

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

December 16, 1986



Madonna and Child

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

at the MASTER'S FEET

Ingredients of effective prayer

Part II

Even as our gracious Lord extends such rich promises to those who pray in faith and in His Name, He bounds these promises with two vital considerations. An effective prayer life is realized as one prays according to the will of God and as one comes in a spirit of helplessness.

The Perfect Will of God

Our Lord's perfect conformity to the Father's will is shown so wonderfully in the Incarnation. His submission is stated in classic fashion by the Apostle Paul: "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men . . ." (Phil. 2:6-7). The voluntary condescension of our Lord to come to this planet is awesome to contemplate.

His obedience involved placing Himself as the eternal One in the hands of Mary and Joseph, dependent upon their ministrations as the tiny Babe of Bethlehem. That posture of submission took Him ultimately to the cross.

As our Lord faced the agony of the impending crucifixion, He prayed in the garden, "Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Thine be done" (Lk. 22:42). He wanted His prayer answered according to God's perfect will, whatever the personal sacrifice.

The relationship of God's will and prayer is clearly presented by the Apostle John. "And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us: and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we desired of Him" (I Jn. 5:14-15). God's will is found in the written Word of God. R. A. Torrey comments in this regard, "Here is one of the greatest secrets of effective prayer: To study the Word to find what God's will is as revealed there in the promises, and then simply take these promises and spread them out before God in prayer with the confidence that He will do what He has promised in His Word." Luther would sometimes pray with such humble boldness as to lead him to lay down a promise before God and say, "Now, Lord, there is Thy Word; if Thou dost not keep it, I will never believe Thee again."

The Personal Realization of Helplessness

On at least two occasions our Lord illustrated the need for personal realization that there is simply no place to turn than to God in our helplessness. In the

parable of the persistent friend, our Lord notes the desperation of the one in need who was willing to come at an untimely hour with his request. His frank admission, "I have nothing," typifies the inadequacy necessary to persist in prayer. Our Lord promises an answer to such who come asking, seeking and knocking (Lk. 11:5-10). In similar vein, our Lord urges continuance in prayer in the story of the unjust judge. It was the widow's sense of helplessness that caused her to repeat her pleas to this man. Unlike the judge, however, our Lord assures that God answers "speedily" those who "cry day and night unto Him" (Lk. 18:1-8).

Luther gives testimony to the blessing of sustained prayer in His life. "None can believe how powerful prayer is, and what it is able to effect, but those who have learned it by experience. It is a great matter when in extreme need to take hold on prayer. I know, whenever I have prayed earnestly, that I have been amply heard, and have obtained more than I prayed for. God indeed sometimes delayed, but at last He came."

It is the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word that reveals to us our deep need for God's grace and strength. Oh, may we allow Him to show us our own spiritual poverty and powerlessness that we may be continually depending upon Him in prayer and in His Word.



by Dr.
Francis W. Monseth

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A true story;
only the names are changed

Something different for Christmas

by Mrs. J. G. (Harriett) Erickson

"What do you mean? Not going home for Christmas?" exclaimed Rachel with a frown. "Home" meant her old hometown and the surrounding area where her parents, grandparents, and cousins lived—with all those impressionable traditions at Christmas time!

"I am really sorry, dear," Mark went on to explain, "but now as the pastor of three churches here on the Dakota prairie, which means extra Christmas services and programs, there is simply no way we can make that five-hundred mile trip to Minnesota this month."

The date on the calendar read December 15, 1959. As Rachel lingered over a second cup of coffee, joyous memories of past Christmases flashed back on the screen of her mind.

Who could forget those exhilarating sleigh rides on Grandfather's farm? she mused. Actually, growing up during the Great Depression wasn't all that bad. Although somewhat poor in material things, we were indeed rich in love and togetherness.

It seemed but yesterday when this conversation took place on the old farmstead.

"Boy, are we glad you kept the team of horses and the sleigh, Grandpa!" exclaimed Merv, her older brother.

Another cousin, Annette, added, "Isn't it great to watch the horses racing with the sleigh over the bright snow-covered fields?"

"Jump in and pull the fur robe over your lap!" shouted Rachel to Jan, as she headed for the sleigh. Their winter wonderland consisted of several expansive pastures on their grandfather's farm, now blanketed with newly fallen snow, glistening like myriads of diamonds.

The children appeared oblivious to the frigid temperatures, as the excitement of those sleigh rides made the adrenalin flow freely.

Later in the afternoon on Christmas Day, when the shadows from the orchestrated pine trees lengthened across the fields, the children scurried into the farm house and changed into dry clothing.



"Grandma," cried Annette enthusiastically, "you make the best chicken gravy I have ever eaten!"

Smiling modestly her grandmother replied, "Perhaps it tastes a little different because I make it from real cow's cream."

As he viewed the many steaming kettles on the old-fashioned black stove, Merv added, "How will we ever survive until dinner time? I'm starved right now!"

"Take a look at that lutefisk swimming in warm butter, the yummy lefse, and pumpkin pies!" added Rachel.

"Go into the living room now and see the Christmas tree," suggested their grandmother, as she shooed the children out of the kitchen.

Approaching the living room, all the youngsters were quite awed by the scene. In the center of the room stood a tall, bushy Norway pine, beautifully decorated. Grandpa had cut it down

from his own woods north of the farmhouse. This tree now boasted of many miniature candles clipped to the various branches. As the children sat quietly around the tree, Uncle Ray turned off the electric lights and lit the numerous candles on the tree. All was silent.

"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night." In the hush of the late afternoon, Grandfather's voice came through the stillness, reading the timeless Christmas story.

While they listened to those meaningful words and gazed at the lighted tree, the children pretended they were actually there with those surprised shepherds of Bethlehem on that first Christmas Eve. The lights from the candles twinkled like silver stars hiding in a deep blue velvet sky.

"Oh, how can I ever survive this Christmas? My very first one away from—just everything!" moaned Rachel.

While she tried to surface from this slough of despond, her conscience began to rebuke her. "Remember, you have a wonderful husband and two

"Actually, growing up during the Great Depression wasn't all that bad."

DIFFERENT . . .

precious little boys with you for Christmas. What about those people in your parish who will be spending Christmas *all alone* this year?"

