

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

December 13, 1994



Glory to God in the highest
and on earth
Peace

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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Leap for joy, God has provided the Lamb!

You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. Luke 2:12b

What would the shepherds find in Bethlehem? Simply a baby in a manger; no knight in shining armor, no jeweled crown, no palace, no army and no sword. How can this baby save us from our enemies? Oh, but God had a plan more strangely wonderful than anyone could imagine.

It was there in place from the moment man fell into sin and consequently needed a Savior. The plan was revealed when He said the Seed of the woman would crush the head of the enemy. There would be deliverance.

The plan unfolded more and more down through the ages. The woman would be a virgin and she a virgin, would give birth to a son. He would be called Immanuel, God with us! The place of His birth would be a small, unimportant town called Bethlehem. But the Deliverer, this "tender shoot," would be despised, rejected, and would be "led like a lamb to the slaughter." He would be "pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities." We would be "healed by His wounds."

The plan took shape as a godly young girl, Mary, a virgin, was visited by a heavenly messenger. The angel Gabriel said, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus."

Mary was engaged to Joseph, a carpenter and a righteous man. As time went by, Joseph became aware that Mary was pregnant and he was very troubled for he was not the father.

An angel of the Lord visited Joseph and more of God's wondrous plan was revealed. "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins."

Others became aware that the plan was being fulfilled. Mary visited her relative Elizabeth who was an older woman now pregnant with her first child. Scripture lets us in on the excitement: "When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: 'Blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.'"

In a few months the Savior of the world would be born. Mary knew it along with Joseph. Elizabeth and the baby in her womb knew it too. He would be named John and as a grown man would point others to Jesus, saying, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

But now the night of Jesus' birth had come. The angel brought the shepherds "good news of great joy that will be for all the people."

They went and saw the baby Jesus, the Savior. God had provided the Lamb. No wonder they went home glorifying and praising God. Together with all who need a Savior, we too can leap for joy!

—by Odell O. Kittelson

Many people have answered the question: "If you could have one wish for Christmas, what would that wish be?" The word which more than any other tops the Christmas "wish list" is that elusive condition so yearned for: **peace**. We seek the quiet, calm and secure assurance that "all is well." Ironically, this hustling, bustling and all too often, frustrating holiday season turns people's thoughts toward serenity.

Christmas engenders more passion for peace than any other festive occasion. Yet, no other time of the year creates greater frustration and activity than does Christmas. During this time it seems as though peace is stolen. Why? Why would God permit such a special time of the year to create so much turmoil? Of course God is not the one at fault; people can only blame themselves. The unimportant activities of the celebration of Christmas become too important. The family list of "things to do" seems only to swell each year. The holiday season will not permit a time for calm.

Why peace is missing

The activities of Christmas cannot bear the full burden of responsibility for the lack of peace. Life carries enough hurt without blaming the Yuletide. Marital strife, conflicts with children, financial difficulties and workplace instability affect the tranquillity of individual and family life. Abortion, crime, politics and pornography distort the chorus of societal harmony. War, famine, economics and natural catastrophes rend the fabric of global quiet. In reading today's headlines, Jesus' soliloquy recorded in Matthew 24 finds fulfilled validity: "And you shall be hearing of wars and rumors of war ... and in various places there will be famine and earthquakes." Life harshly reveals the absence of peace.

But is tranquillity the true peace that is needed? The destruction of peace did not begin with the first war between nations or even with the first murder. Peace died at the first rebellion of man against God. The loss of peace is not the presence of conflict but the existence of a rift in the relationship between God and humanity. The sin-caused chasm that separates God and man also removed peace within individual hearts and creat-

He is the Prince of Peace

*And His name
shall be called ...
Prince of Peace.*

Isaiah 9:6



ed conflicts between individuals. With the fall into sin all human attempts for peace became impossible. No amount of wealth, power or prestige can produce true and lasting peace. No treaty, politics or economics can restore serenity. Peace does not exist in external conditions, but it rests in the security and wholeness and joy which people need within their spirits.

How peace is found

The restoration of peace began at the angelic song on the birth night of Jesus: "And on earth peace among men with whom (God) is pleased." The separation between God and man could be bridged only by the cross of Jesus and His resurrection. A restored relationship with God would give the opportunity for a person to find peace with self, and peace with self

(continued on page 4)



— by Rev. Clyde Grier, Jr.
Faith Lutheran Church
El Campo, Texas

And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord. Luke 2:10,11 (RSV)



Prayer for Christmas Day

Eternal, merciful God, heavenly Father, with all our heart, soul and mind we praise and extol You this Christmas morning, because You so loved the world that You gave Your Son, the only-begotten, so that everyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life!

We praise You, Who in the fullness of time sent forth Your son, born of a woman, so that He could pay our ransom and we could receive the rights of children with You, O God!

We praise You that You let Him be born in poverty so that we could come to understand that the world's greatness, pomp and station before You are not worth the smallest particle.

We praise You that in Your mercy You made Him be a Savior for all people, so that no one is

shut out, so that all have the same right of grace to Your salvation, whatever race we belong to, whatever age we are, whatever social status we have — forever may You be praised!

Oh, be welcomed then, dear Jesus; before You we want to sing now! Welcome, comfort of God; be near to us. Welcome, our Christmas joy! Welcome, with Your blessed peace for old and young here below!

O blessed Savior, may You be received by all; may this Christmas be permitted to bring Christmas joy into heart and home. To that end bless the festival in Your house, were many will soon be gathering.

Quietly in my mind I say: O blessed of God, come in! Amen.

— Johan Lunde, *Ha Tro Til Gud*

Translated from Norwegian
by Rev. Raynard Huglen

PRINCE OF PEACE


would allow a beginning for peace with other people.

Jesus came from heaven to be born that He might live a life for us that would be sacrificed in our stead. What the world needs to realize is that peace does not come in a condition but in a relationship. Peace is not a "thing" but rather a person. That person is Jesus the Christ of God.

Among the characteristics of Jesus revealed in His names, we may know Him as the Prince of Peace. As Prince, He is regent and Lord of the relationships that bring us peace. Jesus is Lord of peace with God. Jesus is Lord of peace with self. Jesus is Lord of peace with others. As His Holy Spirit establishes and matures His relationship with you, watch Him develop peace in your life. You will come to know peace as a relationship that does not depend on environment or emotion.

In that relationship the headline news of the day cannot destroy your peace. The disruptions of life will not disturb your peace. Peace will not depend on a condition within your heart and mind. That peace which comes from the Prince of Peace relies solely on God's promise that His relationship with you never changes. His love for his children endures forever! That gift from the Prince of Peace makes the Christmas wish come true.

The author was raised in St. John Lutheran Church (ALC) at Jourdanton, Texas. Graduating in 1987, from Faith Evangelical Lutheran Seminary, Tacoma, Washington, he began in congregational ministry at age 36, in El Campo, Texas. He continues to serve Faith Lutheran. In 1993, he was approved for the AFLC Fellowship Roster. He and his wife, Pamela, cherish their four children and one grandchild.



And His
name shall
be called
Wonderful
Counselor...

Prince of Peace

Isaiah 9:6

Room for the Savior

Imagine that cold dark night when Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem. Joseph's hand, strengthened from hours of carpentry work, and scarred when his saw slipped, held on tightly to the stiff rope bridled to the donkey.

