

# THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

December 15, 1987

*The Word  
Became  
Flesh*





# at the MASTER'S FEET

## The gift of gifts

A very blessed Christmas to each of you! To some, good health and happiness are the ingredients of a blessed Christmas. To others being together with family, going to church, seeing a Christmas program are the experiences one needs for a blessed Christmas. However, there could be no Christmas without Christ! Mankind would never have thought of such an event. They would have just lived and lived, hoping for something to happen to rescue them from trouble and oppression. The key, as you and I know, is in the verse: "For God so loved the world..." Just a few words from St. John, Chapter 3, verse 16, but a verse telling us so very much about God, sharing with us the real and special meaning of love, and then who it was all for—the world (people who needed Him and that love the most)! What a

time for positive Christian witness! What a time to share Jesus!

"And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His Name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21 NKJV).

Give yourself some time. When was this message more important? When was the world in a greater need of the Savior? Or, giving this a deeper thought, when have you and I had a greater need for the Savior? The closer we get to the Lord's return, the harder the energy of the devil will burn. What a time to share Jesus!

Tell me now, just how did God "so love the world?" Was it in the beautiful creation, a healthy person, a future promise, or a promise of now making all things well? No, these are not first and foremost? These are secondary to the greatest Gift, Jesus Christ our Lord! "In Him we live and move and have our being!" (Acts 17:28 NKJV). In Him — all things work together for good to those who love God (Romans 8:28). The message of Christmas is a life-giving message. What a time to share Jesus!

Isn't it interesting? God, our Creator and of the whole universe, has given us a Gift! It is not found in a material present, but in His Own Presence! When our focus becomes too much on the presents, we often lose sight of His Presence. A most profound Gift! A very precious Gift! A very personable Gift! As we mentioned before, a Gift far beyond our doing!

Take a piece of paper. Write down five gifts you received last Christmas. Well, try for four or three or, hopefully, two. How are they doing at this time? Yes, the Gift of Jesus Christ is an eternal Gift. To the non-Christian, the Christian may be seen as a Christmas spoiler. That is if the main emphasis of Christmas is found in material gifts. On the other hand, a Christian is a Christmas blessing because what he or she may give can be given in the name of Jesus and in honor of Him. The whole experience of Christmas makes the joy and message of Jesus richer and fuller.

*Every day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before,*

*Every day with Jesus I love Him more and more;*

*Jesus saves and keeps me, and He's the One I'm waiting for,*

*Every day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before.*

What a time to share Jesus! May our Christmas fellowship in home, church, school or wherever, be one that celebrates His presence to His glory and honor!



by Pastor  
Harvey Jackson

### THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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**"HIS KINGDOM  
IS FOREVER"**

Psalm 145:13



It was his  
mother's first  
real Christmas

# Billy and the Christmas Baby

by Ruth Jesness Tweed  
McHenry, N. Dak.

The porcelain Christ Child in the manger was broken. The fragments were scattered on the floor by the Christmas tree. Billy had thrown the book at it.

"Billy, how could you?" his mother said. He loved the beautiful figurine and had adopted it as his own. Ann had bought it after Christmas the year before. Even at half-price it was the only part of the creche she could afford. She planned to add a piece each year until she had the complete manger scene. It was not intended to be a boy's plaything but Billy wanted it and Ann had trouble saying no to her son. She was pleased that he cared for it lovingly and only touched it with awe and reverence. To Ann it was a lovely piece of art, but to Billy it was real — his "Christmas Baby."

Although his religious training had been casual, Billy loved the Christ

Child. His Christmas Baby replaced the plastic Santa that he had kept to put by the Christmas tree. He never really believed in Santa because Ann had been careful to tell him that it was a game. The school psychologist said it was important that he know the difference between reality and fantasy. The Christmas story was real — Billy's mother told him so. She truly believed it although it had been many years since it had been part of her life. She had not consciously meant to reject God, although she struggled privately, wondering how a loving Father could give her a retarded child and let his earthly father desert them.

They had moved to a large city where she could find work and a school to suit Billy's needs. She seldom saw her family — it was too painful to watch Billy try to play with his normal cousins. Even her parents had difficulty accepting Billy's handicap. When she called her mother and told of Billy's progress — that he could read and do simple arithmetic — her mother was not impressed. "He's 12, isn't he?" she said. After that conversation Ann wouldn't even consider the invitation to visit her parents at Christmas.

Reading together was part of a new routine they had established. Billy couldn't wait to start on the new book she brought home for Christmas Eve. It had a picture of Jesus blessing the children on the cover and was written in simple sentences with many colorful illustrations.

Billy hadn't thought about the Christmas Baby growing up but he liked the idea of Him becoming the Man Jesus who loved children. He wanted to read the book himself while his mother fixed their supper on Christmas Eve.

He turned the pages, looking for parts that were easy to read, and studying the pictures. He made a wonderful discovery — Jesus, the Man, was more exciting than the Baby. Then he saw the picture. . . .

Like all the pictures in the book it was brightly colored and lifelike. It showed three crosses on a hill and he knew the Man in the middle was Jesus. Jesus, the good Man who walked on water and loved kids, who was just becoming real to Billy. He was dead. Bad men killed Him. It said so right there. He read it himself.

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"She seldom saw her family — it was too painful to watch Billy try to play with his normal cousins."

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He yelled out in grief and fury, hurled the book across the room where it hit the figure of the Christ Child by the Christmas tree. He threw himself on the floor and lay crying until his mother came.

Ann tried to soothe the sobbing boy and make sense out of his garbled words. She had not expected this.

"But, Billy," she said, not quite believing her own words, "God made Him live again."

"How could He?" Billy sniffled. Dead was dead. His mother had told him so.

While their Christmas Eve supper dried on the stove Ann and Billy sat together and read the Easter story. His tear-stained face turned to a smiling one as his mother read, "He is not here. He is risen." Billy was not hard to convince. Christmas Eve became a joyous celebration.

"I'm glad Jesus is alive," Billy said, as he got ready for bed. "But where is He now?"

Ann faltered. "He's... He's everywhere. He's right here with you now even if you can't see Him." She held her breath, waiting for more questions, but the boy was satisfied. He was not the one to doubt his mother's words. Ann was weary and for once was thankful for the boy's innocence. She was confused, full of doubts and overwhelmed by the emptiness in her heart.

When Billy fell asleep Ann found her almost-new Bible and looked for the answer. As she read, a new understanding came to her, of a loving Father who must sacrifice a Son, and His victory over death. Although the familiar words stirred her memory, it was all new. For the first time in her life she realized that God's love was real and unconditional, like her love for Billy.

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## BILLY . . .

Secretly, Ann had dreaded Christmas Day. It always brought back memories and bitterness; yet she had to be cheerful for Billy's sake. This Christmas morning was different. Ann was reborn.

"Merry Christmas, Mom!" Billy was tugging her arm to wake her.

"Merry Christmas, yourself," she answered and they laughed together as they went to the Christmas tree for the ritual of exchanging gifts. Billy was so excited that she thought he might have forgotten their talk the night before.

"Are we going to church?" he asked. Ann was surprised. Church had been part of the Christmas routine in their old home. She had promised herself that they would find a church someday — when she wasn't so busy. Billy said that there was a pretty church near his school. Could they go there?

It *was* a beautiful church, friendly and warm. Billy loved the music and the pretty red flowers on the altar, while Ann heard the Gospel as she had never heard it before, and like Mary, pondered it in her heart.

On the way out Billy stopped to admire the outdoor Nativity scene.

"That's Jesus when He was a baby," he explained to a woman passing by. "He grew up and died and lived again for always. He's here now."

The woman smiled. "Thank you. I needed reminding." To Ann she said, "You've a fine boy there. You must love him very much."

No one had ever said those words about Billy. Before Ann could thank her the woman had disappeared into the crowd, not knowing of the gift she had just given.

Outwardly Christmas was the same — Billy's excitement over his new toys, a quiet dinner, a phone call to Ann's parents and a walk in the snow. Even so, it was different. Ann was celebrating her first real Christmas.

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"To Ann she said,  
'You've a fine boy there.  
You must love him  
very much.'"

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Photo by Roger C. Huebner, D.D.S.

The little figure had been forgotten until Ann emptied the wastebasket. It was a shame, she thought, as she looked at the pieces. It would mean so much more to both of them now. The gift shop would be having another sale and she could replace it.

"Shall we buy another Christmas Baby?" she asked Billy. "I can get us a new one tomorrow."

Billy thought for a while before he answered. "If you want to, Mom," he said. "But we don't need it, you know. We've got the real Jesus with us now. All the time!"

### JESUS MEANS SAVIOR

...as for Mary, amidst all the trying circumstances that confronted her, one thing stood out clearly, namely, that Jesus was her child, and that Jesus means *Saviour*. This one great truth she clung to through all the inner struggle and soul anguish that fell to her lot in life. So amidst all the doubts and questionings that come to us in life, we must ever hold fast to the one great truth that Jesus is *our Saviour*, and that He is God's great gift to us.

*F. Hammarsten*



by Mrs. Philip (Judith) Hyland  
Brooklyn Center, Minn.

One in freedom, four in captivity

# Five Philippine Christmases

For a child, the enchantment of a Minnesota "white Christmas" is an experience that can never be fully relived as an adult. Those memories have cast a glow on every subsequent Christmas festival: deep, white snow, some clinging to the branches of trees, sleigh bells, brightly lighted windows, caroling, church bells, the family gathered around the Christmas tree reading the Christmas Gospel, singing, laughter, joy!

Christmas has come to have a deeper meaning over the years, especially during the more than 30 Christmases I have spent in the Orient, far from our Minnesota wonderland and Scandinavian yuletide. Some of these holidays have been spent with few or none of the usual trappings of Christmas; there has been a growing awareness that we can lose all else, but if we have Christ, nothing, no, nothing, can rob us of the joy and wonder as we ponder that great mystery, the incarnation—when God came to live among us.

Christmases 1940 to 1944 were spent in the Philippine Islands, one in freedom and four in captivity. We were 11 young Lutherans of the American Lutheran Church who had set out for the China mission field, but because of the Japanese invasion, had been diverted to the Philippines, where we were to study the Chinese language until it would be possible to enter China. Therefore, Christmas, 1940, found us in Baguio, a charming city tucked in among the towering pine trees of the northern Luzon mountains. It was not difficult to catch the Christmas spirit where evergreens and gorgeous poinsettias were growing profusely. We Lutherans had a very happy Scandinavian "yule fest."

