soul that sits in gross darkness. Is our whole Christmas self-made or do we need *Jesus*? Yes, it is a universal message, but it is also personal and present. "For unto *you* is born *this day*...a Savior, which is *Christ the Lord*. Have you rejected Him? Have you left Him? Or, have you sinned against Him. Then cry out with David of old, "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation" (Psalm 51:12). "Make me to hear joy and gladness"

(cont. on p.12)

THE GREATEST GIFT



That first Christmas
The miracle of salvation began.

Mary believed in the miracle –
Her Son, her firstborn, a magnificent gift from God.

She kissed His soft cheeks, stroked His tiny fingers,
Rocked Him gently, comforted His cries.
She smiled as He slept and rejoiced when He awoke.

She could not know all that He would become,
all that He was.
She only knew what she felt –
A love that transcended everything.

The path to heaven began at the stable door.
Mary loved all that was necessary:
His name was Jesus.

Pat Fridgen
North Mankato, Minn.

Joy To All People



Pastor Richard Snipstead
President,
Association of Free Lutheran
Congregations.

Greetings to each reader of *The Lutheran Ambassador* in the Name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

"I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people" (Luke 2:10b).

Christmas is a time of special joy. The content of the message proclaimed by the angel to the shepherds was of such magnitude that it would cause all peoples of the earth to experience great joy.

'Have you noticed how this theme of joy is echoed by so many of our Christmas carols? One of the best loved is:

*"Joy to the world! The Lord is come:
Let earth receive her King;
Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room,
And heav'n and nature sing."*

This great joy was to be the experience of all peoples. I cannot help but think of how it was for the Gentiles before Christ came. There was no joy for those who were outside of God's chosen nation, Israel. Paul puts it so well in Ephesians 2:11-12: "Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world."

What a dramatic change was effected by the message that a Savior was born for all people. It is good for us to be reminded of this as we celebrate Christmas 1988.

Gentiles born before Christ came were without God, without hope and outside of the promises, and thus without joy.

"But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:13). As the proclamation of the angel to the shepherds implies, Christ's coming into the world had great

significance for all people and especially the Gentiles. No longer would we be on the outside looking in, longing for hope and a relationship with the eternal, almighty God. Now because of Christ, the entire world was included in the message of hope. God's plan of salvation did include all men. The tidings of great joy were for all people.

I rejoice in the knowledge of the fact that though as Gentiles we would have been on the outside, now you and I are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

The good tidings of great joy that were for all people can become personal and real in our individual experience. It will be so when we possess the personal assurance of the forgiveness of sin through the finished work of Christ. There is nothing in all of life's experiences that can compare with the joy that a child of God has in the knowledge that he is a child of God. He has peace with God because his sins are forgiven. He has a standing in the grace of God where he is able to rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

The shepherds went to Bethlehem to see the Savior. They returned glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen. Later, wise men from the east were filled with joy as the guiding star led them to the Christ Child.

When through the eyes of faith we have seen Christ and have come to know Him, then we, too, can join the ranks of the redeemed in the chorus of praise that began 2,000 years ago.

If the Savior dwells within, the great joy of salvation should radiate from our lives.

*"Hark the glad sound!
The Lord has come,
The Savior promised long;
Let every heart be filled with joy,
And every voice a song!"*

May your heart and home reflect the true joy of Christmas. A blessed Christmas to all.

The fruitcake
became a symbol

a gift is made to be given

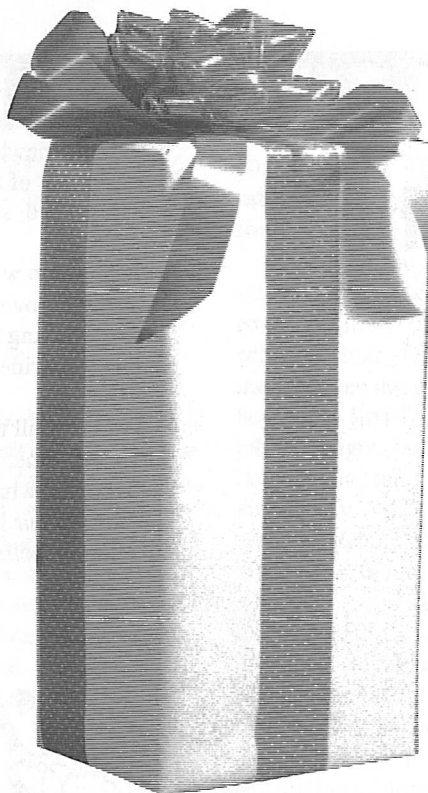
One Saturday morning in early December, I had actually made it as far as cleaning my room. As I sorted through my belongings, making the usual piles – stuff to give away, stuff to throw away, stuff to keep – I came across something that brought back a flood of memories. It was a decorative fruitcake tin. The cover was embellished with a horse and sleigh, and inside were some of my most treasured possessions. I thought back to the day I had received it....

It was an early December Saturday such as this, and the house was in an uproar. We were getting ready to attend the Christmas party my maternal aunts and uncles held each year. Dad had somehow disappeared towards the barn, as he nearly always manages to do when it's time to go some place, and Mom was shouting for someone to go and get him. My older sister was tying up the bathroom, and my brother was trying to explain to Mom that he wasn't going with us.

I stood in the middle of my room and listened. I hoped that Dad would come back in time to brush my hair. He was the only one who could do it without pulling.

My sister finally got out of the bathroom and went to get Dad. Mom forgot about my brother's not coming and went to finish fixing the vegetable tray we were bringing.

I went out into the hall and looked at the grocery bag sitting there filled with presents. I wasn't sure I wanted to give them away. I didn't even know what was in some of them, but then Mom had said we'd be getting some



—By Carol Waterworth
Newfolden, Minn.

back. Maybe I would get another stuffed animal. I thought I could have used one, but I know my mom would have disagreed.