Mary sat quietly and patiently on the donkey's back, heavy with child, and wondered about the message the angel proclaimed to her: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the Holy offspring shall be called the Son of God."

Joseph knocked on the door of a noisy inn. "Please sir, could you spare a bed for my wife? She is so tired, and the baby will be born soon."

Folks inside, warm by the fire and sleepy from wine, sat with wordless expressions on their faces, staring at the couple.

"Man, can't you see every corner is taken? Be on your way."

Doors slammed shut in Joseph's face. As he turned away, Joseph heard a voice from inside, "That man has no right traveling with a pregnant wife on a night like this."

Joseph turned back to Mary, "I'm sorry. There is no room." They continued down the road, tired and desperate.

Later they saw another light in the distance. Hoping to finally stop for the night, even the donkey quickened his pace in eagerness to ease the load from his back. Finally the inn stood before them and Joseph timidly knocked on the door. It opened and he pleaded, "My wife needs to rest. Our baby will soon be born."

And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped him in cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.
Luke 2:7



The innkeeper answered Joseph's desperate eyes, "The inn is full, but you can stay out back in the barn." Mary interrupted, "Joseph, I've got to stop. It won't be long. I need to lie down."

Congregations reaching out

Though the opportunities and needs are all year long, Christmas is a special time of the year to reach into hearts and homes and minister to both physical and spiritual needs. A brief and random survey was taken in which congregations were asked, "What do you do special at Christmas time to reach out to your community?" Whether God has placed you in a rural or metropolitan setting, opportunities to reach out with the "good news of great joy" are unlimited.

Fargo, North Dakota — St. Paul's Lutheran women's group collects items such as gloves, socks, toiletries, etc. for the New Life Center, a local ministry to the homeless.

Morris, Illinois — Bethlehem Lutheran has a "mitten tree" in their church entry. During the Christmas season, gloves, hats, and scarves are hung on the tree then sent to a mission work. As in many congregations, quilting is done throughout the year to send to missions.

Wadena, Minnesota — Zion Lutheran goes caroling at two different times because they minister to the senior high-rise, a nursing home, a home for young adults with special needs and individual homes of the elderly in their congregation.

Kalispell, Montana — The Christmas Eve service at Faith Lutheran is the highlight of the season. This special evangelistic service is well-attended and brings in many unchurched people.

Minutes later Joseph laid his cloak on a pile of fresh, sweet straw. Mary laid down and her eyes closed in sleep. Soon Joseph found a restful spot. He listened to the quietness of the night broken only by the breathing of the nearby animals.

Joseph woke with a start. "Help me Joseph! The baby is coming! I can feel him coming!"

Terrified, with no midwife to assist, Joseph grasped Mary's hand and watched the baby Jesus being born in a stable, and laid in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Recalling the events on that first Christmas night perhaps makes you feel indignation towards that wretched innkeeper who turned Mary and Joseph out to the stable. Yet, perhaps you and I are no different.

My third grade Sunday School class had a window in our upstairs classroom that overlooked the yard next to our church. We often gathered at the window hoping to see the old lady who lived in the gray weather-beaten house venture outside to poke around in the enormous pile of rusty junk she had collected over the years.

Occasionally our wish came true. We shuddered with fear as we saw her creeping outside, dressed in her shabby, old dress. It seemed as if her dirty unkempt hair waved in the breeze at us. I am not sure why we were frightened yet so fascinated. I do know she did not go to church.

Years later, my brother reported to our family as we sat around the kitchen table, "That old lady who lived next to the church died. Her house was so full of newspapers and junk that there was only enough room for a narrow aisle running down the center of each room." Her rusted stove had finally broken out at the bottom and the poisonous fumes choked her while she slept.

Someone ventured, "And what was her name?"

Embarrassed and confused looks bounced around the room. Finally the dreaded confession was made. No one even knew her name!

Sometime later the church bought the property. The old lady's house was torn down because the church needed more room to expand.

Oh our hearts are not any different from the overworked innkeeper who turned Mary and Joseph out for the night. God understands the predicament of possessing sinful hearts. He invites the weary soul weighed down with guilt, "Come unto me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

God can understand because in Christ He became true man with real flesh and blood. He lived in the same world we live in; suffered the same temptations we face. The good news of great joy is that not only does He understand, but He can forgive our sins and change our hearts!

Jesus Christ, true Son of God, became true man when He was born and laid in the wooden manger. Growing out of that manger, He was to hang on a wooden cross and die to pay the penalty for the sins of the world. The tiny babe born that first Christmas night is the Savior!

Believe in Him and receive Him and Jesus will come in and cleanse your sinful heart and change your life! If this is your desire, pray these simple words from the familiar gospel song: "Into my heart ... Come into my heart, Lord Jesus. Come in today. Come in to stay. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus." Amen.

— by Rev. Joel Lohafer
Triumph Lutheran Church
Ferndale, Washington

Eugene, Oregon — Spencer Creek Lutheran for several years put on a Living Nativity Scene. A backdrop would be constructed, lighting would be set up and members of the congregation and community would dress in costumes and appear in the scene along with a variety of animals. As people would drive-by or stop and look at the scene, tracts would be passed out along with invitations to the other Christmas events at the church.

Fairbury, Nebraska — Faith Lutheran youth start the holiday season with a special outreach to the community on Thanksgiving eve. The youth provide a soup and sandwich supper followed by an informal Thanksgiving service. Both the supper and service are well-attended by the community. At Christmas, the congregation provides food baskets for specific families as well as contributing to the local food bank.

Bethel Park, Pennsylvania — This year 50 underprivileged children living in Pittsburgh's North Side will receive presents from Ruthfred Lutheran. The congregation also has eight families they will give to who are a part of the Angel Tree program with Prison Fellowship ministries.

Colfax, Wisconsin — Faith Lutheran women plan a special Advent Program one Sunday evening in December. The special lunch and service are well-attended by the community.

**It was one
of many moments.** Moments

that came in erratic succession. Moments in which a part of me died—again—and then again. There was no peace. Never any peace!

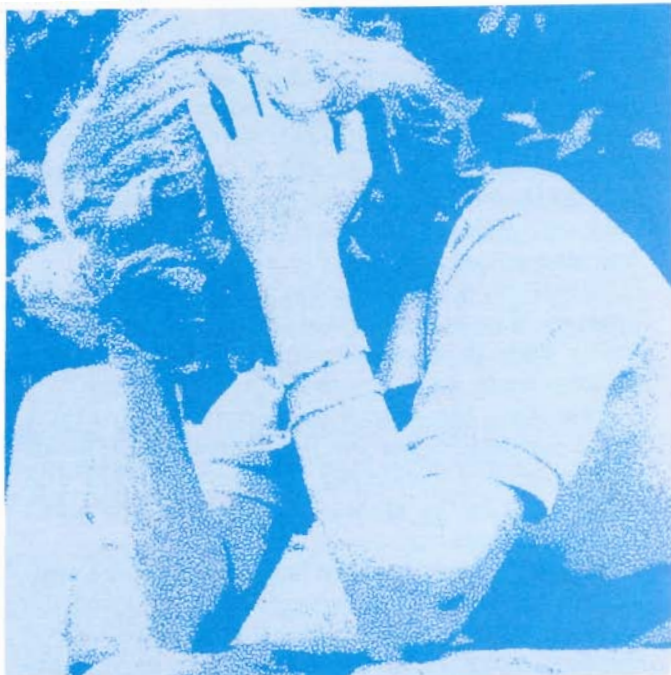
I had been looking for the bandages. Kneeling in front of the cupboard beneath the bathroom sink, I opened the door, leaned in and groped for the box of first aid supplies. As I pulled it out, I spied the object of my search. I stood up quickly, then stopped. Instead of popping the lid and pulling out a strip, I leaned back against the wall. I slowly wrapped my fingers around the plastic box and lifted it to my heart. I slid to the floor with muffled sobs, then wailed uncontrollably as the yearnings within would hold no longer.