Before Christmas of 1941, we realized that war with Japan was imminent. There had been many portents, which we had tried to ignore; therefore the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7th took us by surprise. I was just hearing about Pearl Harbor as I walked down the main street of Baguio, memorizing Chinese proverbs, when the Japanese planes bombed our city. The three weeks that followed were a troubled time of uncertainty and waiting. Merchants were boarding

up store windows, rumors were wild, and every day we expected the invading army to take our city. On Christmas Eve the arrival of the enemy troops seemed imminent, so the expatriates began assembling at Brent School for protection. We came there late in the afternoon and what bedlam! There were just too many bodies for the space; people were hungry and afraid; toilets were overflowing. Reactions were varied: some wept, some ran hither and thither spreading rumors and panic, some were enjoying the excitement and one very aristocratic woman had taken refuge under a table where she was sucking her thumb!

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"Before Christmas  
of 1941, we realized that  
war with Japan  
was imminent."

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Hours passed, and there was no sign of the Japanese army, so we all stretched out on the floor and tried to sleep. At dawn I whispered to Ruth Jochen, "Let's go home." We knew there would be protests at our leaving, so we slipped quietly out of the room and began running through the woods toward town. On the way, we found a pine tree which someone had evidently cut down for a Christmas tree. We arrived at our apartment on main street dragging the pine tree just as our cook arrived with a live chicken under his arm. We smiled at our loot, but no questions were asked; so we set about to prepare a Christmas celebration. By the time dinner was ready,

others had drifted in, for, with daylight, the imminent arrival of the enemy seemed less threatening. Dinner was a "happy-sad" occasion, for we feared this might be our last meal at home.

We had just finished dinner when there was a telephone call from Subido, our Filipino pastor. "Would you be willing to go with me out to City Camp for the Christmas party we had planned for our classes there?" In spite of protests from friends, who feared for our safety in case the enemy should arrive, we decided to go. When we arrived at City Camp, we found no one, not even a chicken. The large barracks, usually crowded with children and adults, were empty. We were just turning to leave when a boy came running and calling to us. "We are all in the caves; please come!" So we walked with him over a few slopes to a mountainside, where the people of City Camp had taken up residence in three large caves. There they were fearfully awaiting the arrival of the enemy army.

There we had our Christmas festival; we enjoyed the goodies we had brought, sang carols, read the Christmas Gospel and prayed. Then we hurried back to the city and arrived there safely at dusk. That Christmas service in the cave with Filipino friends is a precious yuletide memory.

Christmases 1942, 1943 and 1944 were spent inside barbed wire enclosures. Time stood still, though we kept track of the days by our homemade calendars, which had served as birthday and Christmas gifts. For me, those years were lonely, but far from unhappy or idle. Besides helping to turn mountain-sides into gardens, I was always busy with the children in camp.

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## Re-examining the Incarnation

# MY GOD! HOW WONDERFUL THOU ART!

"I have so much to do before Christmas" is a very familiar refrain in the pre-Christmas season. We want Christmas to be really special, so we plan, we work, we spend, we attend, we call, and on and on it goes. But all too soon we have Christmas Day. Then the days after Christmas, the turmoil of returning or exchanging gifts not quite right. Finally, we can get some rest and relax. Christmas is over. There may be a sense of accomplishment that we finally got it done, or most of it. But did we have Christmas?

Christmas is a "God event" not a "man event." Christmas is not what we have done, are doing, or will do. No, it

is what God has done, is doing, and will do. This is so easy to forget or neglect.

The Christian faith is not centered in what we do, how we live, the good we ought to do, etc. No, it is centered in what God has done, is doing, and will do. Praise God for that! Our loving and living is not very good. God's loving and doing is perfect! This gives hope for all mankind, even for you and me.

My God! How wonderful Thou art!  
Thy majesty how bright!  
How beautiful Thy mercy-seat  
In depths of burning light!

Our traditional Christmas Epistle lesson, Hebrews 1:1-5, is a great message. Here the Word reminds us that God is speaking to us in a most wonderful way. We look not for another, a greater revelation, for we have the best.

Because God loves us He came down to where we are. He became incarnate, He became flesh, He became one of us. There was no other way He could help



by Pastor  
John P. Strand  
Remer, Minn.

## PHILIPPINE . . .

Even when there were no prospects of gifts, the children never lost their eagerness for Christmas. The mess hall was decorated with pine branches and usually an outdoor tree was decorated with trimmings made by resourceful people.

For two years we had a kind of commandant, who had been educated in a mission school. He allowed extra food for the holidays and there was a relaxed, happy atmosphere. However, Christmas, 1944, there was almost nothing with which to make merry. Food had become very scarce; we knew nothing of what was happening in the world outside. For three-and-one-half years I had received no word from home and I was homesick. However, that good old Christmas spirit of cheer and good will just couldn't be suppressed. As Christmas approached, there was much secret activity in camp as scraps of material became pot-holders, aprons, children's clothes; sweaters were ripped and yarn used for gifts; down at the shop the men were making trinkets and ornaments out of coconut shells, carabao (water buffalo) teeth and scrap metal.

**"For three-and-one-half  
years I had received  
no word from home and  
I was homesick."**

Christmas Eve, after a supper of rice with a watery sweet potato gravy, we gathered in the natural amphitheater below the barracks for the Christmas pageant. The singing, the angels, shepherds, and wisemen carried us away to that night long ago on the plains of Bethlehem. Memories of home brought tears — lights in the window, the reading of the Christmas Gospel, father, mother, brothers — yes, where were they this Christmas Eve — at sea? on some battlefield?

*Hail, the heav'n born Prince of Peace!*

*Born that man no more may die . . .*

The song echoed over the hills that were soon to be the scene of great bloodshed and suffering.

The most poignant memory of that evening was the group of Japanese guards, silhouetted on the rim of the hollow, listening intently. How wistful and lonely they seemed compared with

the prisoners sitting in a cozy circle on the hillside singing carols. The guards, too, were lonely and homesick.

Christmas morning we were awakened by the singing of Christmas carolers. It was beautiful and the jolly holiday spirit was irrepressible. A Christmas dinner of hamburger, rice and sweet potatoes was served at tables outdoors.

The morning of December 26 we all experienced a severe letdown. Christmas, with its cheer, was over and we dreaded months, maybe years, ahead in captivity. Suddenly, an order came from the guardhouse that we must break camp and be ready to leave in two days. To be moving anywhere! We dreamed of a repatriation ship. But our destination was to be the Old Bilibid Prison in Manila. That is another story. But there was an incident on the 28th of December, the night we were being moved to Manila, that has changed the direction of my life and led us to spend Christmas for the next 30 years in Japan.

The night trip down the Kennon road was memorable for many reasons. It was a beautiful night with a nearly full moon. With mingled apprehension and



"Christmas is a  
'God event' not a  
'man event.' "

us. And we could not help ourselves, although we always insist on trying.

A few weeks ago we were on our tiptoes, looking toward Texas where a little girl had fallen into a well. She was helpless. All she could do was die. Someone had to go to where she was to save her. After a thrilling effort, she was saved. So God came down to where we are (all we can do is die) to save us. He, too, succeeded, if we would be saved. Christmas is all about God's coming to us in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Now sing we, now rejoice,  
Now raise to heav'n our voice;  
Lo! He from whom joy streameth,  
Poor in the manger lies;  
Yet not so brightly beameth  
The sun in yonder skies!  
Thou my Savior art!  
Thou my Savior art!

Come from on high to me,  
I cannot rise to Thee:  
O cheer my wearied spirit:  
O pure and holy Child,  
Thro' all Thy grace and merit,  
Blest Jesus! Lord most mild,  
Draw me after Thee!  
Draw me after Thee!

Because of His love, God is extremely anxious to rescue us. There were so many strange and wonderful aspects of His coming. A Child was born in a stable in Bethlehem. That Child was our Heavenly Father's only begotten Son and our Savior.

We are living in troubled times.

"Regardless of the past  
or the present,  
there is hope,  
for the future belongs  
to Jesus."

Foundations of society and nations are crumbling. Despair and spiritual poverty is the lot of millions. Is there any reason to have hope for the future? Hebrews 1:2 teaches us that that Child born in the stable in Bethlehem is the heir of all things. The future is in His Hands. How comforting! I would not want the future to be any place else. Regardless of the past or the present, there is hope, for the future belongs to Jesus. This is what God is saying.

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joy we noted signs of recent bombings along the way. Joy, because it was a sign of American advance; apprehension, because we would be a perfect target on this road. Our apprehension mounted as mile after mile we were meeting the Japanese army retreating to the north. We expected to be bombed momentarily. Truly God was with us and fulfilled the promise, "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and delivers them." Later we learned that every night for two weeks the Kennon Road had been bombed, but for four nights there was no fuel, so the bombers could not go up. Those four nights we were traveling on that road.

That night I became aware of the Japanese in a new way. I can never forget those long lines of silent, dejected soldiers moving quietly in the dark. That tugged at our hearts. They were nearing the end of a course to which they had given their fanatic loyalty. Their uniforms were threadbare, many were barefoot. The only sound was their heavy breathing as they pushed their handcarts of ammunition up the mountain. We prayed that night, together, audibly, that God would open

"That night I  
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the door of Japan to missionaries from the ALC.

It has been our great privilege to help answer that prayer. A Japan Christmas has so many faces. There is the commercial Christmas, flaunting Santa Claus, and the loudspeakers: "Only \_\_\_\_ days until Christmas," prodding jaded shoppers. Then there is Christmas Eve, when people crowd into the Christian churches for the candlelight service, a group of carolers carrying lighted candles. Then comes Christmas Day, with the stores more open for business than usual, everyone pressing forward to the New Year celebration. Then begins "home Christmas" for the missionaries when we can pull down our shades and have our family "Jul."

However, there was always a sadness as we would walk down our street at night; we see no light shining from the windows; the wooden shutters are closed, so no light peeps through.



Before we can  
go out, as did  
the shepherds,  
and spread the Gospel  
news, we must have been  
to the manger, and our  
hearts must have been filled  
with the heavenly joy,  
as theirs were; we must  
have witnessed for ourselves  
before we can bear  
witness to others.

*Theo. P. Frohne*

Those dark, closed homes are symbols of how most of the people have shut out the Christ of Christmas.