Now—that is something else, she thought. Who might be having a lonely Christmas just ten days from today?

The first person who came into focus was a dear widow named Inga who always seemed to radiate joy and contentment. But she had no children. Not even a single relative in this area. While bravely ranching by herself, she regularly drove thirty long miles to church.

"Let me take care of those boys while you rest up a bit," she often volunteered on Sunday afternoons. With their own grandparents so far away, Tim and Paul dearly loved Inga and had given her the affectionate title of "the third grandma."

“. . . Tim and Paul
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of ‘the third grandma.’”

Wait a minute! There is also a bachelor living alone in a small hotel room. In the past, Sam had been quite a rodeo personality—providing many thrills and spills for the grandstand audience as he roped the frisky calves from his talented quarter horse, or attempted to ride bare-back on a bucking Brahma! Now with the rapid passing of the years, he was no longer as active, nor did he have any immediate family. What would Christmas be like in a dingy hotel room?

How about Roy and Cora? This middle-aged couple had recently lost a child in an accident. They were having such a difficult time adjusting to this new situation.

A few days before, while Rachel and Cora visited in the post office, Cora had remarked, "We are not yet able to think of Christmas preparations with that empty chair at our dining room table."

The next possibility was another widow who had an only son. But he was on the other side of the world in the Service of his Country. His recent letter

went something like this . . . "Dear Mom, It is hard for me to write this letter, but our commanding officer said no one would be given a furlough this Christmas because of the uncertainty of the situation here. I know how lonesome it will be for you now with Dad gone and me so far away . . ."

Finally, Rachel remembered Ed and Jean—and their two young children. More rough than calm sailing described their marriage. A divorce was pending. What would Christmas mean to this family, especially to their emotionally bruised little ones?

Dashing to the phone, Rachel called each family. Would you believe it? Everyone of them graciously accepted the invitation to be at the parsonage on Christmas Day.

As the special occasion drew near, Mark purchased a young, succulent turkey, while Rachel baked pumpkin pies, made fresh cranberry salad, and other goodies.

Christmas Day dawned in cool splendor. After church services, the guests arrived around noon. They were all seated around a festive table, including a red poinsettia centerpiece, plus the attractive crystal and china. As the heads were bowed, Mark led in prayer. Afterward, happy conversation added flavor to the traditional dinner.

Later in the afternoon, everyone gathered around the piano and formed a volunteer choir. A warm spirit of caring and sharing pervaded, like the aroma of a delicate perfume.

Of all the carols sung, the lyrics of one remained with Rachel, even today.

"Cast out our sin and enter in,
Be born in us today."

After the children had enjoyed an hour or two of getting acquainted with their new toys, Mark happened to glance at the sturdy platform rocker. His two boys were sitting in the lap of kind old Sam. Their eyes sparkled with excitement as he told them stories.

"Why, boys, I remember the old days when I was in my twenties. Those funloving cowboys would ride into town on Saturday night and really shoot up the place! Such dust and hubbub they raised by galloping up and down Main Street. We had a few skirmishes with some Sioux braves, too! But—eventually, law and order also came to this area. However—it wasn't that way when I first homesteaded out here on the prair-

"The very Christmas
she had been so dreading
became the most
fantastic one after all."

ies in 1910. By the way, kids, I used to have an awfully smart quarter horse named Rex. Why, he could . . ."

Tim and Paul, wearing their own cowboy boots, were reliving those nostalgic days with Sam and loving every minute of it.

Roy and Cora put aside their sorrow, at least temporarily, as they romped with the children. In return, the young ones gave generously of their impromptu "Bear hugs."

Later that same week, after some serious contemplation, Ed said to Jean, "We have been so busy arguing and putting each other down that we have overlooked what this turmoil and insecurity is doing to our two precious children. Should we invite the Christ of Christmas into our hearts and permit him to transform our lives?"

Although Rachel felt somewhat "bushed" that Christmas night, her heart bubbled over with joy unspeakable. The very Christmas she had been so dreading became the most fantastic one after all.

Perhaps she had previously overlooked the secret formula for happiness given to people centuries ago by the Lord Himself.

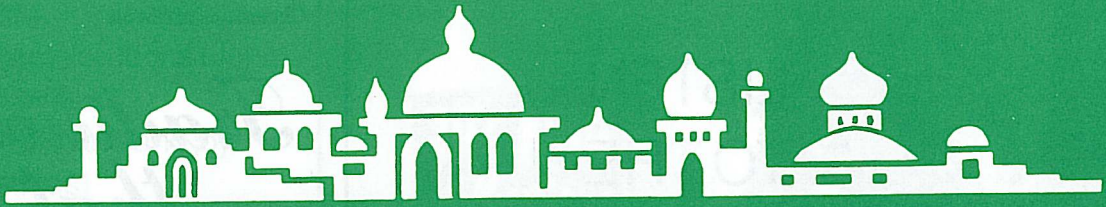
"When you give a dinner party, don't invite your friends or your brothers or relations or wealthy neighbors, for the chances are they will invite you back, and you will be fully repaid. No, when you give a party, invite the poor, the lame, (the lonely), the crippled and the blind. *In that way lies real happiness for you*" (Lk. 14:13, Phillips Translation).

—A true story, reprinted with permission of the author from *His Mysterious Ways*, copyright 1977.

"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

A VISIT TO BETHLEHEM



by Henry Van Dyke

A slowly ascending road brought us to the hill of Mar Elyas, and the so-called Well of the Magi. Here the legend says the Wise Men halted after they had left Jerusalem, and the star reappeared to guide them on to Bethlehem. Certain it is that they must have taken this road; and certain it is that both Bethlehem and Jerusalem, hidden from each other by the rising ground, are clearly visible to one who stands in the saddle of this hill.

There were fine views down the valleys to the east, with blue glimpses of the Dead Sea at the end of them. The supposed tomb of Rachel, a dingy little building with a white dome, interested us less than the broad lake of olive orchards around the distant village of Beit Jala, and the green fields, pastures and gardens encircling the double hill of Bethlehem, the ancient "House of Bread." There was an aspect of fertility and friendliness about the place that seemed in harmony with its name and its poetic memories.