At last we were ready to go. When we arrived at my aunt's house, the very first thing that caught my eye was the tree. It stood in the corner, near the stairway, and underneath it were piles of presents. I went to help my sister add our gifts to the others. Then I began hunting for the one with my name on it. Finally I found it. It was rectangular-shaped, solid and a little heavy. I had no idea what was in it. Of course, I wanted to open it immediately, but I had to wait. I tried to forget about the present while I played with my cousins and had dinner. We kept running back to the tree and looking at it. At last the grown-ups finished eating and said we could pass out the gifts.

My sister and one of our older cousins sat under the tree and told us whom to give the packages and cards to. Then I got to open my present. I tore off the wrapping paper and looked at it.

It was a tin box. "There must be something inside," I thought. I took off

the cover and saw a fruitcake. I hate fruitcake. I was only five years old. Who would give a five-year-old a fruitcake for Christmas?

It was a disappointing day...

We took the fruitcake home. My family ate it and I kept the box. Gradually, though, I realized it wasn't as useless as I had thought and I began to store my mementoes in it.

To me that fruitcake has become a real symbol: I was born into a Christian home and taught from birth that Jesus is our Savior. The Gift became real to me at an early age. I am very thankful to have Christian parents who understood the real meaning of Christmas and have taught it to me.

Many people never hear about Jesus until after they are older. Sometimes they don't hear until after it is too late. They don't even know that God sent them a present. Or maybe they do know, but they don't think the Gift is important enough to accept.

When God sent His Son to earth, people were excited. It was a present, a gift, something special for them. However, after they had seen what was in the Gift, they weren't so sure they wanted it. They said, "Let someone else have it. Kill it. Just get rid of it. It isn't what we expected or wanted."

But some people realized that Jesus was a heavenly Savior, for everyone. They understood that if He was kept in their hearts and shared with others, then He would become the most precious gift of all, to each and every person in the world. Today He is still our most precious gift.

That's what I learned from my fruitcake. If it had been an interesting toy with lots of moveable parts, I would have liked it at the time. I might have enjoyed it for months. But it wasn't just for me. I shared it with my family, and it still belonged to me, just like when you share the Lord; He comes back to you through others.

Now I can keep my gifts to use and to share: the most precious gift of Jesus and the unusual gift from my aunt. Who would give a five-year-old a fruitcake for Christmas? One very loving aunt who understood that a gift is made to be given.

Welcome Blessed Child

We bid you welcome again,
Tiny, most blessed Child.
A miracle from Your Father, God;
Borne by a virgin, pure and mild.

You arrived in a stable
In the city of Bethlehem;
Angels appeared to shepherds
And announced the tidings to them.

Three wise men rode many long miles
To follow a brilliant, shining star.
They and the shepherds came to the stable
To worship the same Babe, from near and far.

The Infant's face was all aglow;
His smile, the most radiant ever seen.
All around Him were quiet and hushed –
From kings to shepherds and livestock, fat and lean.

The angels all caroled sweetly:
"Hail to the newborn King."
The salvation of the entire world
Is in this Child, so small and serene.

Lord, how can we ever repay this most precious Gift
Of freedom, love and eternal life?
How? By loving and living for others,
Here in the Bridegroom's Church, His wife.

God bless us all this holy day,
And let us remember well
Just who and what we celebrate,
The birth of our Lord.
Ring out the bell!!

Helen Strom
Ishpeming, Mich.

*Joy to the
World*

REALLY MEANS

(v. 8). Christmas means "Joy to the world, the Lord is come!" Good news!

Christmas means peace. "...and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14b). God's good will toward men. God's mercy, love and grace toward us in and through *Jesus* His Son, who came to reconcile us unto God and "made peace through the blood of His cross" (Ephesians 2:14-17; Colossians 1:20). "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our *Lord Jesus Christ*" (Romans 5:1). The world speaks much of peace. Many preachers today say, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace." There is no peace while rejecting the "*Prince of Peace*." Jesus said, "*My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you*" (John 14:27). Christmas ought to mean peace to us. Peace *with* God and the peace *of* God. I trust it is so with you. The peace that *Jesus* gives. The "peace of God, which passeth all understanding" (Philippians 4:7).

Then, too, Christmas means

"Glorifying and praising God" (Luke 2:20). How do you and I respond to that "good news?" How do we respond to that truth that "a light is come into the world?" How do we respond to the message to us from God that "unto you is born a *Savior*?" "She shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name *Jesus*: for He shall save His people from their sins." The shepherds celebrated that first Christmas all right, but not like the world. The world celebrates, too, in a pagan way. But the shepherds "returned, *glorifying and praising* God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them" (Luke 2:20). That is what Christmas *ought* to mean to us and to the world. A time to glorify and praise God for what he has done. "Christ the Savior is born..."

Yes, my friends, Christmas ought to mean *salvation* to us and the world. Our Savior has come! It ought to mean *light* in our lives and hearts. It ought to mean *glad tidings* and *joy* to us sinners for, "where sin abounded,

grace did much more abound" in *Jesus*. Christmas ought to mean *peace*, the peace that only Jesus can give, an inner tranquility of the heart and the mind. It ought to mean a *glorifying and praising* God for all that he has done for us in *Jesus*. If you have embraced and know the true essence of Christmas which is *Jesus*, born to die that you and I might live, then these are yours. Praise God for new life in Christ, the Christ of the Cradle, the Christ of the Cross and the Christ of the Crown.

If you have not come to Him as yet, then "come with haste." The Christmas message is for you. God invites you. The hosts of heaven invite you. The Word of God invites you. Of the shepherds the Word says, "They came with haste" (Luke 2:16) "and found..." Jesus said, "Seek, and ye shall find." May Christ Jesus be in your Christmas, but, more importantly, in your heart.

TELL ME THE STORY SIMPLY

There's an old Gospel song which begins this way:
 "Tell me the old, old story,
 of unseen things above,
 of Jesus and His glory,
 of Jesus and His love;
 Tell me the story *simply*..."