My husband had bought the bandages. He liked the stretchy ones that would bend and pull with the movement of his hands. His hands. I remembered the wide fingers that had thrown touchdown passes in high school. At times they had gestured with emphasis as he spoke. I recalled the joy of being touched by those hands; of the tenderness. And now he was gone. After 22 years together, he had taken his hands and everything else I loved about him and left. He said he was divorcing me, and he did. Within a year he had remarried. Peace? It became an absurd concept to me; certainly it was not my reality!

I quickly discovered men and women in my situation have two basic needs. The first is a need for practical help. It is not necessary for the church to form more committees or groups to handle divorcees. Christians need only pick up their phones or get into their cars and practice the admonitions of Matthew 25:35, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

Granted, the possibility of being misunderstood and rejected always exists. Divorce is not conducive to stable personalities. But what is that to a servant of Jesus Christ? There were days I wanted to scream in rage at the "happy, married people" in my church. It was not that they had done anything wrong, but simply that they were "happy, married people." Beneath my rage, however, I needed to know they were still there and they would not desert me.

Beyond the practical matters, my greater struggle was with ultimate questions. That is the second need. I needed to come to grips with what was happening and make some sense of it. My life seemed a



When there is no peace

cruel, cosmic joke. I was lonely. I was terrified. I hurt for my son and could do nothing about it. I did not want trite phrases of comfort nor could I tolerate shallow sympathy. I was beginning to develop an unholy attitude towards a holy God and it frightened me.

I had gone beyond the borders of what I believed I could bear. And that is where I met Christ. Truly met Him.

As the world defined it, there was no peace. As the Bible defined it, there was only Christ. I began to saturate myself in His Word. I had no other alternative. "If I cannot find comfort here," I told myself, "I will not find it anywhere." I thought about peace, perfect peace. What would that be? It would be

freedom from sin. Touching someone, knowing someone, being with someone who had never sinned. As my own unrighteousness became more and more clear to me, my repentance was deep.

The blood of Christ was real. The healing began.

My father once told me, "Annie, Christ did not come to answer all your questions. He came to solve your problem." Christ was merciful. The truth and depth of that statement overwhelmed me. In Philippians 1:12, Paul told his fellow Christians, "Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel." I am sure Paul was ashamed and embarrassed by his past. When Christ forgave and freed him though, he chose to press on and stand firm. He also chose to trust God with the answers.

As Christians, our lives will touch others in the journey homeward. In God's scheme of things, our suffering becomes our credentials. Not because it is unique. Not because we are better people. Not because it has built character in us. But because it is all covered in Christ's blood. When our suffering is mingled with Christ's suffering, it takes on His holiness. We become like Him. When we seek to understand what is happening to us in the light of His plan, we open ourselves to truth. When we choose to obey because we love Him, we acknowledge that He is pure and will protect us not only from what is "out there," but from the evil in our own hearts. Obeying becomes a joy; our loneliness a libation of love; our lives, an example to others.

Paul said, "Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. ... For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:19,21).

As for me, what I do not have this Christmas, I will have again soon. My family will be whole. It was named before the foundations of this world. How can I be so sure? Because I am the bride of Christ. Can you imagine it? What peace! What hope! What joy!

One day "at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Philippians 2:10). No wonder the angels are singing! It is impossible to know Him and keep silent!

— by Ann Allred
Cleremore, Oklahoma

And so we have the message of Christmas in prophetic form. It is the good news of God's answer to all the confusion, chaos, complexities, and conflicts of life. It is the gift of One who is a newborn infant and yet was the Father of all eternity. He is but an innocent child, yet He is a wise counselor and mighty King. He is God with us. If you find those realities hard to fathom, you've glimpsed the truth of Christmas ...

He assumed our nature, entered our sin-polluted world, took our guilt on Himself although He was sinless, bore our griefs, carried our sorrows, was wounded with our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities. All of that is wrapped up in this phrase, "God with us."

God with Us: The Miracle of Christmas by John F. MacArthur, Jr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan Books, 1989.

Peace in the heart while in a world of strife

Pease. What a wonderful word! The Bible contains at least 35 references to social peace and at least 50 references to spiritual peace. There is a great difference between the two.

A world in turmoil

We live in a world that is in turmoil. Life, even in our United States, is becoming more uncertain. Home, which once meant peace and protection, is becoming a shaky place of refuge. Some residents are double-locking doors and installing electronic surveillance systems. Small arms, particularly automatic weapons are enjoying brisk sales in many areas. A former inner city resident in one of our major cities regularly packed a handgun while doing her house work. Her backup was a large dog, capable of inflicting serious harm if asked to do so.

Are we on the verge of social peace enforced by garrisons of soldiers? Our Lord was born during that type of system. The November 1994 edition of the American Legion magazine reported the 300 Marines at the Twenty Nine Palms Marine Corps Base in California were asked a disturbing question. As part of a United Nations non-traditional mission, could they shoot fellow Americans if they resisted the confiscation of fire arms banned by the government? Apparently our nation's leaders are becoming fearful of a citizen takeover in the uncertain climate of this world.

On the evening news on October 26, 1994, President Clinton, in speaking to the Jordanian Parliament said, "Peace is unstoppable." The context was the peace accords between Israel and its neighbors. Clinton's reference was to social and economic peace, a noble goal but hardly unstoppable. Jesus said enormous turmoil along with intense perse-

cution of Christians would continue right up to the closing days of this age (Luke 21:8-36). Social peace is becoming an endangered species.

An eternal, spiritual peace

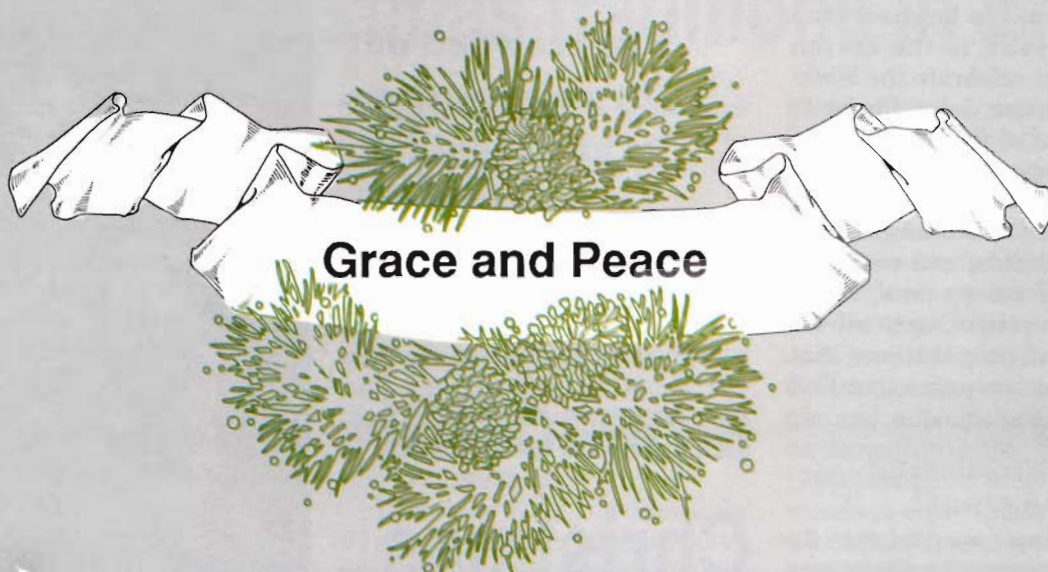
Lest we degenerate into hand-wringing anxiety, remember that Jesus did come to disrupt social peace (Matthew 10:34). Remember also Jesus' words to a troubled and fearful group of men gathered to celebrate the Passover on the eve of their Leader's death. He said, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful (John 14:27 NASB). His words speak of a kind of peace this world has to offer, particularly if one does not disturb the system of the "ruler of the world" (John 14:30).