In a walled kitchen-garden at the entrance of the town was David's Well. We felt no assurance, of course, as we looked down into it, that this was the veritable place. But at all events it served to bring back to us one of the prettiest bits of romance in the Old Testament. When the bold son of Jesse had become a chieftain of outlaws and was besieged by the Philistines in the stronghold of Adullam, his heart grew thirsty for a draught from his father's well, whose sweetness he had known as a boy. And when his three mighty men went up secretly at the risk of their lives, and broke through the host of their enemies, and brought their captain a vessel of this water, "he would not

"here the legend
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drink thereof, but poured it out unto Jehovah."

There was a division of opinion in our party in regard to this act. "It was sheer foolishness," said the Patriarch, "to waste anything that had cost so much to get. What must the three mighty men have thought when they saw that for which they had risked their lives poured out upon the ground?" "Ah, no," said the Lady. "It was the highest gratitude, because it was touched with poetry. It was the best compliment that David could have given to his friends. Some gifts are too precious to be received in any other way than this." And in my heart I knew that she was right.

Riding through the narrow streets of the town, which is inhabited almost entirely by Christians, we noted the tranquil good looks of the women, a distinct type, rather short of stature, round-faced, placid and kind of aspect.

"In the market-place
we left our horses . . .
and entered, by a low door,
the lofty, bare
Church of the Nativity."

Not a few of them had blue eyes. They wore dark-blue skirts, dark-red jackets, and a white veil over their heads, but not over their faces. Under the veil the married women wore a peculiar cap of stiff, embroidered black cloth, about six inches high, and across the front of this cap was strung their dowry of gold or silver coins. Such a dress, no doubt, was worn by the Virgin Mary, and such tranquil, friendly looks, I think, were hers, but touched with a rarer light of beauty shining from a secret source within.

A crowd of little boys and girls just released from school for their recess shouted and laughed and chased one another, pausing for a moment in round-eyed wonder when I pointed a camera at them. Donkeys and camels and sheep made our passage through the town slow, and gave us occasion to look at our horses' footing. At one corner a great white sow ran out of an alley-way, followed by a twinkling litter of pink pigs. In the market-place we left our horses in the shadow of the monastery wall and entered, by a low door, the lofty, bare Church of the Nativity.

The long rows of immense marble pillars had some faded remains of painting on them. There were a few battered fragments of mosaic in the clerestory, dimly glittering. But the general effect of the whitewashed walls, the ancient brown beams and rafters of the roof, the large, empty space, was one of extreme simplicity.

When we came into the choir and apse we found ourselves in the midst of complexity. The ownership of the different altars with their gilt ornaments, of the swinging lamps, of the separate doorways of the Greeks and the Armen-

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LISTEN TO THE WONDROUS STORY

Listen to the wondrous story,
How, upon the Christmas morn,
Jesus left the realm of glory,
As a little babe was born;
Left those bright and happy regions
Of His Father's home above,
And the glorious angel legions,
In His great and boundless love!

Came into the lowly manger,
Dwelt beneath a humble shed,
And, among His own a stranger
Knew not where to lay His head;
Went from city unto city,
All His life was doing good,
Weeping o'er His friend with pity,
When beside the grave He stood.

Love all human love exceeding,
Brought Him to a cruel death;
Even then, though hanging bleeding
On the cross, His latest breath
Spent He for His murderers praying
To His Father to forgive;
To the thief repentant saying,
"Thou in Paradise shalt live!"

Oh, what love in God the Father
To bestow His only Son!
Oh, what love in Christ, who rather
Than the world should be undone,
Came Himself to seek and save us,
Came to claim us for His own;
Freely all our sins forgave us,
Raised us to His glorious throne!

Ellen Tupper

(This poem can be sung to the tune of, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus.")

Christmas is Christ

Traditions that Bind

by Mrs. Richard (Clara) Gunderson

What, no Christmas lights? No shiny balls? No gaily wrapped gifts? And not even a tree? No fruitcake or decorated cookies? No Santa in the stores? No stores with bright displays enticing me to buy dolls or cars, perfume, clothes or candy? No glorious Christmas concert? And more, no snow on Christmas Eve? No grandma and grandpa, aunts and uncles or cousins coming to celebrate? How will I ever *feel* like it is Christmas this year?

I'm sure you've read before about "Christmas in Other Lands" and upon putting down the pages just read you have secretly been glad that here in your country things are different. Or, perhaps you've thought some particular thing sounded good and that you'd like to try it, only to do so and be disappointed because it didn't seem to go over well.

Have you left something out of your Christmas celebration in the effort to cut costs? Or, perhaps because someone dear was missing, either in death or because circumstances didn't allow—a child now married or in school and living too far away to be home. And did you have the feeling that Christmas just wasn't the same? One doesn't realize how tightly traditions bind until the time comes when they are out of reach. That was my own experience in our family—seven Christmases in Bolivia and six in Mexico.

Even though we had lived away from family before, we had always managed to get home for the holidays. During the years of being in school and having a

limited income, out of necessity we let go of certain aspects of holiday celebrating and in a way they were good years of preparation. Yet I wasn't prepared for the stark reality of a Christmas without any of my beloved traditions.

We left Minneapolis by car on Thanksgiving weekend, heading for Miami, Florida. Our plane left the Miami International Airport at 2:00 a.m., and after a 15-hour flight with stops in various places, and an overnight in Lima, Peru, we arrived in cold, cold, *cold* La Paz on the 6th of December. As yet there were no Christmas decorations anywhere. Well, it was rather early, I said to myself. There was a warm welcome by our fellow missionaries, though, and through the goodness of one of them, after two weeks we had gotten our paperwork done in the government offices, which allowed us to stay in the country. Now we were well into the middle of the month and still no evidence of Christmas . . . in the stores, on the streets, in church or at the mission home where we were staying. What was happening? Didn't anyone care about Christmas, that Jesus was born? Oh, I had so much to learn!

"No grandma and grandpa, aunts and uncles or cousins coming to celebrate? How will I ever *feel* like it is Christmas this year?"

I learned that my heart wasn't open to accept another way, nor my mind to understand that Christmas *was* being celebrated. Not understanding anything in the foreign language, I missed the fact that there was to be a drama by the young people on Christmas Eve. So simply and casually did my fellow-workers make their own plans to be with this church group or that group of

cont. on p. 8

A greeting from our president

Christ, the re-director of lives

"They departed into their own country another way" (Matt. 2:12).