(Kate Hankey)

It is a marvelous story, the story of Jesus. We are getting it through our church services, but also in bits and pieces these weeks of Advent and Christmas through carols, programs, and greeting cards received and sent. God sent His Son into the world; Jesus was born. If more people only *believed* what they sing and say, this world would be a different place.

Christmas is at the door. How much meaning is associated with it for us. It is the festival of the incarnation, "God with us," as Isaiah wrote. The Savior has come. Let us hear the story simply, using four words which begin with the letter "c."

The first word is *census*. Joseph and Mary lived in the north. The Great One was to be born in Bethlehem far to the south. Joseph and Mary knew that the Child she was carrying was special. The angel had told Mary that He was the Son of the Most High, and Joseph, that He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. "Call His name Jesus," the angel had said to Joseph, "for He will save His people from their sins." How should the prophecy about Bethlehem be fulfilled?

Rome thought the religion of the Jews mere superstition. They let them run their religious affairs as long as they gave Caesar his due. But mighty Caesar played into the hands of One mightier than he when he called for a census, thus bringing Joseph, with Mary, to his ancestral city, and causing the age-old prophecy of Micah to come true.

All of this was a part of God's plan. God sent His Son into the world. No one else could effect salvation and a Roman census played a big part in causing all things to work out.

As we tell the story simply, we note the *circumstances* surrounding the birth of Jesus. They were very humble, more than for any of us. No human royalty would consider such poor conditions for a birthing.

Mary and Joseph found Bethlehem's lone public lodging facility full. Have our readers ever come face to face with a "No Vacancy" sign after a hard day's drive and had to go on further in hopes of finding a place to stay the night? But what do people do when they are walking, with one perhaps riding a donkey?

There was no room in the inn. Many a Christmas sermon has been preached on the theme, "Is there room in our hearts for Jesus?" That is a natural transfer and a good question to ask. In our Christmases, can it be seen whose birthday we are celebrating?

Jesus was born in humble circumstances to show that His kingdom is not of this world and that we might become rich.

Not materially, for that is not the great concern of God, but rather spiritually and eternally. But we must believe in Jesus for this to be so.

As we tell the story simply, we observe the *celebration* which took place. We see it in the announcement of the royal birth by the angel, then by the heavenly host or celestial choir. Would we like to have heard sound such as that? We see the celebration of the shepherds, those men and boys who first heard the news. They were just doing their job that night, but we believe they were among the waiting ones of the land, for when they saw the great heavenly vision they didn't scoff, but went at once to see what had come to pass. The shepherds celebrated, not in the way we often think of the word, but by honoring and praising God who had caused this to happen.

Finally, the wise men from the East, when they came later, fell down and worshiped before the little One they knew to be of God. The gifts they brought were for royalty.

Do our Christmases have the air of celebration about them: Not as the world so often celebrates, but the celebration of deep joy?

The fourth word we should notice as we tell the story of the birth of Jesus simply is *communication*. The angel first communicated the good news. And then the shepherds, after seeing for themselves the visitation of the Lord God, told others. They were the first human witnesses to the Gospel. What a great honor was theirs!

How much that communication is needed in our world! If we believe the Christmas story, that God sent His only Son and that there is salvation through Him, if we know Jesus Christ personally, then let us spread the news boldly and unashamedly. Let us reach out to as many as we can as soon as we can.

The world is waiting for the story of Jesus. The telling need only be simple, in fact, that is the most effective way.

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

There is no question but that Christmas holds a very dear place in people's hearts. We realize that there are exceptions, but usually it is the case. Children love Christmas as a present thing and their celebration of it is making their memories of the future. We adults look back in fondness at the Christmases we remember, the gifts that made special impressions on us, the warm feeling of family in the holiday season.

I find it interesting that both writers of the pieces in this issue translated from the Norwegian (my father one of them) wrote glowingly of Christmas Eve as just a wonderful time in their childhood homes in Norway. Beyond doubt, the same would be said by other writers from different lands.

My own memories go back to several small midland American and Canadian towns. In the Canadian town we

◇

Christmas thoughts

Christmas time is here once more –
Have we forgotten what it's for?
People are running to and fro –
Where are they going; do they know?
What will we buy for Dad and Mom?
What did we get last year for Tom?
What shall we eat and whom invite?
We have to trim the tree tonight.

In the hustle and bustle, do we remember
What really took place that cold December?
We celebrate the Christ Child's birth,
When the Son of God came down to earth
In the human form of a baby Boy:
Doesn't that fill your heart with joy?
Surely the greatest gift of all
Came from God in that manger stall.

That baby Boy, God's only Son,
Was born to die for everyone.
Do we ever stop to count the cost?
Would we give our child to save the lost?
As we gather our loved ones close once more
And the unseen Guest knocks at our door,
Are we too busy with worldly things?
To open our hearts to the King of Kings?

*Verna Kammen
Badger, Minn*

Christmas joy

Again our thoughts turn back to when
Our Lord was born in Bethlehem.
In God's great plan the time was come
For Him to send His only Son.
The days were dark and hope was dim.
Only a remnant awaited Him.
He came as Israel's promised light,
To give the blinded people sight.

Today with joy we praise and sing
Of this our Christ and Savior-King.
Though the whole world in darkness lies,
Believers yet look to the skies,
Awaiting Christ the manger-born,
From heaven in power to return.
O glorious day of joy and bliss
When we shall see Him as He is!

Now at this wondrous Christmastime
We marvel at God's gift divine.
The spotless Lamb for sinners slain
Will not for us have died in vain
If we ask Him into our hearts;
Then Christmas joy will ne'er depart.

*E. I. Mork
Bottineau, N. Dak.*

EDITORIALS

Scandinavians were a minority among people of other national origins, who didn't make much of Christmas Eve. But no matter, we were free to do as we pleased and we followed the customs of our ancestors.