(Mrs. Hyland is a pastor's wife and daughter of the late Rev. and Mrs. A. N. Skogerboe, who were well known in northwestern Minnesota. Pastor Hyland once served Buffalo Lake Lutheran Church, Eden, S. Dak., now of the AFLC.)



## WONDERFUL . . .

That Child born in the stable at Bethlehem was the Creator of the world (Hebrews 1:2). Our universe is vast and complex. We are constantly being amazed as we learn more and more about it. But as it was first created, it was even more wonderful than what we have now. Sin entered history when our first parents fell, and sin always destroys. Our society is in turmoil today. All kinds of efforts are being made or proposed to fix it, but man does not have the power. But God's Son created a good and wonderful world by the word of His power. What incomprehensible power! Nothing is beyond it. It was in evidence when Jesus walked among men. He is the same, yesterday, today and forever more. The Creator is our hope for today. This is what God is saying.

That Child born in the stable in Bethlehem said one day, "I and my Father are One." Yes, Jesus reveals the glory and nature of God perfectly (Hebrews 1:3).

Not only little children are asking what God is like. There are some tragic misconceptions of God about these days. He is made to be stupid, ugly, ignorant, naive, helpless, judgmental, unloving and totally lacking in understanding. Jesus revealed the true glory and nature of God.

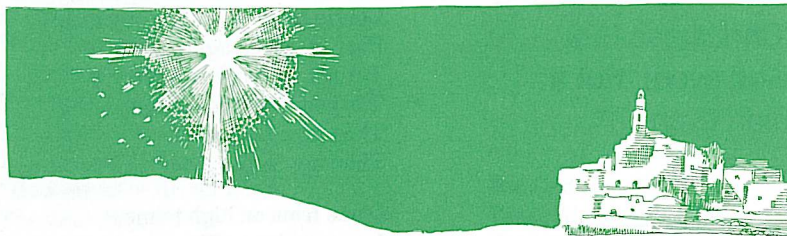
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### "There are some tragic misconceptions of God about these days."

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No one has had a finer and more loving character than Jesus. He was so patient and understanding to the fearful and humble, but stern and full of warning to the insincere and hypocritical, those just playing a part. He was quick to hear the cry of the needy, whatever that need might be. No task was beyond Him, not even giving life to the dead. No sin was beyond forgiveness, when confessed. God, our Heavenly Father, is that way. This is what God is saying through Jesus.

That Child born in a stable in Bethlehem is now upholding our universe by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3).



He cannot be blamed for the evil and suffering of our day. If it were not for Him, things would be infinitely worse. There would have been total collapse before now. Because of Him, there are limits to evil and misery. Yes, while evil and corruption are strong, there is One who is stronger. This is what God is saying through His Son. This, too, is comforting.

That Child born in a stable in Bethlehem made purification for sins (Hebrews 1:3). As great as His manifold works are, this must be the greatest.

We all are sinners and know feelings of guilt and fear. Try as we might, we cannot quit sinning. Even if we did, what about our past, and our nature that just does not love God above all else? And sin brings forth death and judgment. "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24).

Jesus came! The Scriptures have so much to say about what He did about your sins and mine. He is our Redeemer, our Advocate, God's Lamb that takes away the sin of the world; He ransomed us, etc. None of these tell the whole story by themselves. Perhaps they are summarized by the statement that "He . . . made purification for sins."

Yes, the sins of the whole world, even my sins, and yours, were dealt with by Jesus. And when sins are gone there is no judgment, no eternal death, only a glorious hope.

Unbelievable but true, Jesus made purification for our sins. This is what God is saying.

After making "purification of sins" Jesus sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3). What

## O Blessed Morn

O blessed morn, O wondrous day,  
that day when Christ was born,  
When God took flesh for all to see  
and became as one of us.

O Jesus Christ, You blessed Babe,  
who knew no sin at birth,  
And yet with us You came to live,  
we who knew no worth.

do you think He is doing there? There He, as our High Priest, is praying for us.

We must thank God for all He is, and has done for us, as well as confess our sins and seek His grace. But our prayers are often so pathetic. At times we wonder if God will hear them. But Jesus is praying for us. He is praying perfectly. He came to earth and lived as one of us. He understands us. He did perfectly for us all God's Law demands of us. Then He carried our sins on the cross. He died for us. And now He is our advocate before God. "My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not ours only, but also for

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"There will be no Christmas if we just ignore or neglect what God is saying through His Son."

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*"For to us a Child is born,  
unto us a Son is given;  
and the government will be upon  
His shoulder, and His name will  
be called 'Wonderful Counselor,  
Mighty God, Everlasting Father,  
Prince of Peace' "*

(Isaiah 9:6)

We worship You, O Jesus Child,  
we kneel before You now;  
You came to save us from our sins,  
to You we humbly bow.  
O what grace that brought You here,  
what a love so dear;  
Make our hearts Your cradle;  
Christ, be forever near.

*Lynn J. Wilson  
Valley City, N. Dak.*

those of the whole world" (I John 2:1-2). God will never turn a deaf ear to His Son's prayers for us. This is what God is saying.

Because Christmas is a "God event," all can have a blessed Christmas. It is not dependent on health or wealth, home and family, freedom or bondage. The truth that Christ has come cannot be changed. But there will be no Christmas if we just ignore or neglect what God is saying through His Son. It is strange but it is very easy to do that, even during the Christmas season. But we are not going to do that, are we?

"Dear Father in Heaven,

Thank You for sending Jesus to be my Savior. Thank You for all He has done and is doing. Thank You that He understands me, and is sympathetic. Forgive me my sins and help me that my faith will grow. Help me to have a good Christmas." Amen.

"My God! How wonderful Thou art,  
Thou everlasting Friend!  
On Thee I stay my trusting heart,  
Till faith in vision end."

*And it came  
to pass*

"And it came to pass in those days. . . ." Read Luke 2:1-15.

Three times we find the expression "and it came to pass" in the Christmas Gospel. We do well to mark the expression because Christmas speaks of something that really happened.

Christmas isn't only a mid-winter festival. That's all our forefathers' Christmas was before they came to know the Gospel. Christmas was celebrated in honor of something which occurs over and over, new each year. When the darkness of winter is deepest, there is a change and the days become longer again. That happens every year. But that which the Christmas Gospel tells of happened "in those days" when Augustus was Caesar.

Something took place in Caesar's palace. That is the first thing. It happened that an order went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled in a census. It is strange to think about that. Caesar's order was according to God's plan. God's Son was to be born in Bethlehem. Caesar carried out his decision and everyone had to obey it. But Caesar himself had to serve God's will even if he didn't realize it.

Something happened in a stable. That is the second thing. It happened that the time came when she should give birth. Mary brought forth her son, her first-born, and wrapped Him up and laid Him in a manger. It all was of such little moment and so unnoticed of mankind that there was scarcely talk of

it at all in the inn. But God's angels saw it and rejoiced. The Savior was born.

This is the greatest and most remarkable thing that has happened in the history of mankind. Yes, the writers of history haven't paid attention to it. But this was greater than all the events they have written about. God's Son from eternity came here below and was born of a woman. He became our brother.

On Bethlehem's fields the angels rejoiced and sang: "Glory to God in the highest, good will toward men."

And then something happened in hearts. That's the third thing. And it happened when the angels were taken up from the shepherds into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another: "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known to us!"

That which happened in the stable in Bethlehem doesn't need to be repeated. But that which happened in hearts, that should happen many times — also this Christmas. Then this will be a good Christmas. For that which they got to see, that was Jesus, the world's Savior.

—Translated from *Daglig Brød* (Daily Bread), Carl Fr. Wisløff, Lunde Forlag, Copyright 1981.

(Carl Fr. Wisløff was a guest lecturer at the Summer Institute of Theology at the Association Seminary last summer, discussing the theology of evangelism.)



## A Christmas far from home

Christmas vacation has always been a welcome break from school for me. My first Christmas away from home was no exception. The thought of some time off from work was pleasant but the thought of spending Christmas Eve alone in the Alaskan interior was not.

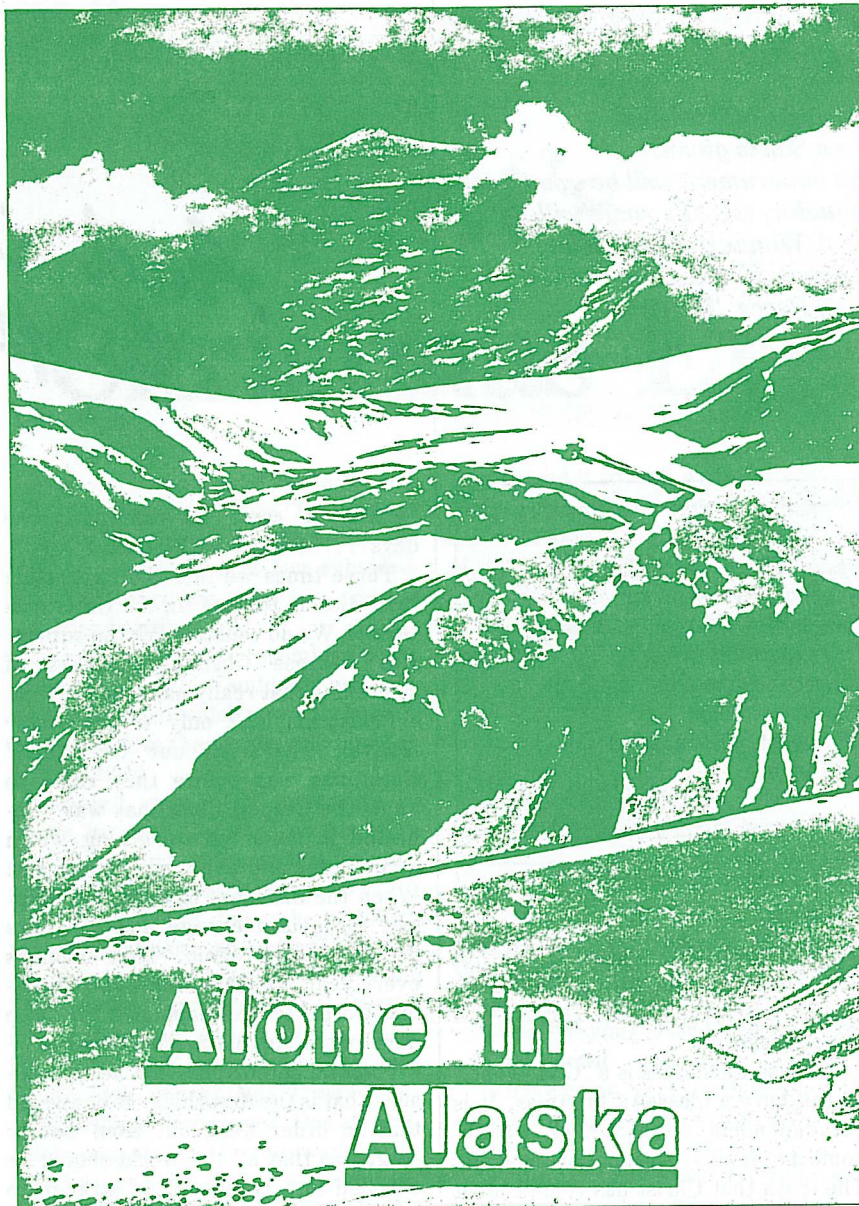
1983 was a difficult year for me. I graduated from college in December of 1982 and went to Cordova, Alaska, for a short-term mission experience. Cordova is a scenic fishing town built against one of the mountains of Prince William Sound. Lutheran Mission Societies, a small Haugean mission, has done work there for years. I learned a lot about the world as I left my small town life of 21 years to work with hardened men at the rescue mission. The drunkards needed some "tough love" and often didn't appreciate it. In May I left Alaska, exhausted, vowing never to return again.