It is a joy to bring a Christmas greeting to you, dear *Ambassador* readers, in the precious, indescribable name of Jesus. "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

The impact of another blessed privilege to visit the Holy Land is still very fresh in mind as I write this greeting. Like the wise men of old, you depart to your country "another way." You cannot be the same when you have had the privilege of seeing the places where Jesus lived and died to make reconciliation with God possible for us. You return home changed.

Christ came into the world to change the direction of men's lives. The magi having laid their gifts at Jesus' feet, then returned home "another way." How symbolic this is of the re-directed course of our own lives when we encounter Jesus and accept Him as Lord and Savior.

Christ has the power to change the direction of the life of the most degraded, hardened criminal. But He changes only those who come to Him in humility, acknowledging their need of Him.

A tragic example of man's freedom to reject Jesus is recorded in the words of John's Gospel, "He came unto His own and His own received Him not." The consequences of such a decision are also recorded for us. We find Jesus pausing and weeping before the city of Jerusalem on His last entry into the city. He wept for a city and a nation who would reject Him. Here were a people who knew not their time of "visitation," and who would in a few short years be defeated and scattered abroad.

Even there, God was rich in His mercy, not willing that any should perish. Ezekiel 37 describes a valley of old, dry bones scattered everywhere across the ground. God said, "I am going to make you live again." Ezekiel saw the coming together of these bones, with muscles, flesh and skin covering them. At God's command, he spoke to the winds to bring life to these forms and they lived again. We are told that all this represented Israel and a restoring

of the people to their land (Ezek. 37:11).

What a thrill it was to be able to be in Israel and to see the restoration of a rocky, barren land. Why would people want to come to such a land? It is God re-directing lives so that these people are being drawn there. We saw Ezekiel 36:34-35 being literally fulfilled. "And the desolate land will be cultivated instead of being a desolation in the sight of everyone who passed by. And they will say 'This desolate land has become the garden of Eden, and the waste, desolate and ruined cities are fortified and inhabited.'"

God's promise of forgiveness and restoration was not only made to the nation and land of Israel. His promise today is to the souls and lives who are "waste, desolate and ruined." Jesus came "to bring good news to the afflicted," "to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners" (Is. 61:1).

Jesus came to re-direct lives. "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." "But we do see Him, who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering and death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone."

In Jesus, we have the forgiveness of our sins and healing for our wounded souls and lives. Should you be one whose life is in waste and desolation, Jesus can forgive and restore. He can turn your life around.

As we purpose to worship and adore our Savior this Christmas, we come like the wise men of old, with exceeding joy. As their lives were re-directed by finding Him, so may we, too, walk in newness of life.

A Blessed Christmas to you all.



Pastor Richard Snipstead, President Association of Free Lutheran Congregations

TRADITIONS . . .

believers up on the mountain for Christmas, that I didn't see that they were doing exactly what they had gone to Bolivia to do . . . they were ministering by their very presence to the Body of Christ! And so quietly did they make their own preparations that I was taken by surprise to see their generosity toward my children on Christmas Eve. Yes, that first Christmas away from home in Minnesota was the beginning of my recognition of how tightly I was bound in traditions.

That, of course, is all hindsight! How quickly I forgot what I had seen that first Christmas. We now had moved to our assigned station on Coaba Farm—warm and temperate, lush foliage at that time of year with poinsettia bushes growing outside our door. This was to be home now and we felt more comfortable. We had studied Spanish for a year, but even while our ears were becoming accustomed to those sounds, a new problem arose as this was an Aymara-speaking area, with few people speaking Spanish. Feeling left out because of this, it was no wonder I wanted to hang on to what was familiar. Our barrels had arrived and inside were gifts packed for the children, given by family and friends. Surely this mother was as excited as her children!

Without knowing that you needed a special permit and that here in this "above the tree line" area one didn't just go out and cut a tree, we did just that. I can even now feel the excitement as it was dragged up the stairs and into the house. Never mind what others said, we were going to have ourselves a

real Christmas! We had brought tree decorations from home, now unpacked from the barrels. How precious they became! Those baubles that others hadn't wanted and were passed on to the missionaries going to a foreign country, how beautiful they were! The most precious ones had come from Dick's home after his parents had died. Can you feel the cords of tradition getting tighter? I was so eager to have everything as familiar as possible that I even resisted the plans by the nationals to have a church supper on Christmas Day. Now these meals became so precious to me in the ensuing years that I am most embarrassed to remember my desire to *not* attend, but have "a small family gathering" in our own home. Fortunately, my voice wasn't as loud as my feelings and we did attend this love feast, which is what it was. Less strange this year were the orange and yellow, blue and green crepe paper streamers strung across the small church. More familiar was "Silent Night, Holy Night" and other carols sung in a foreign tongue.

I allowed a barrier to come down that year—I accepted fellow missionaries as real family and found that with the loosening of certain outward traditions, there was room for acceptance not only of new ways but new family. What a gift from God that was to me! Fellow-workers became Grandma and Grandpa, Aunt and Uncle to my children; cousins were again in and out of the house; together we planned what we would give to the children and older folks of the church.

Allowing God's Holy Spirit to work always brings openness in my life and in the next couple of years I recognized this within myself, openness to the

Bolivian culture, recognition that the Holy Spirit can work in the heart of the Bolivian as well as in my own and, yes, a realization that there were no colored lights on the trees in Bethlehem when Jesus was born!

" . . . drilled holes
in various spots
and each year fresh branches
would be cut from a bush
and stuck into the holes."

Perhaps now I could handle better the next two Christmases, spent in the small lowland village of Apolo. This wasn't our work station the first year we went there, we were visiting friends. But God has his special preparations and unknown to us at this time we would be there in a ministering capacity the next year. Could the Christmas celebration be any more different than what we had already seen? Here also the drama was the big thing. Yes, oh yes, there were other adjustments coming! There were no evergreen trees at all! Not even to cut down with a permit! Years earlier another missionary had made a pole, rather like a thick broomstick, had drilled holes in various spots and each year fresh branches would be cut from a bush and stuck into the holes. It was of table top height and served the purpose very well. Can you see how one tradition was becoming less important to me? I believe that the joy of having become very familiar with carols sung in Spanish, hearing the Christmas story read in Spanish and understanding it superseded the need for a traditional, North American Christmas.