Those small midland towns did their best to bring good things to us for Christmas. There wasn't the variety one finds today, but we didn't know better and we were happy. A fine gift then might cost \$3.98 whereas today parents might think in terms of something for \$24.98 or even \$49.98.

Taking part in the public school programs was exciting although the rehearsals were tiresome. The performances were held in the school gym if one was available or in the town hall. Large crowds came to observe this part of Christmas.

Who can forget the Sunday School programs at Christmas? The public school programs would have some religious parts, but in the church the whole message was based on Scripture. There would be the Old Testament prophecies and the fulfillment from the New Testament. When the program was over the apples, treats, gifts and

cards would be distributed. What a fine, essential part of our Christmas the Sunday School program was.

And most of all, Christmas memories come from what we experienced in our homes – the good food, the "Christmasy" feeling, the exchange of presents, visiting with family, extended family and friends, sharing the spiritual meaning of Christmas. Each of us has personal recollections, some of which we can share with others, some only with our families.

We continue to celebrate Christmas. It is a warm and wonderful time now, too. Some things have changed. Much remains the same. Christmas is still about Jesus and His coming to our earth as Savior. We all have to hold that at the center of our observance and resist what would deter us from it.

The Lutheran Ambassador staff extends best wishes to all our readers for a blessed and joyous Christmas, trusting that this enlarged Christmas issue will add to your enjoyment and appreciation of this special season.

Raynard Huglen



Christmas Chancel

Roger C. Huebner, D.D.S.

Love supremely revealed

...let me share with you a story that was in one of our letters. It was written so simply and beautifully that I'm going to quote it just as it came to us.

"It was three days before Christmas. A poor widow was busy with seasonal chores. She asked her son, Richard, to shine her only pair of shoes. Shortly thereafter, with the prideful smile only an eight-year-old can muster, Richard presented the shoes for inspection. Pleased with the results, his mother rewarded him with a quarter. On Christmas Day, as she put on her shoes to go to church, she noticed a lump in one shoe. Taking it off, she found a quarter wrapped in paper. Written on the paper in a child's scrawl were these words: 'I done it for love.'"

The letter continues by reminding us that God did it for love!

This is the heart of our message to the Muslim world; God loves you and this love was apparent in both the birth and death of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. I recall a seminary professor once reminding us that we do not learn that God loves us from the vicissitudes of life, only at the foot of the cross, where His love was supremely revealed.

So as we face another year, let us remind each other of this truth. Nothing, Paul says, will ever be able to separate us from it.

—From a letter by
Marvin A. Palmquist
Lutheran Orient Mission Society

- By Mrs. Arnold (Lydia) McCarlson
Langford, S. Dak.

PROMISES PROMISES

Labor Day Weekend had become a family time to spend together at the lake cabin. Cousins had a chance to swim, fish and play. Just now they were resting on the nice green grass.

I overheard the boys, Eric, Todd, Tobias and Jay, saying, "But our dads promised us to go fishing in the boat." So they eagerly peered towards the lake front expecting their dads to appear any minute.

Noting their anxiety, I intervened by saying, "Oh, your dads promised but sometimes they can't keep their promises."

"Well," Eric answered, "I always keep mine." Then he shrugged his shoulders and meekly said, "Grandma, I guess I don't always keep my promises. Remember when Rusty, my dog, was killed? Mom said I could get another puppy if I promised to take care of it. After I got Pepper I sometimes forgot to feed it."

Todd piped up, "I promised my mom and dad to say my prayers, but sometimes I'm so tired I fall asleep before I finish."

Little Tobias, age four, added, "I'm not supposed to go across the street to play. I promised Mom and Dad, but sometimes I forget." Little three-year-old Jay muttered, "Me promise, too."

Andy, the 12-year-old, had been listening. "I was swimming yesterday and I teased my cousin. So to get away from him I swam under water backwards. When I came up, I realized I was directly under a person sitting on a surf board and my way was blocked. My fear led me to pray, "God, save me from drowning and I'll never tease

Mike again. Yet I knew God was looking out for me. You see this summer at Lutheran Bible Camp I asked Jesus into my life and promised to follow him."

Dawn and Wendy had joined the group and Dawn blurted out, "I promised my mother I'd change my new dress after school, but I stopped to play ball with the boys and I got my dress dirty."

Wendy shyly admitted, "I promised Mom to practice my horn every night after school; instead I'd do homework, read a book or play."

Lucy and Nikki, teenage friends, looked at each other, smiling knowingly, "We make promises, too - we share secrets and take a vow, but before we know it the promise is broken."

Soon the mothers joined in. Cheryl said, "I promised the children we'd make popcorn balls after work one day. Computer problems developed at the bank and I had to work overtime. My promise was broken."

"Promises made to last a lifetime should not be broken," said Stacy. "I just made my confirmation vow and I hope to keep it."

Tami, the oldest grandchild and a

"My fear
led me to pray,
'God, save me
from drowning
and I'll never
tease Mike again.'"

high school graduate, remarked, "Promises should be sincere, especially when considering marriage vows. So many are easily broken these days."

Troy and Mike, teenage boys, had been fishing, but upon entering the group listened attentively - "Promises - that's a good subject this election year when candidates are running for office. Each man makes promises and we wonder if he intends to keep them. If they are broken, it's not fair to the American voters."

Just then, Eric, Todd, Tobias and Jay started running toward the lake. They had spotted their dads near the dock.

"Dad, remember you promised us," all four shouted at the same time. The three dads grinned broadly and nodded their heads. "We were just coming to get you."

The boys looked at me and gleefully cried, "Here's one promise that was not broken."