Jesus died a violent death on a Roman cross for our transgressions (Romans 4:25). His hearers also died at the hands of others, except John. He did a term of forced labor on the Isle of Patmos. Why? These Spirit-filled men chose to embrace the eternal, spiritual peace of God rather than the transitory peace of this world. Multitudes have also believed the gospel message of justification by faith and resulting peace with God through Christ (Romans 5:1).

Down through the centuries and even in our lifetime, people have been called on to die for the sake of the gospel. Jim Elliot gave his life to reach the Auca people in South America. His widow, Elizabeth, recently commented, "The world that we live in is so awful and horrifying that we need to look at another world."

Jesus came from that other world, born to a virgin mother in Bethlehem. The herald angel proclaimed the message of peace. The shepherds went to look. They found the Christ. They believed and told the message to others (Luke 2:14-17).

God's wonderful message of spiritual peace with Him through Christ has survived nearly two millenniums in the long war against God. The message is the same today as it was then. To be a member of God's family, we must receive Christ. John 1:11-13, teaches the need of an active receiving of Christ that results



Our President writes

Peace is a word filled with the message of Christmas, the Babe of Bethlehem is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6), and the angel's chorus is peace on earth (Luke 2:14).

Peace does not stand alone in the Word of God, however. Grace is its companion. The Epistle to the Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I and II Thessalonians, I and II Timothy, Titus, Philemon, I and II Peter, II John ... all these New Testament books include the two words, *grace* and *peace*, in their opening verses.

Peace is preceded by grace. Grace comes first, and only then will peace follow. "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men" (Titus 2:11). This is the order of events in holy history, and in our personal salvation as well.

Peace will always remain a distant goal when it is the object of our spiritual search. The message of Christmas is the good news of God's grace in Jesus Christ, in which our faith relies. When the seeking heart clings to grace, then the peace of God which passes all understanding floods the soul.

Holiday greetings from all of us here at AFLC headquarters, with a prayer that grace and peace may both be found at the heart of your Christmas celebration and always!

— Rev. Robert L. Lee

in being a member of God's family. The Holy Spirit is given to us (Romans 5:5b). He bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, perhaps even called upon to "suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him" (Romans 8:16,17 NASB).

The Apostle Paul gives us the assurance of peace through Christ while we live in this world with an uncertain future. "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice! Let your forbearing spirit be

known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:4-7 NASB).

Are you absolutely sure that you have the peace of God guarding your heart?

— by Rev. Henry Johansen
Willmar, Minnesota

Christmas, the loveliest time of the year, is the season when we celebrate the birthday of our Savior, Jesus Christ. It is a highlight of the church year. We plan programs and decorate. We speak of Joseph, Mary, the tiny baby in the manger, the angels, shepherds, and wisemen. It's good will among men, right? Or are we so caught up in all the planning and preparations that we crowd out the peace that God intends for us to enjoy?

Are we missing the point?

Everything we might be involved in during the Christmas holiday seems so wonderful. Who can fault faithful workers at church and at home? And don't we all feel so ambitious and generous, anxious to show God's love to others by an unexpected visit or gift to someone who might otherwise be overlooked? But are we missing the point? While these plans are noble and worthwhile, each day has only so many hours. Many of us may end up being so exhausted we lose our "peace" with others and with God.

Satan loves to deceive us into thinking only about how important all these plans are. When we are tired physically, we are tired spiritually. Satan knows our weaknesses and when we are most vulnerable. He must delight when we over-commit to activities and allow distractions to keep us from focusing on the **real** meaning of Christmas: God's provision for sin in sending His Son to earth. During Christmas, and every day of the year, we need to be conscious of keeping our priorities in the order God intends.

Having the right center

We need to daily spend time in the Word and in fellowship with God, to worship and praise Him for His goodness and mercy. As we confess our sins, the Holy Spirit will point out our areas of

**Don't let peace
be crowded out
by preparations
and planning!**

Celebrate a peaceful Christmas

need and will help us be on guard against Satan's subtle, deceiving ways. We can thank Him for caring about the smallest details of our lives and for giving us the strength **as we need it** (not all at once or we would use it up right away). "The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace" (Psalm 29:11).

When God is the center of our lives, everything else will fall into place. Isaiah 26:3 reminds us, "You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you." Paul says it this way: "Therefore as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts since as members of one body you were called to peace" (Colossians 3:12,15).

Being realistic

As members of individual families and of our church family, perhaps we can share some of the extra responsibilities. See the blessing others will receive in serving the Lord! We can plan our Christmas activities to focus on Jesus Christ and all He has and



is doing for us. We can ask God to make us sensitive to others, the little things and to graciously give and receive gifts.

We can sincerely express appreciation to others in our family and church for all they do. It may be the most precious gift we can give them. Kind words do not cost a thing and the blessings we in turn receive may be greater than we could have imagined.

Plan ahead and be realistic about what can be accomplished and afforded in time, money and personal strength. Don't try to cram three months' activities into one month. Then give God the glory and honor for what He accomplishes through us!

Simple, uncluttered, and beautiful

As we are in the midst of another Christmas season, let's ask God to be especially close to

Sharing Christmas traditions in Brazil

Christmas is my favorite time of the year! When I think of Christmas the floodgates of my mind are opened and tons of happy memories pour out. I see our family decorating the tree with the sounds of Christmas music. I smell Christmas baking. I hear my family having Advent devotions around the wreath each evening. I feel my toes stinging from the cold winter night while out caroling. I see the smile on the faces of the lonely people from our church who shared our Christmas celebrations in our home as together we sat listening to my father recount his favorite Christmas stories. How awed I was at the Candlelight Services as we bowed in prayer and adoration in thanksgiving to God.

Traditions will always make my Christmas special; not because they are traditions, but because they reflect a deep faith in the One who loved us so much that He sent His Son into the world to offer us salvation. God's love motivated Him to send His

Son into the world. It is His love that motivates me to want to share the good news of great joy. That love brought me to Brazil to work with people who had no wonderful Christmas traditions.

For most people in Brazil, Christmas is just another holiday, another excuse for a party, eating well, and drinking too much. For some, a Christmas mass is a part of the celebration. But for most this too is a ritual.