There was another lesson coming the following year, the pure joy of having

This Christmas I long for a quiet heart.
Like Mary, may I ponder each
significant part;
With time for the One who was born
that day,
To express love to Him in a special way.

O, for a heart of joy this year,
As the momentous meaning of Your gift
becomes clear;
To rejoice and praise Your wonderful
plan—
Immanuel — God making His home
with man.

Give me a heart with love unfurled,
Sharing the reality of Your love
with my world.
Like the shepherds, enthused to inform
all I meet,
Like the Wise Men, to lay my gifts
at His feet.

Amen
—Doris Stensland

Christmas Prayer

our children with us after a ten-day wait for their plane, delayed because of bad weather. They only had three weeks vacation from their boarding school and we longed to have them with us. What good would the broomstick tree be without them? Late one afternoon during program practice, when the clouds were thickening and we accepted another day gone by without them, the plane swooped in and there were our three and, indeed, that's all we needed! No meat for a special dinner wasn't important; no stores to shop in wasn't important . . . family together, that's all. Did I *feel* like it was Christmas? Oh, yes, my babes were in their nests! The celebration of the Babe in the manger, of His love for us, rang out, reminding us of the favorite carol sung in Apolo, "O holy night, O joyous night, gracious time of celebration."

**"How peaceful I feel
sitting at night
with just the tree lights on
and music on the stereo."**

As freeing as it is to let the cords be cut, how quickly they can wrap themselves around one once again. We have spent Christmas in a traditional setting for the last three years, having the usual treats in baking, gifts, church programs, etc. Last year when we told our younger children still at home that we were not going to have our gift celebration until the 27th when our older children would have arrived, I understood their incredulity at it all. Not open gifts on Christmas? What

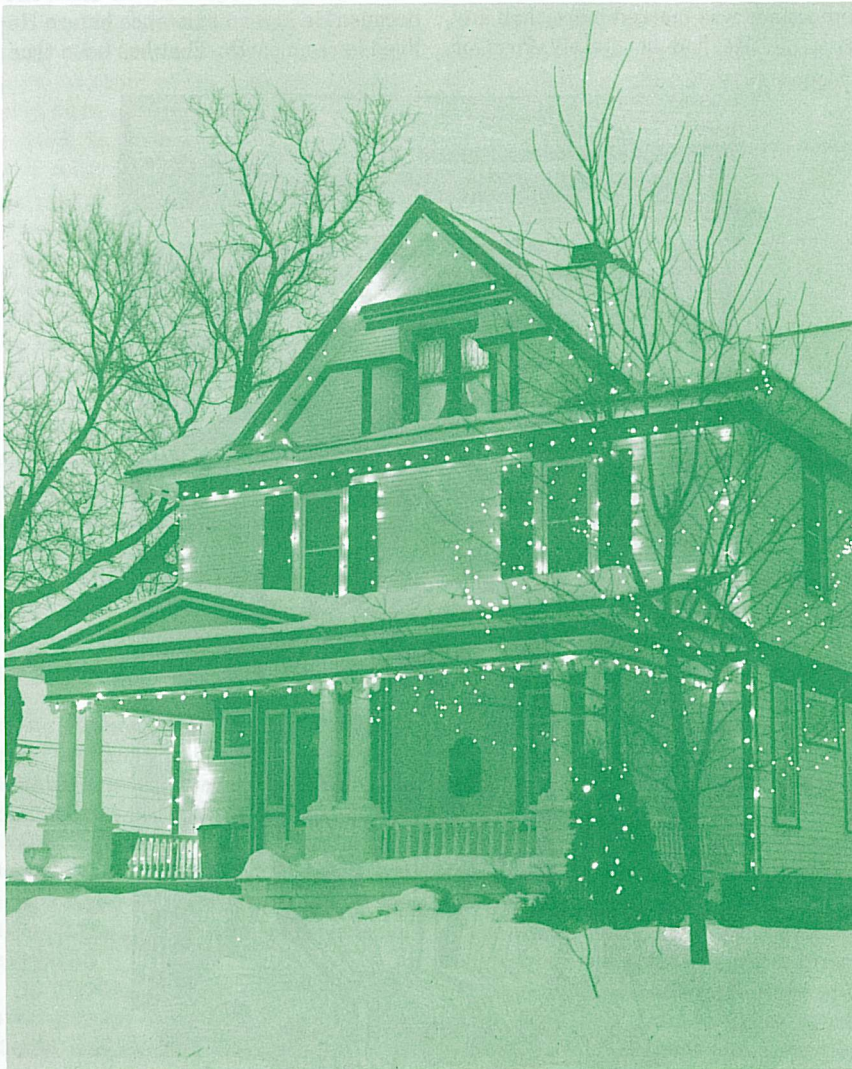
would Christmas be like? Yes, I understood because I had felt the same years before. But God had a blessing in store for us. With no big meal to prepare, no demand on our time, we packed up some treats and went to visit a shut-in who would not have had company that day, a delightful friend who returned our love.

Will I, I wonder, allow these changes to be a blessing? Traditions, how I do like them! How peaceful I feel sitting at night with just the tree lights on and music on the stereo. How I enjoy making the cookies and serving specialties, having friends and loved ones around, arranging my creche in its special place, lighting the candles. I always want to be reminded, as Peter reminds all in his first letter, chapter one verses 18 and 19 . . . I have been redeemed of the empty ways (traditions) of my fathers and not with silver and gold, but by the precious blood of Christ (the Babe of Christmas). Even as I write this we are packing our household for yet another change in our lives. And once again, on Thanksgiving weekend, we will be leaving our familiar, comfortable spot and will take up work in yet another area of our country. I know that no matter how different the celebrating of Christmas is in the State of Washington, the Christ of the celebration will be there!

Bethlehem's Star

Star above the city gleaming,
Where the crowds of men
are streaming
To the east and to the west
Seeking peace or seeking rest,
See, the smoke blurs
out your rays;
See, the darkness
down these ways.