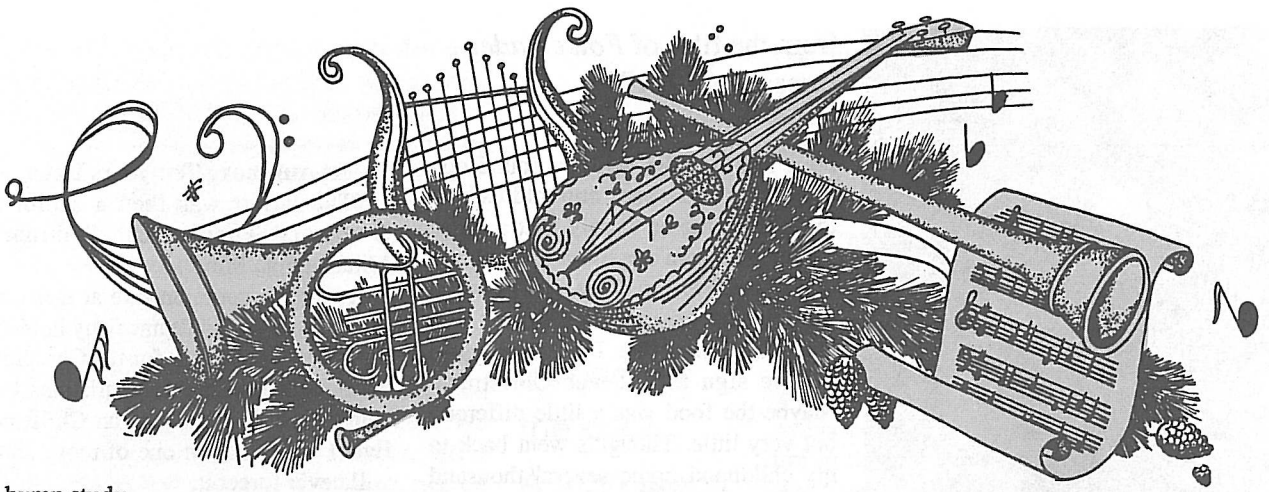
Later when I was alone, the word "promise" kept echoing in my mind. A promise is an intention we make to ourselves to do something. Promises are made to get things we want, even to God in prayer. It's only a word but should carry trust and integrity with it.

At this Christmastime, we are again reminded of the promises of God, promises which are never broken. Mary was promised a Son, Jesus. In Luke 1:37, we read "For with God nothing will be impossible."

On Christmas Eve in a lonely stable in Bethlehem, Baby Jesus, our promised Savior, was born. He grew to manhood and walked among men teaching and preaching the Word.

God had promised a Savior and in time, on Good Friday, Jesus Christ was crucified for our sins. God's promise was fulfilled and we can be assured of eternal life.

"Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love Him" (James 1:12).



A hymn study

Concordia No. 132

Words by Isaac Watts, 1719

Tune – ANTIOCH

Music by George Frederick Handel,
1742

Arr. Lowell Mason, 1830

Joy To The World! The Lord Is Come

Joy is the keynote of both the words and music of this carillon of praise. It is one of the most jubilant hymns in existence, not in the sense of making merry, but in the deeply devout and reverent realization that the New Covenant has been fulfilled and we are redeemed. The carol is a paraphrase of a portion of Psalm 98, itself remarkable for its exultant adoration. The specific related verses are 4, 7, 8, and 9: "Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth; break forth and sing for joy and sing praises. Let the sea roar and all it contains, the world and those who dwell in it. Let the rivers clap their hands; let the mountains sing together

for joy before the Lord; for He is coming to judge the earth; He will judge the world with righteousness, and all the peoples with equity."

George Frederick Handel, the composer of the music, was born at Halle, Germany, the root of Pietism, and was blessed with a deeply devout mother. She was the daughter of a Lutheran pastor and herself a faithful Bible reader, so Handel's boyhood environment (plus matriculation at the University of Halle) had a lifelong influence on his music and credal identity. Both London, where the composer mainly resided, and Rome tried hard to persuade him to change

his doctrinal affiliation but Handel's replies were that he had "resolved to die a member of the communion in which he was bred." He knew his Bible well and personally chose all his texts. An aristocrat once complimented Handel on "the noble entertainment he had furnished" in the glorious music of "He Was Despised and Rejected." Handel responded, "My Lord, I am sorry if I only entertain you; I wished to make you better."

Handel ranks among the greatest composers ever and is often mentioned together with J. S. Bach (both were born the same year within 50 miles of each other and their tercentenary in 1985 was occasion for a world-wide musical celebration). Unlike the supremely great Bach who was a provincial church musician, Handel was a sophisticated cosmopolitan. But if one has sung or listened to "Messiah," or even excerpts such as "He Shall Feed His Flock" or "I Know That My Redeemer Liveth," you can at once feel his genuine and deeply held spiritual convictions.

ANTIOCH, also called "Messiah," is based on passages from Handel's "Messiah," specifically, "Lift Up Your Heads," and "Comfort Ye," and put together by American Lowell Mason.

Don Rodvold

*"Joy to the world! The Lord is come:
Let earth receive her King;
Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room,
And heav'n and nature sing.*

*Joy to the world! The Savior reigns:
Let men their songs employ,
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
Repeat the sounding joy.*

*He rules the world with truth and grace
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness
And wonders of His love."*



Two Christmas memories

—by Pastor R. J. Huglen

It is exactly 30 years since then now. I had been in North Dakota (Leeds) and worked in the harvest and threshing. Then I returned to the "North Shore" to my relatives who together with another Norwegian operated a logging camp (Schroeder). It was small stuff now compared to two years earlier. Now we were perhaps a dozen men cutting smaller timber and ties, which we hauled out. It wasn't the worst kind of work but when we some evenings heard a wolf howl even a little, we hurried home a little faster than usual.

Christmas was at the door now, but it seemed rather strange when the young boy (18 years) realized that he was going to have Christmas under such circumstances. A couple of days before Christmas some of the men and one of the foremen drove to our home base (Tofte), about 20 miles distant, to celebrate Christmas — and that they had

from the files of *Folkebladet*
December 19, 1934

done in a worldly way, we found out, when they came back and told us how they had sung so loudly that a stove had moved from one room to another.