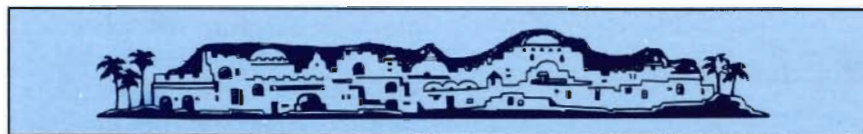
Since our first Christmas in Brazil nine years ago, we have tried to create traditions for our people. Why? We feel traditions are a tool to help create and sustain faith and fellowship. We introduce the Advent wreath and begin preparing people for Christmas early in December. We encourage the practice of family devotions with daily Advent readings that have graciously been provided by our dear co-worker, Edna Quanbeck from McVile, North Dakota. Year after year she has provided beautifully prepared cards with Bible texts written in

Portuguese for each of our new families in the church.

Our people have thoroughly enjoyed learning to sing Christmas carols. Before our arrival, they were not familiar with them. The children certainly love being part of the Christmas program each year. We also have a special Christmas dinner for young people and adults that has become an annual favorite. We include a Christ-centered program and our members enjoy inviting their non-Christian friends to join them where they are introduced to Jesus in a non-threatening setting. How thrilling to see Christmas take on new meaning for these new friends!

This year we will begin sharing Christmas traditions with our people in Bateias, our most recent church-planting project. The young people who live with us will also experience lots of family traditions to make them feel special and loved by us and by God. On Christmas Eve, after our program, we will join with several families for a traditional midnight meal where we will celebrate our friendship that was made possible because of Jesus.

Although Christmas is different in Brazil, the tradition of celebrating Christ's birth brings joy and hope and unity among those who believe. It has been fun to have a part in making Christmas a special time of year for the people in our churches. We pray that the happy traditions we share will be symbolic of life-long transformations that Jesus brings in the lives of those dear people for whom Christ was born. May the Gift go on giving and giving that the whole world might know that Jesus is Lord.



us. May our hearts and homes be prepared to welcome our Savior again. There is no better example we can follow than the plan God showed us in the first Christmas. It was so simple and uncluttered, yet the most beautiful story ever told.

As Christians who rejoice in the first coming of the baby King, we look forward to His coming again. Anticipating that, we can truly relax and celebrate a peaceful Christmas in our homes and churches.

Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, Rejoice. Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand.

Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:4-7 (RSV)

— by DaNeil Olson
Calvary Free Lutheran
Arlington, South Dakota

— by Mrs. Paul (Becky) Abel
Curitiba, Brazil

I learned much about the peace of death through the life of my father-in-law, Richard Konerza. Dad's preparation for his home-going was lived out in his daily walk with Jesus. He was one of those very precious people who lived each day as if it was his last.

From the day I met Dad, he had a faithful and consistent walk with God. When visiting their home, I would awaken each morning to my mother and father-in-law's voices as they read the Bible and then prayed for each of us by name; always closing with the Lord's Prayer. I felt so humbled and so loved to be remembered in their prayers.

Last January, Dad was diagnosed with cancer. Surgery was advised as the doctor believed it was still in the early stages and reminded us that this type of cancer caused great pain. Following surgery, Dad had six weeks of radiation therapy during which time Mom and Dad lived in our home. Many days he could do little more than be still and rest. I would often hear Mom reading to him. Each night we would hear them pray before sleeping, always thanking and praising God for His goodness and mercy to them.

Radiation was finished on Good Friday. I am reminded of Tony Campolo's words, "It's Friday but Sunday is coming!" We were ready to put the sickness behind us and move into spring. Dad looked forward to planting his garden and being outdoors again.

It was not to be. Almost immediately pain settled in his lower back. He patiently rested and my sister-in-law planted his garden with him. We prayed and waited.

It wasn't until mid-July that we realized the cancer had indeed progressed. The whole family came to Mom and Dad's home immediately to cry together, to encourage one another and to pray. Before leaving that day, we gathered around Dad's bed, took

Christmas will be different



Having Peace While Mourning the Loss of a Loved One

hands and joined in family prayer. Those precious moments will be forever etched in my memory as we each gave thanks to God for Dad in our lives. Together we remembered his kindness, patience, gentleness and how he loved each of us. We asked God for His healing hand upon Dad and gave him up to God and His divine will. Dad closed in prayer then quoted one of his favorite passages of Scripture from Proverbs 3:5-6. We left their home

enveloped in the blanket of God's love and comfort.

Before long Dad's pain grew so intense that he was taken to a Duluth, Minnesota hospital to bring it under control. The medication kept Dad comfortable as he rapidly slipped away from us.

One evening, our son, David, said good-bye saying, "See you next week, Grandpa, or see you in heaven." After he left, Dad motioned to Mom to say something. His words were, "You tell the children to be sure that they get to heaven!"

We felt the presence of God as we sat with Dad and waited for Jesus to take him. Dad would tell the nurses about Jesus and his wonderful assurance of knowing where he was going. The afternoon of August 3, Mom was reading to him from John 14:1-3: "Let not your heart be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to myself; that where I am, you may be also."

As Mom said, "A few minutes later he peacefully breathed his last. He had been transported to 'The Land That Is Fairer Than the Day.' When the time of death came, Jesus was there."

The peace that carried us through Dad's last months is with us still. Yes, Christmas will be different. We will miss him. But the legacy of his love for Jesus and for each one of us lives on in our hearts. Though at times the sadness and grief overcome us, the peace that comes from his life lived for Christ, and now a life with Christ Himself, has remained constant.

— by Judith Konerza
with Martha Konerza
*Christ the King Lutheran
East Grand Forks, Minnesota*

3 Enjoy Being a Woman

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

Women worldwide are struggling with their femininity. The media is quick to reveal women's discontentment and to call attention to feminine issues. Perhaps in our own neighborhoods and even in our own hearts, we sense the lack of fulfillment that is subtly poisoning the attitudes of women. This was never God's intent. He still desires life abundant and fulfilled; not just for eternity, but for today. He graciously would give this to all who would have it.

Christian women need to know what God says about their role; so that their lives may be enriched and fulfilled and "that the Word of God may not be dishonored" (Titus 2:5). We are charged to live sober, upright and godly lives in this world; adorning the doctrine of God our Savior. This is a serious responsibility, so throughout this year we will explore womanhood in the light of God's Word.

This is not meant to be a comprehensive study as many Bible studies have already been published to meet this need. Rather, let us consider our adventure as significant Bible insights from my coffee cup to yours.

3 Enjoy Being God's Child

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

I. Without Christ

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

John 15:5

Isaiah 53:6

Romans 3:10,11,23

Jeremiah 17:9

Psalms 14:1,3

Romans 7:18,24

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

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

Seeing ourselves from God's point of view, we are desperately corrupt apart from Christ. Have you personally recognized yourself this way?

When we acknowledge this view, we admit our need for deliverance, salvation and redemption.

4. Read the following verses in succession. Explain God's provision for our wretched state in simple truths, as if you were talking to one who had never heard.

John 3:16-17, 36

Romans 5:8

I John 5:10

Galatians 4:4-7

John 1:12

II. Within Christ

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

I Peter 2:10

Colossians 2:9-10

John 6:35; 17:3

John 10:10b

III. Getting to know Him

Being a child implies an ongoing, ever more intimate relationship with the parent. This is God's desire for each of His children. I only enjoy being God's child if I am seeking a growing love relationship with Him. If my relationship with Christ has become dull, it is my fault, not His.

* Getting to know Him may be accomplished by: the Word, prayer and obedience.

6. How is my life built and by whom? Proverbs 24:3-4 and I Corinthians 1:30
7. This knowledge is more than an assimilation of scriptural facts. How do Proverbs 9:10, 4:7, and I John 5:20 explain this?