Finding God's will for the next step in my life was a struggle. I felt the pull of seminary, a teaching career, and a lovely daughter of an Alaskan missionary. A teaching position in Alaska marvelously opened up. In spite of my decision never to return, I headed north for a job and a wife.

Before long I had "Alaska Fever." Thoughts of beautiful mountains, untouched wilderness, abundant wildlife, a Christian girl, and a promising career filled my mind. Alaska has a unique effect on people. It is a frontier that challenges men to subdue it; and I was about to try.

A series of disappointments soon began to follow that initial joy. My relationship with the young lady was the first failure. It seemed so good by occasional contact and through the mail but time together revealed that we were not a suitable couple.

The second major disappointment I faced was my job. I quickly discovered



## Alone in Alaska

that I was then ninth music teacher in 11 years at Glennallen School! The facilities were poor, the students were difficult, the program was undeveloped and teaching 12 grades of choral, instrumental and general music was exhausting.

There was no escape. I was trapped in the Alaskan interior with no car, no money, a job I did not like, and a broken heart. This was my first head-on encounter with the refining work of God. I knew I was in for a real fight with life.

I remember the conflict between the white children and the Indians. I remember the verbal attacks of parents

at conferences. I remember the careless students and the broken and abused musical instruments. Somehow I made it through that whole semester, even to the end of the Christmas programs. The strength to keep on was a miracle to me.

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"In spite of my decision never to return, I headed north for a job and a wife."

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by Thomas C.  
(Tom) Olson  
Minneapolis, Minn.



Several of my fellow teachers encouraged me to fly home for Christmas. A few warned me that if I did I would never come back. I believed they were right, therefore I decided to stay.

Staying in Alaska for the Christmas holiday was the third major trial of that year. I had hoped to go to Anchorage to see my missionary friends, but lack of transportation and my broken relationship ruled that out. The Arctic winter had also set in. That winter was mild with temperatures staying within the -10 to -30 degree range, occasionally dipping down to -50. It is not unusual to have a week or two with temperatures in the -50 to -70 degree range in Glenallen.

It was very cold for a midwesterner but the most haunting part of the Christmastime environment in the interior was the darkness. Twenty hours of it claimed the day, with a light dusk appearing over the noon hour. On clear days the sun brought a bit of cheer as it peeked over the southern mountains at mid-day.

I remember Christmas vacation in Glennallen as being cold, dark and quiet. In fact, there was no wind at all. Snow could pile up in tall columns upon fence posts and be undisturbed all winter. People withdrew to their homes and did not even stir. The stunted evergreen trees held their undisturbed load of snow and characterized the great expanse of dark and silent wilderness of our sparsely populated 22,000-square mile school district. I don't remember seeing a bird or animal stir; there seemed to be just snow and endless darkness. My closest teaching colleagues had gone to Hawaii for Christmas and I began to identify with those who were lonely.

The little Basin Bible Church in the center of our community was my source of light and joy on that lonesome Christmas. It was not anything like my home church that had brick walls, stained glass windows, a pipe organ, and pews filled with Christmas worshippers. Our little Alaskan church was a used double-wide trailer, chairs, a pulpit and not much else, yet we did have a handful of worshippers.

The congregation was a mixed bag of all sorts of Protestants. Our pastors were two laymen, a Calvinistic Baptist and a Methodist. In order to stay compatible, we never had any baptisms. As

## FOREVER CHRISTMAS

At Christmastime, mid winter's cold,  
Our hearts grow strangely warm  
And filled with love enough to share  
With the world's people everywhere,  
For Christ our Lord was born.

Past Christmastime and through the year,  
Our hearts forget the strain  
Of love and peace and joyous life  
And turn once more to selfish strife,  
Our same old lives again.

The Christ still stands without the door.  
Our hearts can hold His song,  
And Christmas live in summer's heat,  
In springtime rains and autumn sleet,  
Forever Christmas morn.

*Marlene Moline  
Lansing, Ia.*

motley as this crew may have been, they were my Christian family. Sunday worship and mid-week Bible study were the highlights of my week. On Wednesday evenings we sat in a circle to read through a book of the Bible and discuss it as we read. The Word of God gave me strength to finish my work week. The loving hospitality of many families made me realize that the church was my family wherever I went.

The best part of Christmas in Alaska was the Nativity story. The glad tidings of great joy, the Savior born in Bethlehem, Christ the Lord, was proclaimed. The Gospel had the same redeeming power in the cold, dark Alaskan interior as it did in my home church. I found out that "Joy to the World" can be sung without fancy instruments, yet with just as intense a meaning.

On Christmas Eve I opened the gifts my family had sent by mail. I don't remember what I ate for supper that night but I know it was not the lutefisk,

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"As motley as this crew  
may have been,  
they were my  
Christian family."

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lefse and spareribs I was used to. Thankfully, the satellite telephone system allowed me to hear the voices of my family in Wisconsin that evening.

God refreshed me that Christmas vacation in December of 1983. He gave me the strength and grace to finish teaching that school year with dignity and success.

Time has a way of making the memories more pleasant. The cold, darkness and loneliness don't seem as bad as they were at the time. In fact, there is something inside of me that longs for the Alaskan interior. The vast wilderness, the fresh biting air, the spectacular northern lights, the simple little church and the quiet melancholy Christmas remain in my mind as fond memories. Even the most difficult student I had, a boy named James, seems like a friend in my memory of him.

That Christmas in Alaska reminds me that loneliness and personal difficulties can never rob the Christian of the true meaning and joy of Christmas. "For unto you has been born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." I find great comfort in the fact that these words which helped me through that lonely Christmas in the Alaskan interior, give lonely people everywhere the strength and reason to keep living.



## A greeting from our president

Greetings to each of the readers of *The Lutheran Ambassador* in the blessed name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

"And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

The greatest event in the history of mankind was the birth of Jesus, our Savior. It was an event planned by God before the foundation of the world. Paul tells us, in Ephesians, that God "hath chosen us in Him (Jesus) before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). This is the event that God had reference to as He promised a Savior when our first parents had fallen into sin in the Garden. "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). The birth of Jesus was the event that fulfilled all the promises God had given to His people under the Old Testament covenant relationship. "But when the fulness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:4,5).

It was a Savior that was needed to

bridge the gap between a sinless, holy God, and a sinful, lost humanity. "You shall call His name Jesus."

So Mary "brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn" (Lk. 2:7).

"And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel before He was conceived in the womb" (Lk. 2:21).

We marvel at the unobtrusiveness of this, the greatest event to take place in the history of mankind. God's Son, the Lord of Glory and Creator of the ends of the earth, came into our world as a little babe. He was to touch and transform the lives of millions. But there was no array of welcoming dignitaries. There was no band or royal salute. Only some shepherds who came to view the great event.

"How silently, how silently  
The wondrous gift is giv'n!"

But there was one thing that God took special care with. That was regarding the name that was to be given to His Son. He was to be called "Jesus." God made that very clear.

The name Jesus means Savior. Man's need was for a Savior. The gift of God's Son to the world was His special way of providing salvation for the world. Jesus is God's way for sinners to be

# "Thou shalt call His name Jesus"

saved. There is no other way. Think about it. If there had been some other way, Jesus would not needed to have come, to suffer and die to pay the penalty for our sin.

The Bible says, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Jesus Himself declared: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but my Me" (Jn. 14:6).

God provided the way for us to come to Him. It is the complete, perfect way in a Savior, Jesus.

How meaningful Christmas can be for each of us as we hear again the Christmas Gospel and sing the beautiful Christmas carols that declare the birth of a Savior. How precious that name becomes for us. Like Peter of old we also say, "Unto you therefore which believe He is precious" (I Pet. 2:7).

"Love caused His incarnation,

Love brought Him down to me;

Your thirst for my salvation

procured my liberty.