There were a few of us who remained at the camp and now it was really Christmas Eve. But there was no visible sign that it was Christmas. Maybe the food was a little different, but very little. Thoughts went back to my childhood home several thousand miles away. A year ago I had been at home and the happiest night in the whole year was, of course, Christmas Eve, but not so this year. It was my hope that the next year would go fast so that I could again celebrate Christmas at home.

It was a cheerless Christmas Eve — even if there was nothing we lacked, but never had I fallen asleep in such a sad frame of mind on any Christmas Eve.

On Christmas Day itself all were at home, free from work and most of the men entertained themselves by playing cards and prayed their "Christmas prayers" off and on. But it seemed like I couldn't get myself to take part in any such on Christmas Day. I left them and went and took out my hymnbook and it was perhaps the first time in seven-eight months.

"...there was no visible sign that it was Christmas."

And while thoughts went away to those who right then were on their way to church and who could hear the clock chiming in Stord church, I sang a couple of Christmas songs that we used to sing at home. But when I seemed to hear Father and Mother singing, I got a lump in my throat and I couldn't sing any more.

I have thought about it many times since that it was the hymnbook and the memories that were the link between home and me. So it was also very likely for the Prodigal Son. And — I was, to be sure, also a prodigal son.

At Augsburg Ten Years Later

(The writer was then a senior in Augsburg Theological Seminary, Minneapolis, Minn.)

It was the common rule at that time that those who didn't have any home to go to and weren't out for the Christmas vacation would have a Christmas tree celebration at the school on Christmas Eve. I was along in one of those and I will never forget it.

The festival was held in the dining room on the third floor of the old school building (Old Main). We were about 20 men not away for Christmas. The Christmas tree stood all decorated and the table was set with several good Christmas foods — lutefisk and lefse among them — of course. There were Christmas candles on the table, too. And after supper the lights on the tree were lit also. And then we made a ring around the tree and someone spaced us about six feet apart — and then we sang "Her kommer dine arme smaa" (Thy Little Ones, Dear Lord, Are We), etc.

The boarding club "boss" led in devotions. A Christmas song was sung and then the leader read the Christmas Gospel, saying that it was old, but always new, and the rest of us agreed silently. There were a couple of others who said a few words. Then brother Pastor A. M. Arntzen, who has recently died, was given the opportunity to speak. I first became acquainted with him through some articles he wrote in *Folkebladet* in 1911, entitled: "On a Visit in St. Paul."

In these articles we got a great deal of information about doctrine-based Norwegian-American church history. He often visited the school while I was there and he gave some very interesting lectures in the "Concordia Society" about Elling Eielsen and his contemporaries in America. Arntzen was a strong "new trend or direction" man (really, the Lutheran Free Church principle) and vitally interested in all our work. I should like to have said something about his latest book, *The*

(cont. on p. 23)

Psalms in the Night

WMF BIBLE STUDY

JANUARY 1989

PSALM I

This is a good beginning for the book of Psalms as it shows the blessedness of the righteous man and the unhappy end of the ungodly. It shows us that the righteous are the friends of God, and the ungodly are the enemies of both God and His followers.

Memory Verse: "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law doth he meditate day and night." (Psalm 1:1-2)

Purpose of the Psalm: Shows the dividing line between the righteous and the wicked.

Key Word: Blessed

The Psalm starts out on a negative tone, telling us what the righteous person does not do. Pay special attention to the words: walk – ungodly; standeth – sinners; sitteth – scornful. In Proverbs 4:14, we read: "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men."

Part I... Verses 1-3

A. Define *blessed*.

How does the dictionary define it? _____

B. Note the progression of thought in verse 1.

1) What does it mean to not *walk* in the counsel of the ungodly? _____

2. Not for weight of glory,
Nor for crown and palm,
Enter we the army,
Raise the warrior-psalm;
But for Love that claimeth
Lives for whom He died:
He whom Jesus nameth
Must be on His side.
By Thy love constraining,
By Thy grace divine,
We are on the Lord's side –
Savior, we are Thine!

3. Jesus, Thou hast bought us,
Not with gold or gem,
But with thine own life blood,
For Thy diadem;
With Thy blessing filling
Each who comes to Thee,
Thou hast made us willing,
Thou hast made us free.
By Thy grand redemption,
By Thy grace divine,
We are on the Lord's side –
Savior, we are Thine!

4. Fierce may be the conflict,
Strong may be the foe,
But the King's own army
None can overthrow;
'Round His standard ranging,
Victory is secure,
For His truth unchanging
Makes the triumph sure.
Joyfully enlisting,
By Thy grace divine,

2) What does it mean to not *stand* in the way of sinners? _____

Are we standing with sinners? _____

3) Do we *sit* in the seat of the scornful? _____

Who are the scoffers? _____

Apply Proverbs 4:14 and Psalm 26:4.

C. In verse 2, what is the righteous man's attitude toward God's Law and God's Word? _____

Apply Psalm 119:35 and Psalm 119:1.

How can we apply these principles to our daily living? _____

D. In verse 3, we are compared to a tree planted beside life-giving water so that it can flourish. What is our source of "living water"? _____

Apply Jeremiah 17:7-8

Part II... Verses 4 - 6

Here we see the ruin of the wicked. They do not enjoy the blessedness of the righteous.