Bethlehem's star has
sunk from sight
But another sheds its light.
Weary traveler, stop and pray
Near the Child upon the hay.
Look within the Baby's eyes
For a star to light your skies.



The Lights of Christmas

Roger C. Huebner, D.D.S.

Raymond Kresensky

by Rev. Harvey Carlson

I'd like to share with you something that is really exceedingly simple. Perhaps too simple to even bother putting into print. But it is something that has warmed my heart and perhaps there might be someone else who would also receive a blessing.

It's been quite a few years now since a baby has had any part in Christmas celebrations within our family circle. Our youngest grandson is already eight years of age. Only the appearance of a great grandchild would bring a baby back into our Christmas activities.

But it was not so at that first Christmas. Then a baby was at the very center of everything. What we celebrate at Christmas is the birth of a baby. Take away the baby, and there is really nothing to talk about.

The one thing we want to note concerning this baby who was born in Bethlehem close to 2000 years ago is that He was absolutely unique. He was in a class by Himself. He was *the baby who was different*, immensely different, from any other baby that has ever been born.

But, Every Baby is Different!

But isn't it true that *every* baby is different? Are there any two babies that are exactly alike? Or any two people? The fact is that God has such great ability and power that He is able to bring about endless variations. Of the some five billion people now living upon this earth, there are no two who are entirely alike.

There are differences even between identical twins. Some years ago I had girls who were identical twins in one of my confirmation classes. I simply couldn't tell them apart and week after week I had to inquire again which was which. But, later on, when I got to know them better, I had no problem knowing which was Betty and which was Letty. There were differences.

But now, even though it is true that *every* baby and person is different, there are still a number of things that were true of Jesus that have not been true of anyone else.

I want to mention just four items that are on my list. I am sure that you can add other items for yourself.

The Baby who was different

Physical Appearance

The thing that made Jesus different was *not* some very unusual physical beauty and attractiveness. The way the shepherds could tell which of the babies in Bethlehem was the Savior was not that He would have a radiant and shining face or have some very remarkable bodily loveliness, but rather that He would be lying in a manger (Luke 2:12)!

The New Testament is completely silent about Jesus' physical appearance. Some years ago I heard an outstanding Bible teacher suggest that Jesus perhaps was decidedly unattractive. He quoted from Isaiah 52 and 53: "His appearance was marred more than any man . . . He had no stately form or

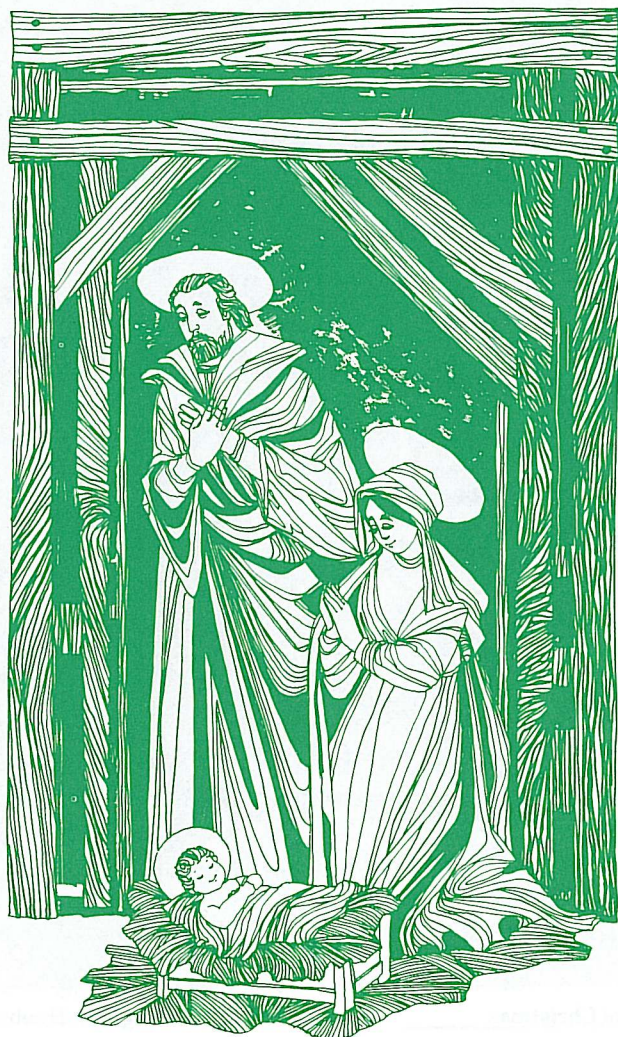
majesty . . . nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him."

A Previous Existence

In connection with the abortion issue, there has been much discussion as to when life begins. The Bible answer, and many in the field of medical science agree, is that life begins at conception.

But for Jesus life did not begin at conception. He existed before that, in eternity, as God. The angel said that it was "the Lord" who had been born (Luke 2:11). Paul says, in Philippians 2:6, that Jesus had the form or kind of existence that goes with being God.

Jesus is the baby who was different because He had an existence before He lived here on earth. That has been true



**"That weak baby
lying in the straw
was the eternal
and almighty God!"**

of no other member of the human family. Many believe in reincarnation, but God's Word never teaches this. Our present life is the only life you and I have ever lived.

The most sensational news story of all time is that *God* came to live here on earth when Jesus was born. That weak baby lying in the straw was the eternal and almighty God!

Sinlessness

Parents are glad when the baby that comes into their home is born without any obvious physical defect and seems to have normal mental powers. Yet, the sad truth is that things are very seriously wrong with every baby. Each one is mortal, capable of dying at any time and subject to disease, pain and suffering. And each one is sinful, wanting to put self first and at heart rebellious against God. This sinfulness soon becomes apparent and it is something the parents have to work with and deal with through all the years that follow.

But the baby born in Bethlehem was different. He had no inclination to sin and He never yielded to the many and strong temptations to sin that He met throughout His life.

Imagine what it must have been like to have a boy like Jesus in the home! Always gladly obedient. Never rebellious, never pouting, never complaining. Never quarrelling with the other children. Never unhappy or envious because He didn't have what others had.

Jesus' sinlessness and complete victory over all temptation have great value for us. Because He had no sin, He could be our sinless substitute. Because He met temptation to the full, He knows exactly what we are facing and what we need in order to be victorious.