O love beyond all telling

That led You to embrace,

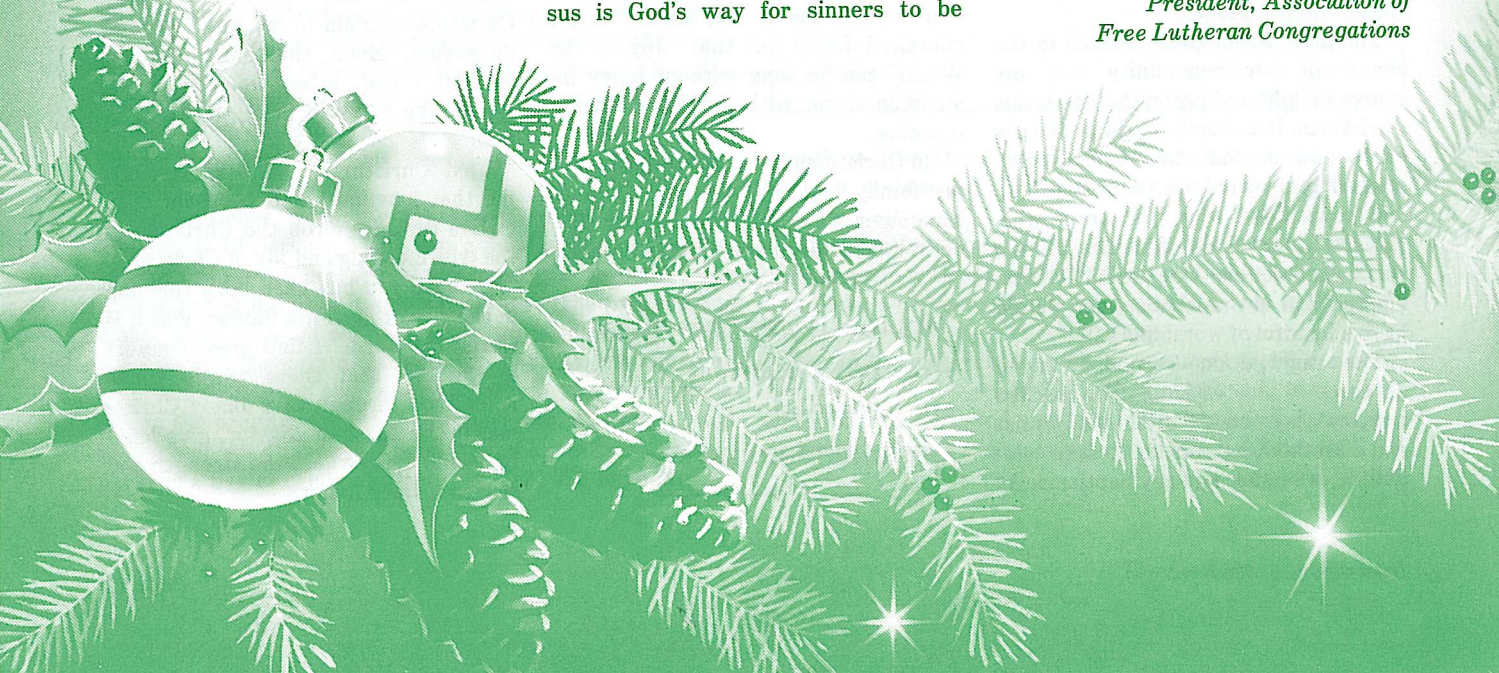
In love all love excelling,

Our lost and fallen race."

— Paul Gerhardt

Thank You, Jesus, for coming to be my Savior. I love You.

Pastor Richard Snipstead  
President, Association of  
Free Lutheran Congregations





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# editorials

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## GOOD NEWS TONIGHT

In our home we first got a radio on Nov. 24, 1937. That's 50 years ago and we were among the last to get that marvelous invention which opened up a whole new world of information and entertainment for us.

In older days we listened to radio for a lot of our news. In addition to the newscasters who merely read the news stories there were commentators who put their own interpretation on current events. Some names which come to mind are H.V. Kaltenborn, Baukhage ("Baukhage talking"), Fulton Lewis, Jr., and Gabriel Heatter. The last named, during World War II, used to say in each of his broadcasts, "There's good news tonight." Overall, the news maybe wasn't very good for the day, but he always included some positive news and accented it. And there's a place for that sort of thing.

During the Second World War there was a need for good news. We forget sometimes how bad things were. Many young men were away at war; some didn't come back and some of the homes in the Association congregations had a gold star hanging in a window. The Allies won some battles and lost others. Back home, we did without some things. We didn't suffer, but life wasn't wholly normal either. In that milieu, any good news that Gabriel Heatter or some other newsman could pass on was welcome.

On the first Christmas night there was good news. That's what the angel called it, "good news of a great joy." Welcome as any optimistic tiding during war was, the news from heaven that first Christmas night was much greater. And it is repeated to us each year. Jesus doesn't come again and again, but the story of it bears reiteration, the message of incarnation. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). There's good news tonight! today!

The first aspect of the good news is that *God loves us*. Other religions don't have the concept of a God who loves the way that the Christian's God does. We don't get that idea, a God who loves, from the Muslim religion and its currently best known representative, the Ayatollah Khomeini, do we? No! Nor do we find it very fully developed in the religion of Judaism, whose followers supposedly look to the same God as we do. There is no revelation through Jesus the Messiah.

Christmas tells us God is a God of love. He works things out for the accomplishment of His purposes. Thus He caused a Roman emperor to do His bidding by ordering a census to be taken, which brought Joseph and his wife, great with child, to Bethlehem, from where, it had been prophesied, "one who is to be ruler in Israel," should come forth (Micah 5:2). The crush of people in Joseph's ancestral city deprived the tired couple of respectable lodging. They had to take refuge in a stable, in God's plan, to demonstrate the poverty of the One soon to be born.

In His love God comes to mankind. He is not some guru to whom we must laboriously climb, if we could, in order to

hear some noble word. Rather, our God reaches down to us. "God is love."

Second, there is good news tonight that *there is a Savior*. Some people live unaware of love at all. That sounds strange to those of us who have always been aware of it, or have for a long time. Some people haven't known love in their lives. This makes it very hard; they don't know how to respond to overtures of love from fellow human beings, and not from God.

Some folks don't know there's a way out, that God sent a Savior. It seems strange to say that about people in the U.S. Don't they hear the carols: "Christ the Savior is born," "Joy to the world, the Lord is come?" In our busy Christmases the truth can be lost. Tired store clerks, tired shoppers and ubiquitous Santa Clauses, well, they can cause the real meaning of Christmas to get hidden.

There's good news, a Savior is born. When a person really believes Jesus came for his sake, that he needs a Savior, *this* Savior, then Christmas becomes tremendously meaningful. The fact of the cross enters in also. This Jesus who was "born in the likeness of men" "became obedient unto death, even death on a cross." We must believe this, believe in Him. The angel called Him "Savior." We need saving. He is the Savior. That's good news.

Lastly, there's good news *for all people*. Isn't that a wonderful part of the whole event? Think of it, a group of shepherds watching their flocks near a small Judean town receiving an announcement like that: "I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people."

This One is for all people, not just the Jews, but all people. He is not just for the Germanic or Finnish peoples, but all people. That's why it is Christmas everywhere today. Not all people believe in Jesus or accept Him, but the Savior is here. No one has sinned so much or gone so far but what he can be saved. We think of all the things that differentiate people: degrees of education, amount of wealth, whatever. The joy is for all.

We are included in the "all the people." It is for us to believe in the Savior personally. May each *Ambassador* reader do that. And then there is the challenge to carry the good news so that all may hear. *The message must get out*. People have the right to hear.

"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."

## CHRISTMAS REMINISCENCES

To reminisce: to remember, to recollect.

I mentioned above the date we got a radio in our home. It was a table model using dry and wet cell batteries. We had a phonograph before that, a couple years before, and we called it the "Victrola." It had belonged to my maternal grandparents and Mother got it for our family when the different



## EDITORIALS . . .

possessions were divided. The Victrola and many records were shipped from Minnesota up to our home in Saskatchewan and the day it arrived was a glorious day, too, and we children played and replayed those 78 r.p.m. records over and over, winding up the machine as needed. There were marches, hymns, comedy dialogues and monologues, etc. But I don't recall that there were any Christmas carols among the records. That remained for the coming of our radio.

But I am to write about Christmas. Memory goes back to the small towns of my boyhood. The local merchants always got some special things for Christmas. Hardware stores drug stores and general stores brought in some gift items for children, such as toys, books and games. The hardware stores especially were veritable wonderlands with their displays. Today I'm sure what they had to offer would seem shameful in quantity and variety compared to what is available today, but then it seemed marvelous to us who thought we might be fortunate to get one or two things from the selection offered. General stores might have some small toys and books, too, as well as clothing items which didn't excite us as much, but which were recognized as being very worthwhile presents also.

The grocery stores had the air of Christmas about them, too. This was the result of the supply of nuts and candies which had been laid in and if one lived in a Scandinavian community, of lutefisk soaking in a barrel or tub. Not to be forgotten are the apples and oranges.

Small-town merchants of my childhood had one advantage over those of today. They could expect that many of the people would be shopping at home for the extra Christmas things. People didn't go off as easily to larger centers, although, of course, there was considerable mail order buying done for clothing and some other things.

The spiritual dimension of Christmas was dependent largely on the home and church, to be sure, although the public schools used some of the carols in their programs. In a Christian home, such as ours was, we were always certain what the season was about. And when Christmas Eve came there was the reading of Luke's Christmas Story and prayer. Christmas Eve closed with carols in both English and Norwegian, in our case, around the tree. The Christmas Day service was one of the very special services of the whole year. Today it has fallen into disfavor and disuse although a Christmas Eve service, nice as it is, really can't replace it. And between Christmas and New Year's we children would put on a program for our parents and it was definitely Christian in nature.

The churches were the other focal point of the real meaning of Christmas. There was a Sunday School program in which to participate. A real message came through these efforts and still does in today's programs. The programs in older days were often held after Christmas Day. That seemed so appropriate. Nowadays they are usually held before, maybe even two weeks before. It was common to attend the programs of other churches, too, and much good to be received. Of course, there was an apple to be gotten, perhaps a bag of candy and nuts, as well. We have already

## Christmas Covenant

The promise of the Savior came  
when man had fallen low;  
God said Eve's seed would take a bruise —  
Satan, a deadly blow.

God spoke again to patriarchs  
the promise of the seed.  
He sealed the promise with an oath —  
He could not break the creed.

'He shall be born in Bethlehem,'  
the prophet did proclaim,  
'The Counselor, the Prince of Peace,  
the Mighty God, His name.'

'And this will be a sign for you,'  
angel unto shepherds said;  
'You'll find the Babe in swaddling clothes,  
a manger for a bed.'

God spoke the promise years ago —  
His voice the people heard;  
'But how,' some ask, 'does God speak now?'  
'Our hearts are never stirred.'

'Mother Mary, manger birth,  
angel chorus, shepherds' mirth;  
Actors, props and scenes we know —  
but where's Christ now? What's it worth?'

Now if we seek to hear God speak  
the promise of all ages,  
We need not voices, visions, dreams;  
we read the Bible's pages.

God's Word declares the greatest truth —  
that God has dwelt with men —  
God in the flesh, died and risen,  
ascended into heaven.