A. How are the wicked described in verses 4 and 5? _____

Psalm 35:5 tells what happens to chaff before the wind. As the chaff is separated from the good grain, what happens to the wicked, the sinner, the scoffer? _____

B. Verse 6 is a real comfort to the Christian but a warning to the wicked.

What is the comfort? _____

What is the warning? _____

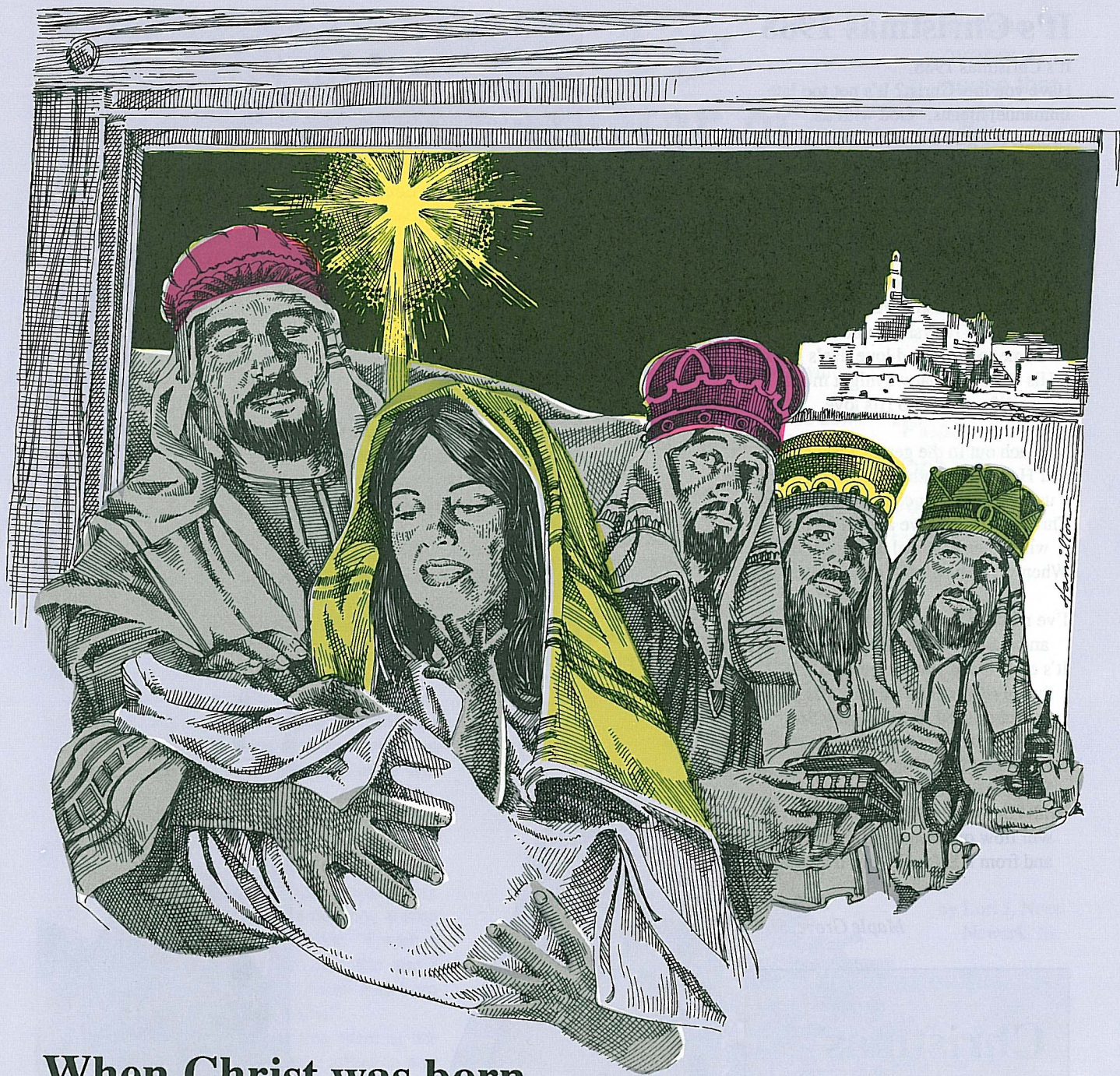
On what side are we? _____

What is our responsibility as Christians, in witnessing to the lost? _____

Hymn #409 (Love Reaching)

WHO IS ON THE LORD'S SIDE?

1. Who is on the Lord's side?
Who will serve the King?
Who will be His helpers?
Others lives to bring?
Who will leave the world's side?
Who will face the foe?
Who is on the Lord's side
Who for Him will go?
By Thy call of mercy,
By Thy grace divine,
We are on the Lord's side –
Savior, we are Thine!



When Christ was born

When Christ was born, the angels sang
Amid the heavens fair;
They also told the shepherds
To behold a Savior there.

The wisemen, too, were following
The star to Bethlehem
And hoped to find a newborn Babe
Nestled in His mother's care.

So at this special season-time,
We, too, must look above
And find our Savior there,
In glorious heavenly love.

And may we also look to find
Salvation for our souls,
That when we leave our earthly home
We'll dwell with Him above.

*Josie Danielson
Roseau, Minn.*

It's Christmas 1988

It's Christmas 1988.

Have you met Christ? It's not too late.

Immanuel means, "God with us."

Amidst the gifts...the fun and fuss

Remember Jesus came. God gave

His Son so that we could be saved...

saved from our sins and hard frustrations...

saved from aloneness...self 'berrations.

A greater love has none than this,
that He would give His life and miss
the joys of rulership in heav'n.

He came to serve and love. He's giv'n
His all for us that we might move
from life alone into His love.

So reach out to the gentle Savior.
Our Heaven'ly Father has deemed to favor
us with His most cherished only Son.
Through His gift, we all can be one
with other men and nations, too.
When we're in Christ, all becomes new.

I've reached across the sin-caused rift
and claimed God's Son, His Christmas Gift.
It's easy. Once you've realized
that giving is God's name. His prized
and cherished first and only Son
is here to trade peace for derision.
So, come to Him. Make your decision
For Jesus in this holy hour.
With Him within you, love and power
will flow out from your fresh clean heart
and from His family you'll never part.

*Dale Stone
Maple Grove, Minn.*

Christmas

Christmas is a time for love,
A time for family;
A feeling of belonging,
A time for unity.

We think of tinsel, colored lights,
And gifts of varied form;
But most of all, we thank our
God, -

The blessed Child was born!
*Fern Wittmayer
Stanley, N. Dak.*

Mary

Just a quiet girl, living with her family,
Growing older with every passing day
Till the favor of the Lord gently came upon her.
'You shall bear a Son, Who'll reign o'er the world forever,
Forever.'