Born By His Own Choice

Another thing that was different about this baby, is that He Himself chose to come into the world. He was born because it was His own choice to be born.

That wasn't true of any other baby

and it wasn't true of any one of us! I had nothing to say as to whether I wanted to be one of the residents upon this earth. It just happened anyway! And so it was with you.

A further thought can be added here: we weren't involved in picking our parents. We couldn't say, "I want that man to be my father and that woman to be my mother." But it was not so with Jesus. Mary was His mother because He chose her to be His mother! He, of course, had no earthly father. He was "conceived by the Holy Spirit," as we confess each Sunday morning.

Truly this was a baby who was different! And He chose to be born, not in order to have some new adventure nor to make it known how infinitely superior He is to any of us. But He came for *our* present and eternal good. He came "to bear witness to the truth" (John 18:37), "to save sinners" (I Timothy 1:15), to "destroy the works of the devil" (I John 3:8), that we "might have life and might have it abundantly" (John 10:10), and for other important reasons.

So Many Names!

Most of us have three names, first, last and middle. My mother's parents were a bit more generous, so she had

**"There is some name of Jesus
that exactly meets every
need and situation
we can possibly face."**

four names. I have read concerning the members of the royal family in England that they are given several names.

But the Baby of the Christmas story is different. He has many, many names! Just how many, I don't know. I haven't made a careful study of this, but I know that there are at least 200 names given to this One in the pages of Scripture.

Why so many names? To set before us how great and wonderful Jesus really is! And also to indicate how much Jesus can be and wants to be to us. There is some name of Jesus that exactly meets every need and situation we can possibly face. Let's pray that there may be some name of Jesus that will be especially meaningful to us at this Christmas season.

"Jesus, my Shepherd, Brother, Friend,
My Prophet, Priest and King,
My Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,
Accept the praise I bring."

THE PROPHECY

I wonder—
Did Mary see the shadow
Of a cross upon the snow,
As she held her babe in Bethlehem
Two thousand years ago?

I wonder—
Did she see Him in the Garden,
And taste His bitter cup,
Or hear His words of prophecy
"If I be lifted up?"

I wonder—
Did Mary see the ages
Within that Yuletide glow,
And did she see the shadow fall—
His cross upon the snow?

Harriet Knight Salvage

A Christmas Eve in



Luther's home

It was Christmas Eve in 1541. The Reformer sat in his family circle. He talked to his children and he was one of those children never tire of listening to. Let us, for a while, listen to him.

Put Jesus before all else! Oh, why wouldn't you also, in Him and for Him, love all those by Him redeemed, all people! Why wouldn't you weep with those who weep? Why can't you remember that the good deeds you do to the poor, the sorrowing, the sick, these you do to Him? See, here we are sitting in the midst of this hard winter, snug inside these walls, fortunate and happy.—Hear how the wind blows. See, how thick the snow falls. Now then! In this instant many poor children are sitting in many a dark house who don't have anything other than the reflection of the snow to see by, no other amusement than to hear the wind whistling, no other food than dry bread, if they still have that. At this moment a poor traveller journeys along the highway. I have experienced that myself, children.

More than once when I studied at Eisenach, have I in snowy weather asked for an evening meal from door to door. I was hungry and cold, but one thought kept me going and made me almost proud. "It isn't I myself who goes

here poor and almost naked; it is Jesus. It is He whom people receive, Him people help." If I was sent away, I didn't curse the people but pitied them. If I was welcomed, I wanted my presence in the face of this hospitality to be a blessing to the home. But I also had my weak moments.

How long I walked sometimes on an evening like this before I dared knock at a door! Through the windows the lights cast their beams everywhere; everywhere there was joy and abundance. And I said to myself bitterly: "There is no place for me today. People are too joyful to be concerned for someone who is crying—." And then I began to cry. But at last it came to me that this was to doubt Jesus. An almost dark window gave me courage. I knocked at the door. On quite a small tree four candles were burning, one for each child, and these four were the children of a widow. With great enthusiasm they welcomed me. And I spent some blessed hours there and that Christmas has imprinted itself in my memory as one of the best God has given me. Let us, therefore, welcome the poor at Christmas! Let them come!

As he stopped, the children were startled. There was someone knocking at the street-side door. Was this a pre-arranged happening? The children believed this at first, but when they saw their father's seriousness they understood that it wasn't an accident either.

"Katharina," he said, "go out and see!—" And when she came in again he looked inquiringly at her.

"How God still in this day arranges all things!" she said. "A poor man, a traveller."

The children jumped up with joy and Luther went to the door and stretched out his hand.— But suddenly he stopped, bowed and gave them a sign that they should be quiet.



"More than once
when I studied at Eisenach,
have I in snowy weather
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from door to door."



It wasn't necessary; they were already motionless. The traveller, the poor man was Elector (electoral prince) Johan Frederik of Saxon, Luther's protector and friend. He shook his cloak which was covered with snow.

"A traveller," he said with a smile, "yes, a poor one, is not so far off. After all, we princes are always poor, because we always need more than we have. Good evening, Dr. Martin. Good evening, Dr. Philip (Melancthon)! Frau Katharina, I greet you. The night has assisted me in fooling you; I have left my people and horse at the end of the street. I have heard, Dr. Martin, that the word poor is the key that opens your door. I have wanted to find that out for myself; now I have done that. By the way I am travelling right through to Wittenberg."

"The poor," said Luther, "will surely sit down a moment?"

"Thank you, Doctor! Now, children, have you seen enough of me? You hardly were expecting me; no, that I don't think: a guilder (piece of money) to each of you."

And then he said with a serious, troubled look. "Doctor, it is dark out."

"God will bring light."

"A big war is going to come in a short time. Now the kaiser talks about declaring war."

"Men plan but God is in charge."

— *Translated from Norwegian*

*She will
bear a son,
and you shall
call His name
Jesus,
for He will save
His people from
their sins.*

Matthew 1:21

editorials

OLD, YET EVER NEW

In many aspects of life, that which is old is lightly regarded. It has served its usefulness; now it may be a collector's item, nothing else.