The promise of the Savior, Christ,  
came true on Christmas morn;  
The promise echoes yet today,  
'Trust Christ and be reborn!'

*Reuben Unseth  
Hancock, Mich.*

mentioned the Christmas Day service and there the pastors seemed to take new heart as they faced an overflowing church.

The Christmases of today are the ones our children will look back on with special fondness, as I have done on mine. Let us be sure, as we have the power, to help make those memories rich ones, even as ours are.

Now *The Lutheran Ambassador* extends to all our readers, wherever you are in the U.S., Canada, and other parts of the world, a blessed and joyous Christmas. A Savior has come. He is living and working today. Merry Christmas!

— *Raynard Huglen*



When the first snowflakes fell, we children figured it wouldn't be long until Christmas. When the snow fell early, we'd wait long and impatiently, but much had to be done before Julaften (Christmas Eve) arrived.

The butchering of beef and hogs had to be done for the preparation of the kinds of meat Mama fixed: the special kind of beef which she brined and dried for the *spekekjød* (dried beef), to the head cheeses, pickled pigs' feet, and blood sausage made with suet, which when prepared was fried in rich cream. And she took special care that Papa cut out the best spareribs for Christmas Eve. It was a busy time and one I especially didn't care for, for all the raw meat that had to be prepared to me was not especially appealing.

Everything had to be done, housecleaning from attic to cellar. Much wood was unpainted and that had to be scrubbed white.

Then came the baking: *flatbrød* (flatbread), *lefse*, *fattigmandsbakkels*, large white sugar and molasses cookies. Nothing was decorated or fancy, but simply very good. Mama baked a delicious Christmas bread with raisins and cardamon. Everything had to be done in advance of Christmas because of *Julehelgen* (Christmas holidays) we were not to bake and fuss. Time was then spent in going to church Christmas Day and visiting neighbors during the week.

I can see, in memory, my father with a cup of coffee enjoying *bakkels* (fattigmand), saying, "Ja, Anna, vi har meget a takke Gud for" (Yes, Anna, we have much to thank God for — and he added, "It's been a good year.")

Finally Christmas Eve day arrived. Animals were given much straw for their beds and a special treat of grain. Papa's horses were treated to sugar lumps. The birds had wheat bundles hung up around the yard. Even the dog and cats were given strips of liver.

Mama and my sister prepared supper. My oldest sister lived across the road and she and her husband with their children came for the evening meal of lutefisk and spareribs, lefse, flatbrød and Christmas bread, plus the potatoes, gravy, pickles and relishes. We did not use pie for the dessert; we had wild strawberry sauce and cookies.

One of the traditions I remember was that the Christmas Eve table was

## Christmas Memories

by Alice C. Lendobeja  
Goodridge, Minn.



never cleared off after supper. The food was left so no hungry stranger would go without food. My mother didn't like the congealed grease the next morning, but that tradition never changed, and I always wondered if anyone would like cold lutefisk.

The supper was enjoyed by everyone except the younger children who were anxiously waiting to go down to my brother-in-law's for the tree and a special tree it was, a pretty spruce with wax candles. They were lit and we joined hands and went around the tree singing "Stille Nat, Hellige Nat" and "Jeg er saa glad hver julekveld."

My brother-in-law gave out the presents. No matter how busy Mama had been before Christmas, there were rag dolls for my two nieces and me. Clothes had been made so that we could dress and undress our special dolls. The button holes were made by hand and wonderfully done.

One Christmas Eve as we walked home under the stars, a beautifully still holy night, my father said, "Tonight we visit the stable." He lit a lantern and we went into the barn where the animals were sleeping. The cats roused themselves and the horses nickered. It was warm in the barn from the breath of the animals. "This, Alice, is the kind

of stable where God's Son was born. He came from beautiful mansions on high to a lowly place on earth."

I felt the wonder grow within me, and I think my dreams that night were filled with the music of heavenly choirs. That visit to the stable became a beautiful memory because the following fall my father had a paralyzing stroke so he couldn't go to the barn any more.

When I married and had children, sister Pearl would have us come down for supper and the tree. We had a tree at home also and Luke's Christmas chapter was always read and the youngest was responsible for the reading.

One Christmas Eve, my husband, my daughter and I went to the church to turn on the furnace. The church was so quiet and still awaiting the beautiful Christmas morning when the church would be full of worshipping people singing:

"Hark! The herald angels sing,  
'Glory to the newborn King;  
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled.'"

Beautiful memories have made Christmas such a wondrous day for my family and me, an everlasting reminder of God's great Gift.





# Berit's Christmas Eve

by Pastor S. Anker-Goli

It was Christmas Eve. The stormy weather which had raged wildly the last three days had at last subsided. Here and there the snow was piled in big, broad drifts.

The wide expanse resembled a tumultuous sea, which suddenly had been made rigid, and which now only lay and bathed itself in the dazzling and beautiful moonlight.

Forward among the snowdrifts he works his way, forward on his large snowshoes, and on his back is lashed a pack. He is a Finnmark missionary.

It is Berit's little dugout he is looking for and that isn't an easy task. Yes, over there was a hillock which looked like a snowed-under dugout. He turned in that direction. At last he was there. He felt his way with his staff. Was it Berit's little shack? No, it was likely only a snowed-under rock, this also.

It was probably true anyway, as the storekeeper said, that it would be impossible to find that little dugout after such a terrible snowstorm.

It was already late in the evening, but he had to find her. It was Christmas Eve. He stopped and gazed into the heavens. One and another fleck of cloud drifted by, otherwise the sky was like a single great sea of sparkling diamonds. Once and again the northern lights moved over it with its ghostlike glimmering, but disappeared again as quickly as it had come.

A silent prayer was sent up to the One who knows us all, Who sees the smallest creeping thing and guides the stars' and planets' course through the heavens. He could also show the way to the little Lapp dugout he was searching for.

And, sure enough, here it was. He

recognized it so well with his staff. He dug away the snow with a little spade he had along. The little door in to the dugout stood ajar, so the snow had drifted in upon Berit's dirt floor. It was dark and cold inside. Over in one corner, Berit lay huddled on the bed.

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"It was already late  
in the evening,  
but he had to find her."

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"Borris, Borris,"\* the missionary greeted her. Her back was so crooked that she had to roll backwards in order to see the visitor who had come.

"Who are you?" Her voice was hard and indifferent.

"I have come to make things a little cozy for you. It's Christmas Eve, you know."

"Is it Christmas Eve? Her voice was uncertain and trembling. She looked over at the hearth which was cold and had burned out long ago. She hadn't had any matches to start any new fire the past two days. The last wax candle had also been used up.

The missionary quickly cleared away the snow which had forced its way through the door opening, closed the door, and built a fire on the hearth with the dry peat which Berit had. He took out everything he had in his pack and soon had the coffee pot going. The wax candles which were in the pack were lit and cast a cozy gleam of light about them.

Berit sat with a steaming cup of coffee and gazed unseeingly before her. She broke off a piece of sweet cake which was in her lap and put it slowly



in her mouth. Two big tears trickled down over the weatherbeaten and wrinkled cheeks. It was good to cry, especially when it was only out of joy that one cried.

"Oh, you blessed God, who hasn't forgotten me." She picked and pulled at the sweet cake in her lap with her old gnarled and work-worn hand.

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"Two big tears  
trickled down over the  
weatherbeaten and  
wrinkled cheeks."

---

After the evening meal Berit lay upon the bed... Never had there been such a glorious Christmas Eve as tonight. It was so warm and light inside that the ice on the small crooked window began to melt so that little streamlets of water ran down over the frame.

After the missionary had read the Christmas Story and sung some of the old Christmas songs, Berit fell asleep with a happy smile at the corners of her mouth.

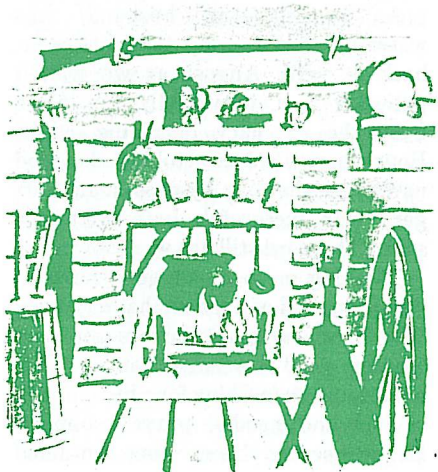
Quietly he let himself out and closed the door after him.

The Big Dipper lay glistening and shining in the clear and cold-blue night sky, as he made his way home.

And so there was Christmas at Berit's anyway.

—Translated from Norwegian

\*The word "Borris" is a mystery to the translator. Perhaps the missionary was announcing his own name as he entered. Anyone with a different explanation may contact the Editor.



## LIGHT

Shine on tonight,  
Bright Christmas light!  
Dearest Jesus, Friend —  
Hope of the world,  
Light of the world,  
Come to set us free —  
Free from stumbling,  
groping, sighing,  
Free from death and pain  
and crying —  
Light my path this Christmastide.  
But let me bear my candle, too,  
Reaching, longingly now for you.



*Susan M. Nordvall  
Roseau, Minn.*

## CHRISTMAS EVE

O, lovely Christmas star,  
Atop a stately tree:  
Now brightly you shine  
On delicate ornaments, and on me.  
You twinkle and sparkle up there  
In a rainbow of many hues,  
To remind us of that night  
When angels spread the good news:  
A Child is born to us tonight.  
Holy Babe, so innocent and pure,  
You came to earth to free us —  
From sin and death; You are the only cure.  
We gather together this evening  
To celebrate Your holy birth.  
Praise God that He sent You here,  
"King of kings," "Prince of Peace," to earth.  
Forgive us, Father, please,  
That we cannot keep all year  
This feeling of joy and brotherly love  
For Your children, whether far or near.  
Thank You, Father for Your infinite  
Patience and love.