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

9. Who is the best teacher of the Scriptures? I John 2:27

10. What is the important starting point emphasized in II Peter 1:20-21?

You and I need to spend concentrated time in the Word of God. As God's Word richly dwells in us, then God Himself will do the building. We may not totally understand how physical food nourishes and builds our bodies, yet we continue to eat. God's Word, eaten and digested, turns into spiritual growth. Note Job 23:12, KJV.

11. Here is a barometer to check the quality of your devotional life.

John 15:11

Psalm 16:11

✱ Getting to know God involves union, knowledge and communion.

Communication with the true God is two-way. Prayer is a wonderful privilege for God's child to enjoy while getting to know our Lord and Savior. The Word and prayer go together like bread and butter.

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

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

13. Obedience is an act of the will. Often my will must precede my emotion and even my intellect. John 7:17

14. Exercise caution lest even your obedience becomes a work of the flesh. What "work" is acceptable? John 6:28-29

A good hymnbook will enhance your devotional time. Select a hymn to share at your WMF meeting which expresses a thought from this lesson that has blessed you.

✱ Being His child is basic if godly womanhood is to be a joyous, fulfilling reality in our lives.

Next month: I Enjoy Being God's Creation

Peaceful when it isn't *picture perfect*

A mother, clad in a white apron and oven mitts, stands in an immaculate kitchen poised over a hot stove. Her eyes are closed and she has a pleasant smile on her face as she inhales deeply of the aroma of freshly baked sugar cookies she has just pulled out of the oven. The baby in the high chair claps his chubby little hands in delight while the children in the living room gently hang fragile ornaments on the newly cut Christmas tree as soft strains of "... peace on earth and mercy mild ..." float from the compact disc player.

While this scene probably could be found in any Christmas issue of *Ideals* magazine, it simply is not one to be witnessed in the Unverzagt home. Perhaps one would be more likely to see mother in her sweats holding a hungry

baby while pulling cookies hurriedly out of the oven before the toddler, climbing completely out of his high chair, burns himself on the hot stove in an attempt to climb up on the cupboard. The children in the living room are meanwhile redecorating the tree with the few plastic ornaments remaining at their level (the majority of ornaments have been moved to the top one-third of the tree to escape the hands of the busy toddler) while the cat laps water out of the tree stand.

"Finding Peace while Busy with Christmas Preparations" sounded like an article I'd love to read, not one I just agreed to write!

I settled myself on the couch to feed my baby and to ponder over PEACE. "What is peace?" I asked my five-year-old daughter. "It

Fifteen years! That is how long ago I sat at a desk in my kitchen in Wisconsin and prayerfully worked out a series of Bible studies for my friends, AFLC women. I was inspired with the privilege and delight of being a woman, a wife, a mother; so the topic, "I Enjoy Being A Woman" became my theme.

My youngest daughter (at the time) consistently napped every afternoon as I devoted that time to study. She is now a high school graduate taking a year to work full time. My other "pinafoired" school daughters are also grown; one about to be married and the other about to become a teacher. A fourth daughter has joined our family taking on the piano-practicing, shopping partner role. I may ask myself, "Do I still enjoy being a woman?" Trials and joys have ebbed and flowed during the last fifteen years. Life seems more complicated then it did then; yet God has remained constant and faithful.

Do I still enjoy being a woman? My head and heart affirm it, and I trust as I re-study these lessons with you, my spirit will find them as applicable and energizing as it did then. God's truth is timeless and ageless.

Speaking of time, one truth did become apparent in 1981: the lessons are too long to complete in an hour (or has an hour shortened?)! You will become frustrated if you try. Value will be lost if you rush. The challenge is on each leader to shorten the study appropriately under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is my desire that you do so. Perhaps your groups could pre-arrange to divide the questions into thirds and assign one-third to last names starting A-H, one-third to I-P, one-third to Q-Z. Each group could be responsible for sharing answers they found most meaningful. I am confident that you will find a way, after all, innovation is the way of "being a woman!"

From the new WMF Bible Study writer



— by Mrs. Michael (Jeannie) Brandt
Sioux Falls, South Dakota



means when you want to be alone—like peace and quiet,” she told me. Peace, then, I mused, must be something I won’t experience for quite a few years! With four young children it is not easy to be alone or to have it quiet. “Do we have peace at our house?” I continued my questioning. She thought for a moment then replied matter-of-factly, “Not much.”

Peace is something we can all have as Christians: it’s not limited to those with quiet households. “Those who love Thy law have great peace, and nothing causes

them to stumble” (Psalm 119:165). Apparently peace is something very important to the Lord. In Psalm 34:14 we are told to “Seek peace and pursue it.” Peace is listed as part of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22.

So how do we achieve it, even in the midst of busy Christmas preparations? I turned in my Bible to a familiar verse: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7). The peace that God gives is something that the world cannot understand (John 14:27). How is it possible for one who loves the Lord to experience ultimate peace in the midst of chaos, strife, or fear? God’s peace is internal. It guards our most vital organs, our hearts and minds by blocking out worry, anger, fear, stress, and ugly thoughts of all sorts. If peace depended only upon external situations, some of us would rarely experience it. Instead, we can have peace that is beyond the imagination!

How do we “pursue” peace according to Philippians 4:7?

There are three ways:

1. By not being anxious. Procrastination is one way we invite anxiety and worry to take over during the Christmas season. Careful management of our time can alleviate last-minute gift buying, card sending, and other holiday preparations.

2. By being thankful. It is much easier to complain about all the beautiful gifts or elegant decorations we can’t afford to buy than to be thankful for what we are able to do. Rejoicing in the birth of our Savior ought to give us ample reason to be thankful!

3. By praying about everything. Turning all our concerns over to the Lord in prayer removes them from our minds and allows room for God’s peace to enter in.

It would not be realistic for me to try to maintain a picture-perfect household in the midst of my Christmas preparations. And trying to create a serene atmosphere at all times would be anything but peace-inducing! I am thankful I don’t have to live up to the **Ideals** stereotype and even more, that I have access to the peace that surpasses all comprehension!

— by Hope Dyrud Unverzagt
St. Paul’s Lutheran
Jewel, Iowa



She looks into the face of the baby.

Her son. Her Lord. His Majesty.

At this point in history, the human being who best understands who God is and what he is doing is a teenage girl in a smelly stable. She can’t take her eyes off him.

Somehow Mary knows she is holding God.

Let him be as human as he intended to be.
Let him into the mire and muck of our world.
For only if we let him in can he pull us out.

God Came Near by Max Lucado, Portland: Multnomah Press, 1987.

Blessed Christmas

the story
of an
unexpected
guest

The Nordheim farm has a beautiful situation, a little way up from the main road. It is quite a large farm. Excellent fields lie in front of the buildings and to the back stretch pretty woodlands. The nearest neighbor is almost half an hour away.

Here live Gro and Anders Nordheim. They like their home and thank God for His rich blessings to soul and body. Both Gro and Anders are God's children and their home is filled with that heavenly fragrance. All who come there sense it.

Now it is the afternoon of Christmas Eve.

Gro and their daughter have all the preparations made inside and Anders and their son are ready outdoors. There is already the spirit of the holiday over the home. The Christmas tree has been brought in and will soon be decorated. All four of them rejoice in the festival of Christmas because they have all received Jesus as their Savior.