How can this be, since I am a virgin?
It seemed so incredible to bear God's very Son.
'The Holy Spirit will come to you, He shall overshadow
you
And the Son of the living God, will be born among men,
Among men.'

Mary, mother dear, of the Christmas Baby,
You were no different than any one of us.
Yet God chose you for that special duty,
To raise up the boy, Who will lead us to glory,
to glory.

Just a quiet girl, living with her family.

Sonja H. Trude



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MEMORIES

Apostle of Norway (a life of Hans Nielsen Hauge), but this isn't the place for that.

Pastor Arntzen stood up and at once it was quiet around the table. As he got into his remarks he spoke about his childhood and Christmas Eve both in Norway and America. Christmas Eve was so wonderful back home, he said, that he couldn't describe it. Later he had become acquainted (more closely) with sin and the world and had come to know their evil. But Jesus came to destroy the works of darkness. In closing, he said, "I can't be anything but glad each Christmas Eve because they bring me back to Father, Mother and brothers and sisters, to the home of childhood and – to the home up there, where there is no sin. And then two glistening tears ran down over the furrowed cheeks.

(Ed. note: The writer of the above was my father. Knowing something of his life, I have taken the liberty to insert, in parentheses, a few items of information to help the reader.)

ADDRESS CORRECTION

The address for Rev. Terry Wold in East Grand Forks, Minn. 56721 is 1209 4th Ave. N. W. and not as given in the Nov. 15 issue.

BOOK REVIEW

Julia's Children by Margaret Chrislock Gilseth is a new immigrant novel that will interest many readers of *The Lutheran Ambassador*. The setting is Goodhue County, Minnesota, and the story is a captivating account of one Norwegian-American family spanning a single lifetime and embracing three generations (1876-1947).

The spiritual dimension is a prominent feature in the book. Aspelund Church near Wanamingo, Minn. (now Emmanuel - AFLC), is the place of worship for this pioneer family and both the positive and negative aspects of divisions among Norwegian Lutherans are accurately portrayed. Special details like "the revival in the nineties" and the visit of Missionary Lars Skrefsrud to America also make the story uniquely relevant to our own AFLC heritage.

The author finds her inspiration

Born in a manger

"Again, it seems to me that Jesus was born in a manger that He might give emphasized comfort to those who feel that the whole world has no room for them.

Walter A. Maier, Sr.

ISRAEL TOUR IN 1989

Rev. Laurel Udden, pastor of Medicine Lake Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, Minn., will be one of four hosts on an Israel Heritage Tour, Sept. 18-29, 1989. It had been erroneously stated in the *Ambassador* that the tour had taken place this past September.

Anyone interested in becoming a member of this tour may contact Pastor Udden at 9324 Northwood Parkway, Minneapolis, Minn. 55427. Among the other hosts will be Rev. David Barnhart, Eagan, Minn., and Rev. Richard Snipstead, Minneapolis, who may also be contacted.

within her own family history, but most of the family names have been changed to protect the identity of her very believable characters. Care has been taken to be both accurate and interesting. Readers will smile with the characters during the comical moments, and a few tears may be shed, too, as we are skillfully led by the author through the painful times as well. Copies of *Julia's Children* may be ordered from Askelaad Press, P. O. Box 616, St. Charles, Minn. 55972. The cost for each copy is \$14.95, plus \$2.00 postage and handling charge per order. (Minnesota residents are asked to also include 6% sales tax.)

-R. L. Lee

THE WMF BIBLE STUDIES

The first WMF (Women's Missionary Federation) Bible Study for 1989 is found in this issue on pages 21 and 22. The writer this year is Mrs. Amos (Magdalene) Stolee of Kenyon, Minn. She is a daughter of the late Pastor and Mrs. J. R. Gronseth of Minneapolis, Minn.

An introduction to the studies will be found in the *Ambassador* of Dec. 27.

This year there will be a study also for the month of December. Local WMF's should plan accordingly.

IN MEMORIAM

Key: The name of the town was the address of the deceased, following that is listed the name of the deceased, age, date of death and the church in which he or she held membership.

MINNESOTA

Roseau

Mrs. Cora Olson, 88, Oct. 27, Rose.

Mrs. Alma C. Peterson, 82, Nov. 5, Rose.

MICHIGAN

Ishpeming

Elias (Bill) Aho, 88, Nov. 3, Hope.

Mrs. Elsa Saari, 85, Nov. 12, Hope

NEW YORK

New York City

Roy Franklin Olson, 82, Nov. 6, funeral at Green Lake, Spicer, Minn.

Tidings of love and joy

I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be unto all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11).

The very nature of a Christmas greeting is joy. Its message is a message of good tidings to all people. Tidings contain both joy and sorrow, success and disaster are sent and received among men throughout the year. These tidings go by telegraph, radio and airmail. They are sent by certain individuals and are intended for only certain individuals.

How different are the tidings from God. His tidings are of love and joy, which issued in life abundantly. The message was brought in song by a heavenly chorus. The message itself came in the "Newborn Babe," the King. And finally, the joyful message from God is for all people. The message is for you and me. We are invited to receive from God the Babe of Bethlehem. In our arms of faith we can hold Him. What a revelation into the mysteries of life, of trust and faith in God. What sweetness of heart can we not attain, to fellowship in God's tender love, expressed in the Holy Child?

So whatever problems and cares the message of the world may have brought us, let us rejoice in the Christmas Message that God has sent us. For "the government shall be upon His shoulders." With the Christ Child our present problems are not impossible. God has wonderfully thought of His children and in His hands we may safely trust the future. Rejoice in the Lord always: again I say, rejoice. Let your gentleness be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.

May you hold fast the faith in the old Christmas story. That faith can bless your home and make it warm with love and radiant with joy.

Pastor Arndt E. Myhre