*Helen Strom  
Ishpeming, Mich.*



# AT THE MANGER

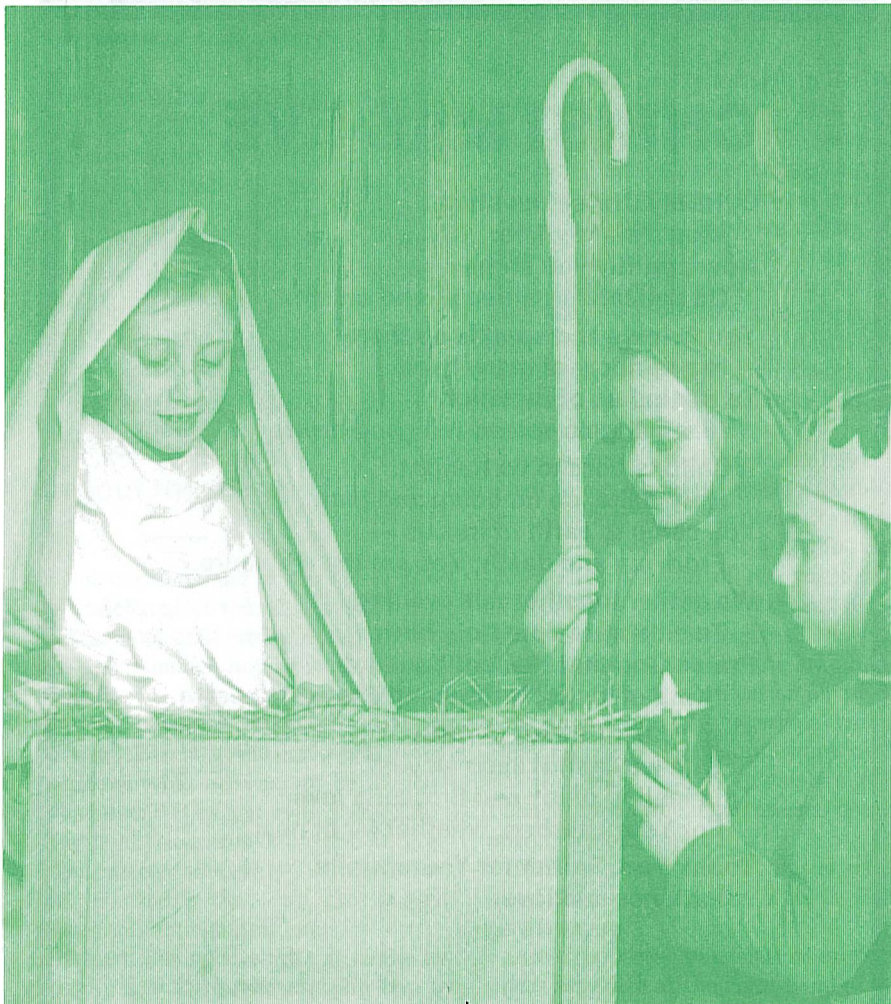
On that wonderful night  
In the long, long ago  
While the manger was bathed  
In the star's gentle glow,  
Two little cherubs kept watch by His bed.  
They looked at the Baby,  
And one softly said,  
"How sweetly He slumbers,  
The dear little Lad;  
Just being here with Him  
Makes me feel good and glad!  
And how tiny His fingers!  
So fragile and small —  
And yet they must carry  
The sins of men all.  
His feet are so *little*,

It hurts me to know  
The long weary miles  
Those poor feet must go."  
"I know," said the other  
"It makes me sad, too,  
To think of the things  
This dear Baby must do,  
But God sent Him down  
From His home up above  
To show men on earth  
How great is His love.  
For He'll save sinful man  
When He has grown tall,  
So you see this dear Baby  
Is God's gift to all!"

*Ruth Moe Kvernstoen  
Fergus Falls, Minn.*

a page for children

## THE GOOD NEWS



*by Mrs. Arnold (Lydia) McCarlson  
Langford, S. Dak.*

The beautiful, highly colored autumn leaves were drifting down like snowflakes. Silently they landed on the ground and joined the ever growing pile underneath the trees.

I sat quietly admiring the beauty of the fall and the stillness of the hour. But not for very long because I could see and hear the grandchildren returning from the dock where they had been fishing.

"Any luck?" I called out. "Good news," Andy answered. "I caught a four-pound northern (pike) but the bad news is I lost a walleye." The cheerful conversation continued while they cleaned the fish.

As Grandpa (my husband) was watching near by, my thoughts went back to early August as we waited patiently and prayerfully for news from the coronary operating room. Hours later the doctor told us the good news that the four by-pass heart surgery was successful. Later Grandpa said, "The Lord still has work for me."

Thinking more about good news, I was reminded of a letter that day from Billy Graham headquarters. It said that the good news was that Mr. Graham would be in China for a big planned revival and needed prayer support. But an insert in the envelope contained





# Holiday Joy

**Merry Christmas, everywhere!  
Joy is riding on the air!  
Snowflakes crunch beneath our feet;  
Joyous seasons when we meet,  
With friends!**

*Fern Wittmayer  
Stanley, N. Dak.*

**“Another piece of good news is that we have a ‘hotline’ to God  
and it doesn’t cost us a dime.”**

the bad news that Mr. Graham had suffered a fall in Japan on his way to China that revived an old injury making it impossible for him to continue on his way to China.

A layman, also a Gideon leader, often visited with the children in hospital rooms. He would bring candy for the children and joyfully announce, “I have good news for you.” The children listened attentively and many learned of the love of Jesus through him.

“What will you do with the Good News that has been heard at these special meetings?” Thus asked Pastor Tom Eggum, youth evangelist and Bible smuggler for the underground church, as we sat in the pews last night. His answer was that he hoped and prayed the Good News that he had been preaching would reach out to someone to answer the missionary call or even just to tell others in the neighborhood. “Don’t keep it back but spread it around that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior,” he said.

Missionaries are willing and dedicated to tell the Good News to others in all parts of the world. In Romans 10:14, 15, 17 (KJV), we read: “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?”

And how shall they hear without a preacher? . . . And how shall they preach, except they be sent? . . . Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”

Another piece of good news is that we have a “hotline” to God and it doesn’t cost us a dime. Prayer is the most important spiritual expression of a Christian. We can pray any time and in any place. We need to ask God’s guidance for our daily walk and future plans.

The bad news is that the hotline is often misused by neglect, unbelief, sarcasm and bad language. The devil is always trying to tempt us and lead us astray.

As the Christmas season approaches again, we think of the birth of Jesus, our Savior, as the Good News. But Christmas is saddened by daily news of the Persian Gulf, politics, murders, fires, and all the immorality of the world.

Mary was fully unaware when the angel came unto her with the good news that she was highly favored among women (Luke 1:28). She became afraid, as we see in Luke 1:30-31, “And angel said unto her, ‘Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy

womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus.’”

She accepted the good news and was honored among all women as the mother of Jesus. There in a stable in Bethlehem on Christmas Eve, the Baby Jesus was born. Soon the angel came to bring the Good News!

“And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them . . . and the angel said unto them, ‘Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord’ (Luke 2:8-10).

After the shepherds had visited the Baby Jesus, they hastened to tell others about the Good News.

Perhaps in contrast, the bad news was that Mary, Joseph and Baby Jesus had to flee from Bethlehem a few days later into Egypt because of King Herod.

During this Christmas season let us all proclaim the Good News — Jesus is mine! He is there for all of us if we invite Him into our hearts. Let us join in singing the old favorite, “Go Tell It on the Mountain that Jesus Christ is Born.”



# Hark The Herald Angles Sing

host praising God, and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.'" (Luke 2:13-14).

1855 by a church organist named William Cummings, Doctor of Music. Since then the two have been inseparable, although the tune has also been used elsewhere. Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy wrote a large piece called “Festegesang” in celebration of the art of printing. This tune is a chorus from that larger work. Mendelssohn died just seven years prior (age 36) to the match-up of his music and Wesley’s words, but had he lived to see it, he would have been astonished, for in reference to this same chorus he wrote, “I am sure this piece will be liked very much by singers and listeners, but it will never fit for sacred words.”

For Charles Wesley, see #10.  
\*\*\*\*\*

“Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” had been bounced around with various tunes for 116 years before being matched with MENDELSSOHN in

*“But when the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons”*

“For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

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# *O Come, Let Us Worship Him*

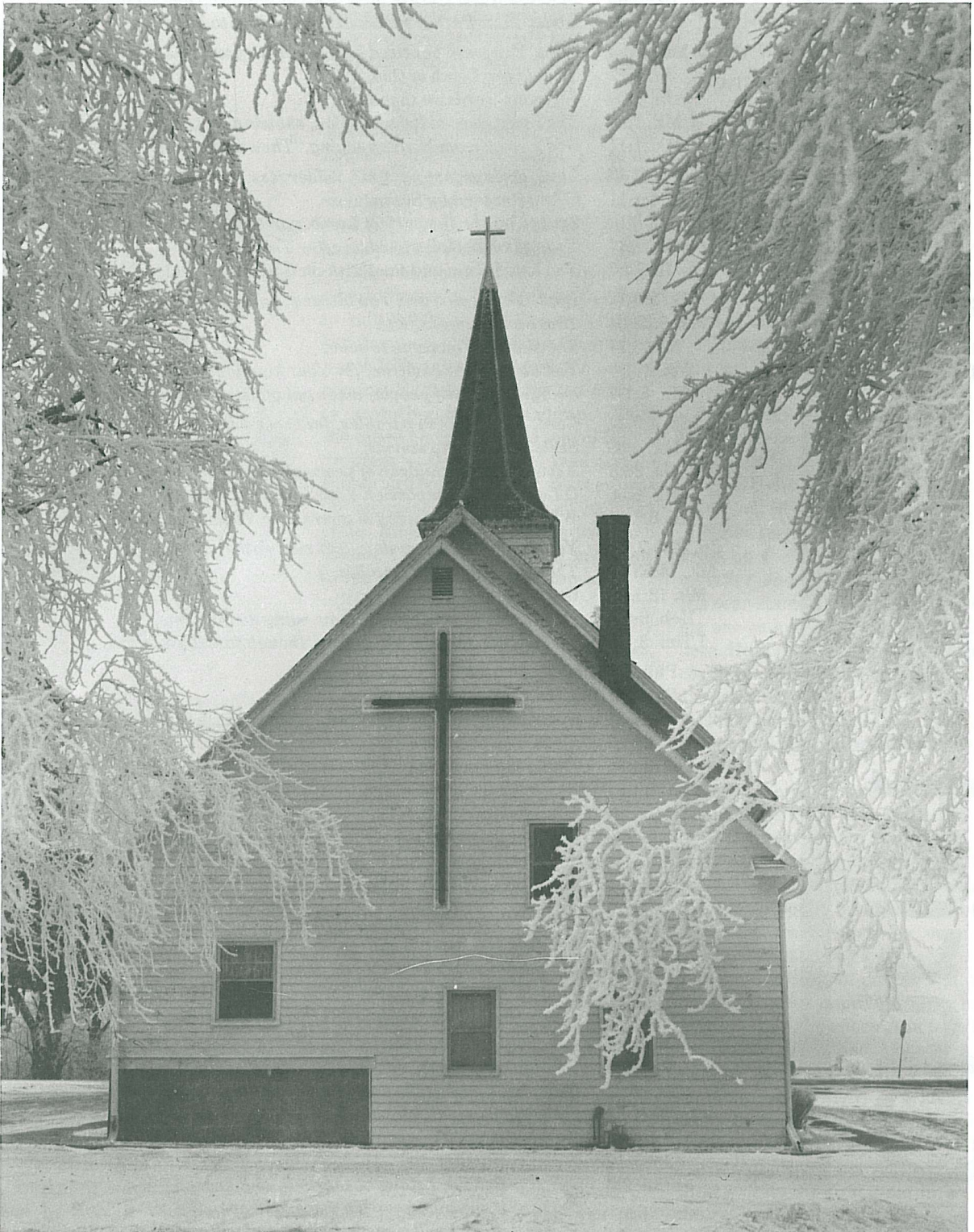


Photo by Roger C. Huebner, D.D.S.