A man plods up the hill to the Nordheim's. The man isn't so young and he is carrying a knapsack. There is much snow and heavy-going. Consequently, it is rather difficult even though the way isn't especially long or steep.

Now he has arrived. He knocks on the door.

"Come in!" the word sounds from within.

The stranger enters quietly and says hello. He takes the knapsack from his back and sets it by the wall.

Gro gives him a chair and invites him to sit down. She means that it would be good for him to rest. He expresses his thanks. Yes, it is good to get to rest after a long and hard walk. The man is in his sixties. They can see that his shoes and clothes are not of the best kind.

Now the daughter must work hard to set the table in a hurry. They think that some food is needed now also. Soon the table is set with good and wholesome food. He is bidden to the table and urged to eat all he can. It must be good to eat now after a hard day.

Yes, that is certainly true. He thanks them heartily. He is very hungry now, that he can't deny. And the food tastes very good to him. He takes his time and eats all he wants. And the people at Nordheim's are so glad to share it with him. They have a warm heart for those in need.

The stranger eats till satisfied and thanks them for the food. Oh, how good it was! He moves his chair from the table and now they will get to know who he is, where he lives and what he does. He is a single man, Jon Langli, and lives in a small, old cabin, far from this place. For many years he has traveled around and sold various small items. He has managed in that way until this day. But now that age has crept on, it has become more difficult. "Ah, ja, ja," he sighs, "It hasn't always been so

great! ... And now it is Christmas Eve, ja." He sits and rocks back and forth and seems to have a far away look. They notice tears have formed in the corners of his eyes. At last he whispers that now he must surely get on because darkness begins to fall.

"No, I think you better be with us for Christmas," says Anders Nordheim. His wife is in hearty agreement and says, "Yes, you must really do that. We have plenty of room." The man becomes so surprised and astonished. Can it be true? Can I stay here all of Christmas? I, a poor stranger?

He becomes almost speechless and looks from one to the other. His eyes ask, "Can I be here with you?" They understand and smile at him. And now the tears fall down over the thin, wrinkled face. They are tears of gladness and thanksgiving. "Thank you, thank you, all of you!" he manages to stammer.

While the Christmas tree is being decorated, Jon Langli goes in a room and washes up. He gets to change his clothing and returns almost like a new man. There stands the Christmas tree already decorated. So radiantly beautiful it is. Think that he should be able to experience such! It is almost beyond belief. Is it only a dream, all of this?

No, it must be a reality. He is here at Nordheim.

And so the Christmas table is set with delicious Christmas food.

They take places together around the table. Anders Nordheim reads the holy Christmas Gospel. A holy time. A holy evening. It is Christmas Eve, when Jesus was born. And it is as though He himself is among them this night. It feels like He will work a miracle in their home this Christmas. The Christmas Story is so powerful and meaningful for them all. Their stranger-guest notices this as well. It is as though they see and experience the whole event.

Anders folds his hands in prayer. He gives thanks for the great wonder of Christmas; the Child who was laid in a manger. This gift is God's gift of love to all people. God doesn't make any distinction among people. In Jesus the way is open and free to all. Salvation is finished for one and all. He prays rich blessing over Christmas for them all. And his prayer embraces also the suffering and fearful souls around the world. At the last he prays for their friend who is with them this evening. "Lord, give him also a blessed Christmas, with Jesus. Amen!"

The daughter Gerd sings a Christmas carol. And then the food is served. With joy and thanksgiving they partake of it. All things are blessings which flow out from Jesus, the great Gift of Christmas.

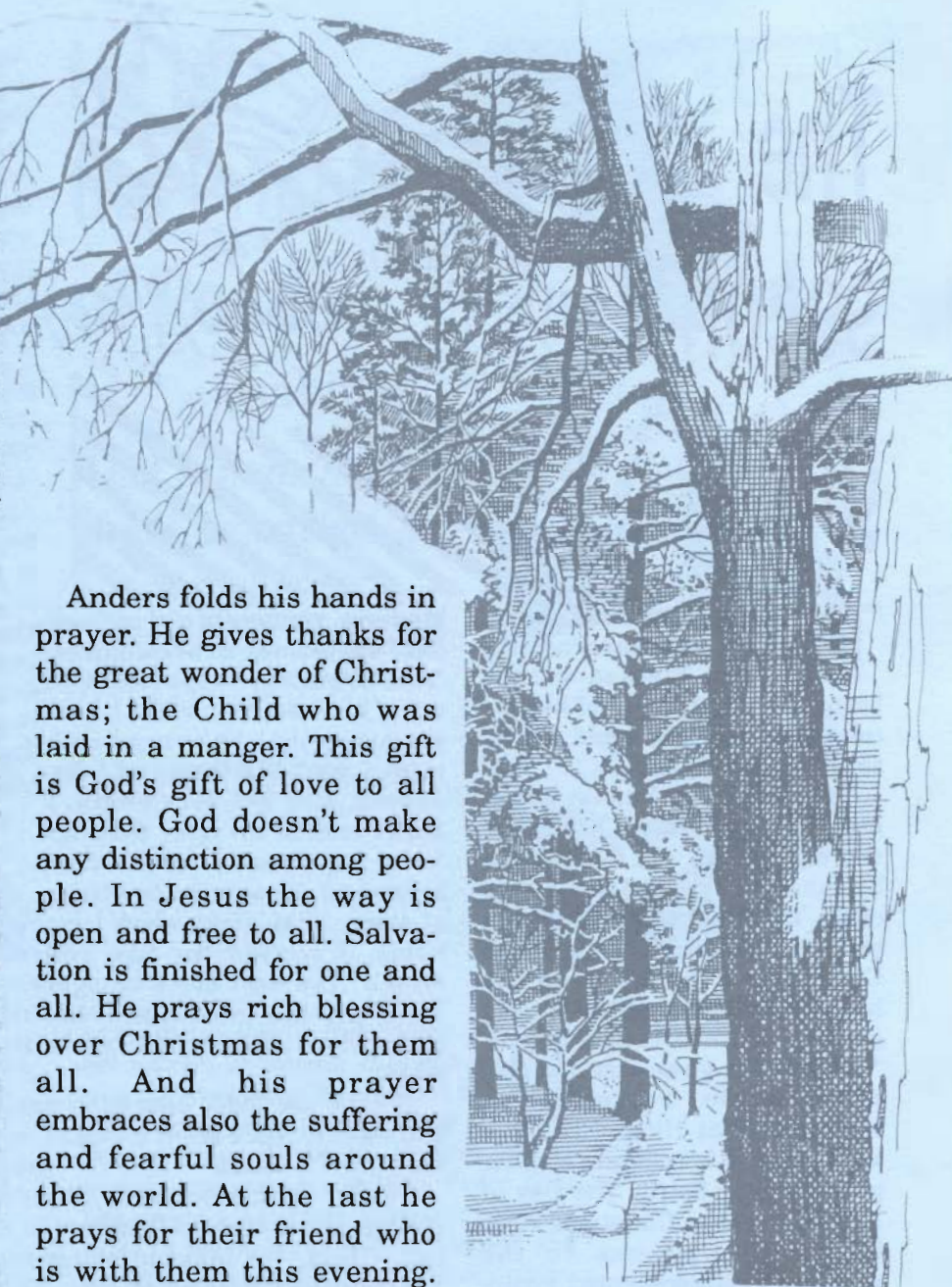
It was a great Christmas Eve for all of them. One they could never forget. The joy reached its highest point when their stranger-guest, in need and with

tears, bowed himself before the Savior.

Jon Langli came to see into the great wonder of salvation. There was, truly, salvation also for him. And there were thanks and songs of praise all through Christmas.

They had a blessed Christmas.

— from *Evangelisten*
translated from Norwegian
by Rev. Raynard Huglen
Newfolden, Minnesota



The second gift



The festive Christmas season was fast approaching. We had been blessed with a beautiful, long fall full of blazing colors and now one could almost smell the coming snow.

It was a quiet Sunday afternoon and as I rested, I listened to the cherished, old Christmas hymns on the radio. The message came through clearly, "God's greatest gift to man, born on Christmas Eve." Between the hymns, a short meditation was given. One meditation began, "God has not given just one gift, however. On Pentecost we remember that He and His Son together gave to believers another gift: the Holy Spirit. The Day of Pentecost was to Christians what Christmas Day was to the world—an unprecedented giving time by the almighty God."

How true I thought. Just then there was a knock at the door and my daughter and her two sons came in. Soon other family members came. Happy voices filled the house and some one mentioned, "It seems we are full of the Christmas spirit!"

There was that word "spirit" again. I began explaining what I had just heard on the radio.

Todd, always alert said, "Oh Grandma, we studied about the fruit of the spirit in Sunday School: love, joy, peace, patience,

kindness, gentleness and self-control." He beamed as he continued, "And Grandma, I experienced an act of kindness this week. I have a teacher that has very harsh rules. I don't like them and I disobeyed. She got very angry. I didn't realize till later that her father had passed away the night before and she only got two hours of sleep. That night when I got home, I prayed for her and myself. The next day I brought her a gift. She loved it and that brought us closer together in school."

"Thank you Todd. Does anyone else want to share about a fruit of the Spirit?" I asked.

"Well," Eric answered, "We studied about faith in Confirmation Class. We learned about Abraham and Sarah and Isaac. Mary too, had faith in knowing she would bear a son. Then last fall, I was digging with the tractor and I lost my billfold. We all looked for it but couldn't find it. I prayed about it. Last week, a whole year later, my dad had to change a tire on that tractor and somewhere behind the frame lay my billfold! It was as good as ever! I said, 'Thank you, Jesus.' So keep the faith!"

Then my grandson, Michael and his new bride chimed in, "Our fruit of the Spirit is love. We knew when we met in college a

year ago that our love was real. It is the foundation of our marriage as the pastor said in our wedding ceremony when he spoke from I Corinthians 13. We mean to fulfill these virtues along with all the fruit of the Spirit. Perhaps we too can have 54 years of marriage as you and Grandpa have had. When your hearts are set on loving each other, we don't look for hurts or mistakes; we look for love!"

My daughter Ann, who had been quietly listening, said, "Mom, my fruit is patience. After we heard that our youngest son was born with a posterior cleft palate and would need lots of surgery, I cried in my heart to God. 'I need patience, and I need it now.' It all seemed so overwhelming. That was ten years ago. After some rough and scary roads, we feel God has been there to uphold us with strength and patience. The world wants results right now, but through God's plans we learn His ways. His ways are perfect and I thank Him for it."

Tobias listened to his mother then turned to me teary-eyed, "Yes, Grandma, I know all of you who took care of me had the fruit of gentleness. All the nurses, doctors and even the pilots who flew us to the Shriners' Hospital in Chicago twice a year for ten years were gentle as they served us."

After everyone had left, I sat down and prayed, "Thank you God for the opportunities we have to see this fruit in the lives of others. may it be that at this Christmas time we can show others that Jesus Christ is our Savior."

Everyone of us has a gift with a tag that reads: "To: ____, From: God. But it can only be opened by repentance and faith. And let's not forget His second gift—the Holy Spirit. This Christmas may we not leave any of God's wonderful gifts unopened.

— by Lydia McCarlson
Tabor Lutheran
Webster, South Dakota

Peace on earth?

The angels declared that Jesus' coming meant "peace on earth," and yet it seems in some ways that His coming brought anything but peace.

Mary and Joseph appear to have been living a rather peaceful, uneventful life until an angel announced that the Holy Spirit would come upon Mary, a virgin, and she would have a son. What happened to them next would be more appropriately described as chaotic rather than peaceful. Their marriage almost fell apart before it happened. Their standing in the community had to have been greatly affected. Just as the big day was about to arrive they had to leave their home and travel across the country. They could not find accommodations in the strange town they were in, and so the birth of their firstborn son had to take place in a barn. While their child was still young they had to flee to Egypt because his life was threatened. If they had been asked later to describe their first few years of parenthood, quiet and calm would probably not be the adjectives they would have used.

The peace Jesus brings is not what a person might expect. It does not come with a guarantee that life will always work out the way we expect it. The peace of God does not include the absence of all trials and difficulties. Experiencing God's peace does not mean we will experience nothing but calm and tranquillity.

The example of Joseph and Mary reminds us that when Jesus comes into a life unexpected challenges often come as well. They traveled to places they had not planned to see. They did things they had not anticipated. If they had been told beforehand some of the things they were going to face, they possibly would have run the other direction. Yet, they experienced the peace of God.

God's peace does not affect the outward circumstances of our lives nearly as much as it does the inner condition of our hearts. Those who know God's peace still have difficulties. Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble." In the same verse, however, He also said, "In me you may have peace." We can "take heart" because Jesus has "overcome the world" (John 16:33). We have a security that survives in the midst of trials.

Life, at times, for Joseph and Mary and for us can seem like a train that has jumped its tracks and is speeding out of control. Take heart! Things are not out of control. Jesus has come. Jesus is here. He says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." (John

14:27). While it may appear to be chaos on the outside, our lives can have peace on the inside because the Prince of Peace has come.

Creating the Perfect Christmas

Are you trying to make this the perfect Christmas for your family and yourself? Are you working hard at spreading the joy of Christmas to everyone around you? Are you looking to give just the right gift, send the perfect card, cook the best foods anyone has ever eaten, decorate in a manner that causes everyone to pull out their cameras and still take part in every program that you know you should? Consider a suggestion for a moment—give up!

No one can make this the perfect Christmas. Many wise and talented people have tried to scale that mountain in the past, and failed. Something won't turn out right. Someone won't be happy with what you give or do. Your best efforts at spreading the joy may be rejected. Circumstances beyond your control may cause your Christmas celebration to be much different than what you expected. That's okay. God did not say you had to make this the perfect Christmas. He has already done the work of making this a special time.

We often spend the holiday time furiously scurrying around like squirrels who heard winter is coming in twenty minutes and all the nuts have to be gathered. We act as if the value of the holiday is determined by what we do. It isn't. Christmas has meaning because of what God has done. The work of making this a wonderful time has already been done. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16). The Savior has come! We have hope! We are not alone! God is with us!

Take a break from all your doing this holiday season to think about what has been done. Instead of spending all our time trying to make this season special, let us be sure to spend time worshipping the One who has made it special. Many of the things we do can be nice, little accessories on the side in helping us celebrate, but the main, necessary ingredient that makes this a great time of the year is already in place. We do not have to create the perfect Christmas. We can receive the perfect gift. God has given us His best: His Son. The Son offers us life eternal. Let us receive the gift and worship the Giver.

Enjoy the season and have a wonderful Christmas!

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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