# Christmas Prayer

Lk. 2:7      *Dear Lord, on that eve so many years ago,*  
 Lk. 2:7      *A manger was Your bed,*  
 Lk. 2:7      *As in lowly birth You came to earth to grow*  
 Lk. 2:52      *In wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man,*  
 Lk. 2:49      *About Your Father's business, according to His plan.*  
 Mk. 1:2-3      *Lord, You were baptized by John, who prepared Your way:*  
 Jn. 1:29      *'Behold the Lamb of God,'*  
 Jn. 1:29      *Were his words on that day.*  
 Mk. 1:10      *The Spirit descended upon You, showing You are the One,*  
 Mk. 1:11      *God's voice from Heaven saying, 'Thou art my beloved Son. . .'*  
 Mk. 1:12-13      *Lord, 40 days fasting in the wilderness, You were found without sin*  
 Matt. 4:1-11      *When tempted by Satan.*  
 I Pet. 1:18-19      *Truly You are the perfect Lamb, come to cleanse us within.*  
 Mk. 1:17      *You called disciples to come after You;*  
 Jn. 14:6      *You loved them and taught them God's way and truth.*  
 Mk. 2:5-12      *Lord, You healed and You blessed; most importantly, forgave*  
 Mk. 5:25-34      *Those who came in faith —*  
 Mk. 2:17      *The sinners You came to save.*  
 Mk. 10:14      *You blessed the children, for Your kingdom is of such.*  
 Mk. 8:1-9      *Fed thousands of people, when out of little You made much.*  
 Mk. 4:9-12      *Lord, You spoke in parables, for those who have ears to hear,*  
 Mk. 4:39      *Stilled the raging storms,*  
 Is. 26:3      *Assuring Your children of peace when to You they are near.*  
 Mk. 6:56      *O Lord, what compassion Your words and miracles showed!*  
 Jn. 8:2-11      *What love! What mercy in your grace You bestowed!*  
 Jn. 19:6-7, 15      *Yet Pharisees and scribes, and many others, too,*  
 Mk. 14:53-65      *Though witnessing Your life,*  
 Mk. 12:1-12      *Coldly rejected You.*  
 Heb. 2:3-4      *And, Lord, in time, today, how many do the same,*  
 I Tim. 2:4-5      *Shunning Your love and mercy, though for all You came.*  
 Phil. 2:8      *You humbled Yourself unto death,*  
 Phil. 2:8      *Even the death of the cross,*  
 Lk. 23:34      *Speaking words of forgiveness as You breathed Your last breaths.*  
 Lk. 19:10      *Truly You came to seek and to save the lost,*  
 Mk. 14:36      *Doing the Father's will, You paid the cost.*  
 Mk. 15:34      *Lord, separated from the Father, You died in sinners' place,*  
 Heb. 9:28      *Bore the sins of many*  
 Rom. 5:1-2      *Who through receiving You, are redeemed by God's grace.*  
 Acts 1:3      *You were raised to life, later to ascend*  
 Heb. 9:28      *To the Father's right hand until You shall come again.*  
 I Jn. 5:11-13      *Lord, I thank You that now I know*  
 Rom. 5:9      *I'm saved by Your blood,*  
 Is. 1:18      *My scarlet sins washed white as snow.*  
 I Jn. 4:19      *I love You, Lord, and praise You and need You every day;*  
 Phil. 4:7      *I pray that others will know the peace of their sins washed away.*  
 Jn. 14:6      *Lord, only You can change the lives of people hurting so;*  
 Ps. 38:8      *The broken emptiness*  
 Ps. 46:4,      *They have within can be exchanged for a peaceful flow*  
 Jn. 7:37-38      *Of living water to quench all their thirst,*  
 Jn. 4:14      *If only each will receive You as his Savior first.*  
 Jn. 1:12      *Behold, I stand at the door, and knock:*  
 Col. 2:6      *if any man hear My voice, and open the*  
                     *door, I will come in to him, and will sup*  
                     *with him, and he with me*

Revelation 3:20

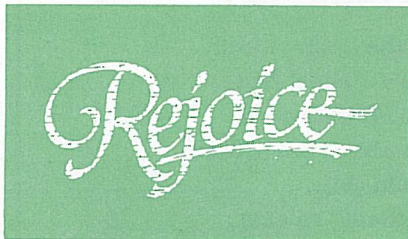
Mrs. Toby (Donna) Knutson  
Minot, N. Dak.



## Remembering Dad

I shall miss him at Christmas  
With emotions at high tide;  
I shall miss him even tho'  
My whole family's by my side.  
I shall miss his old, mischievous grin  
As bow and paper hide  
The gift we chose for him each year,  
And for it's price he'd chide.  
My mother, bless her heart, will be  
Alone this Christmas time  
For the first in many, many years,  
Since the day their lives entwined.  
One day we'll be together  
In another time and place, —  
When our life on earth has ended,  
And we see the Savior's face.

*Fern Wittmayer  
Stanley, N. Dak.*



### NEXT TIME

Look for our regular features in the next issue of the *Ambassador* coming out on Dec. 29.

Two special *Ambassador* issues are coming in early 1988. They are:

January 26—Presenting the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations.

February 9—25th anniversary of *The Lutheran Ambassador*. (There will be many reprints of articles from previous issues.)

Watch for these special issues.

## Personalities

**Rev. Peter Franz**, who had served Bethel Lutheran Church, Minot, N. Dak., and Faith Lutheran Church, Burlington, since 1982, resigned in order to accept the call to serve Word of Life Lutheran Church, Mankato, Minn., and Hosanna Lutheran Church, St. James. He began his work there in September. He and his family live at 1628 Pleasantview Drive, P.O.Box D, North Mankato, Minn. 56001.

# CHRISTMAS, 1987

It's Christmas, 1987

I know I'm saved and bound for heav'n.

I thank the Father up above  
for sending us His gift of love . . .  
His only Child, a priceless Son.

Through Him the vict'ry has been won.

A spotless Infant . . . perfect form.  
Messiah in a stable born.

Angelic choirs announced that night  
God's gift was here! And by  
starlight the shepherds came and  
knelt to pray . . .

to worship Him. And now, today  
we hear mixed messages ring out.

"Come bring surprises, presents!  
Flout extravagant and costly  
gifts."

Combative tensions can cause rifts,  
as we decide what we most want  
to give. Perhaps fine foods  
in restaurants?

A book? A VCR or toy?

Something for every girl and boy.

Yet there are people who need  
more than what we can find  
in a store.

They need to learn why Christmas  
comes and why its sunrise  
changes sums.

We all have sinned and fall far short.

The Eden dwellers did abort  
the Father's dream for  
perfect life.

Thus sin came through first man  
and wife.

And 'cause all sin we need a death.

In Romans 6 and 23 we read,  
"The wages of sin is death,  
but the free gift of God is  
eternal life in  
Christ Jesus."

So do you have a death to pay  
for those sins you do every day?

If not, you'll never be made clean  
or wear a white robe with  
no seams.

So, ask the Father for His Son  
and with me praise Him,  
for He's won

with many calm and thoughtful  
stokes  
salvation for us needy folks.

We praise You, Lord, for gifting us  
with Jesus. May the Christmas  
fuss include times of  
deep gratitude . . .

rereading the Gospel stories old . . .  
then, lifting hearts in prayers  
quite bold.

Let's dedicate ourselves anew  
to love and serve Emmanuel.

God's with us now, so all is well.

Amen.

*Dale M. Stone  
Maple Grove, Minn.*

## 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.

### MICHIGAN

Escanaba

**Dawn M. Spaulding**, 26, Aug. 29,  
Escanaba.

### NORTH DAKOTA

Hampden

**Christian Oswood, Sr.**, 94, Nov. 13,  
burial in Tacoma, Wash. (Mr. Oswood

was the father of Pastor Christian  
Oswood, Hampden.)

Grand Forks

**Mrs. Tillie Hettervig**, 83, Nov. 20,  
Ny Stavanger, Buxton, N. Dak.

### MINNESOTA

Badger

**Hillard Kjersten**, 73, Nov. 18,  
Oiland, Greenbush, Minn. (Mr. Kjer-  
sten was an uncle of Rev. Richard  
Anderson, Lakeville, Minn.)

Holt

**Melvin Sorter**, 83, Nov. 21, Em-  
manuel.



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**THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR**  
3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.  
Minneapolis, Minn. 55441

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Second-class

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# On the Morning of Christ's Nativity

**This is the month, and this the happy morn,  
Wherein the Son of Heaven's eternal King,  
Of wedded Maid and Virgin Mother born,  
Our great redemption from above did bring:  
For so the holy sages once did sing,  
That He our deadly forfeit should release,  
And with His Father work us a perpetual peace.**

**That glorious form, that light unsufferable,  
And that far-beaming blaze of majesty,  
Wherewith He wont at Heaven's  
high council-table  
To sit the of Trinal Unity,  
He laid aside; and here with us to be,  
Forsook the courts of everlasting day,  
And chose with us a darksome house  
of mortal clay.**

*— John Milton  
excerpt from poem*