Most books lose their appeal in a few years, only a few appeal to a second or third generation. Automobiles are out of date in a few years. Most man-fashioned articles are soon old-fashioned.

Governments and ideologies don't have long shelf-life generally. Most pass and are soon forgotten except to the student of history and philosophy. We can conclude from all of this that what does survive for a greater length of time has had a great contribution to make.

The event we now celebrate, Christmas, is unique together with Easter and Pentecost. Although Jesus was born nearly 2000 years ago in an obscure Judean village, in every village of the United States and Canada, and in much of the world, people will celebrate that birth in these next days at least outwardly. There are no other days so noted throughout the world. Remarkable!

Christmas has lived on because even though it is old, it is ever new. It has a living message for every human being. And so we sing carols, present programs and gather for worship. All because Jesus, the Son of God, was born.

The birth or incarnation, if you will, was foretold in hoary antiquity. In the Bible's third chapter, in words that must have seemed very shadowy to the first hearers, One was promised who would inflict a mortal wound on Satan. God established a new nation through the man Abraham. To that nation God gave further promises about a Messiah, chiefly through the psalmists and the prophet Isaiah, who wrote down that marvelous passage about a Child born and Son given (Is. 9) and later the one about One who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities (Is. 53).

Those who believed those promises, who believed in the One who gave them and in the One promised were saved by their faith. We must believe in the One who came, they in the One promised.

Then one night God stepped into human history to a greater degree than ever before. Only a handful of people were aware of what was to happen, Mary, Joseph and Elizabeth, and they understood but dimly. The imperial royal majesty, Caesar Augustus, unwittingly aided God's plan by ordering a census. Thus Mary and Joseph made the strenuous journey to Bethlehem, Joseph's ancestral city, to meet Caesar's requirement and, much more, God's (Mic. 5:2).

There, in a stable, Mary gave birth to her firstborn. They named the baby boy Jesus as Joseph had been supernaturally instructed, for He had a great mission to perform. And the announcement of His coming was carried at the first not to royalty and nobility and leadership but rather to humble shepherds bedding their flocks in the open range beyond the town limits.

The shepherds were among the waiting, the believing. Very awed at first by the celestial visitation, as anyone would

be, they pulled themselves together and went into Bethlehem to see this which had come to pass. They came, they believed, they returned to their flocks, but first telling to others what they had seen and heard. They glorified and praised God.

This is the story of Christmas, old, yet ever new. We don't tire of hearing the message that a Savior is born. The word Savior denotes salvation *from* something. There have been political saviors, such as George Washington, Joan of Arc and Simon Bolivar. And scientific ones, such as Jonas Salk, Louis Pasteur and Marie Curie. But the savior above all others is Jesus, Savior from sin.

The people at the time of the birth of Jesus needed the message that God had sent salvation. We need it just as much in our modern, enlightened age. We, too, are heirs of sin in the flesh. We are born into this world as people who need salvation. Praise God, we are at birth also someone for whom the Christ of Christmas has died. Someone has said, "Cradled there in the straw lay the Beginning Again, the Resurrection of hope and happiness for the human heart."

The glory of Christmas is that there is forgiveness, that God loves and forgives. The angels sang their message of "peace on earth," primarily addressing it to individuals. Where people will believe in Jesus as God incarnate and accept His death at Calvary for the remission of their sins, there come life and salvation.

That's the bottom line, as we say in this last quarter of the 20th Century. The story is old, very old, but it is as new as today. That is, it's good for today, it's relevant for the now. We pray that lives will be open to the matchless love of God today through His Son Jesus, the Savior. We want that for you and for all people.

For all our *Ambassador* readers, a blessed Christmas!

BUSY CHRISTMAS

When one loses a parent who is at a young or relatively young age, never having been able to ask the questions children eventually ask of parents about their backgrounds and experiences, one looks where he can for information. It's that way for me because my father passed away when I was but a boy.

Dad left considerable writing, so that is a good source. Then there are all his pastor's handbooks. There are many facts to be found in them.

In the 1930s Dad was a Home Mission pastor in Saskatchewan. His parish was far-flung. In normal winters car travel became impossible on all but the very main roads and even that was discouraging after storms and much drifting. As a practical measure, then, Dad used to put his car away for the winter. But he did have access to the two congregations furthest away by train. This necessitated much more time in

EDITORIAL . . .

travel than we think of today when we may spend half an hour or an hour going to a church some distance away.

Let us look at the year 1935. In order to have a service the Sunday before Christmas near P., he had to leave on the train on Saturday, going by way of Regina. He arrived the same day, being met by one of the members with a team and sleigh. They drove perhaps eight miles, probably in an enclosed cutter. That Sunday, the 22nd, he held his Christmas service and also conducted a wedding for a young couple. On Monday he had a confirmation class, then returned to the railroad and journeyed to Regina where he shopped, perhaps doing some last minute Christmas shopping. He arrived back home by train at 2:20 a.m., Christmas Eve day. It was 26 below zero that morning.

The day was busy but happy. Dad notes that there were many presents given and received. Christmas Day found a program and Christmas service in a congregation near town.

After some hours at home on second day Christmas he had to leave for another congregation far away, also by train. That evening there was another service and program. He remained in that community the next day and on the 28th, Saturday, travelled early to the town of H., where he was to fill in in a vacant parish on Sunday. But on Saturday he either led or attended a meeting in a chapel. The next day he conducted the Christmas service at the church and then had to wait for a 10 p.m. train, arriving home at 4 a.m., Dec. 30. In ten days he hadn't had one full day at home.

Not all Christmas seasons were as busy as that one, to be sure, but every Christmas season in that parish meant some days away from home. The point is that I and we pastors of this present day have things so much easier than my father did. We have shorter distances to travel and travel in greater comfort. Physically, we don't have to expend the energy our fathers and grandfathers did or endure the discomforts they had which sometimes brought on ailments in older age.

Be that as it may, people were brought the Christmas Gospel that winter of 1935-36. A pastor made his rounds, lived with his people, shared in their Christmas, helped out in an empty parish, and all the while remembered his wife and five children who had to observe Christmas as best they could until Dad got home again.

—Raynard Huglen

born in a manger

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

—Walter A. Maier, Sr.



Kaleidoscoping mosaics of light

Along the dark highway

flashing out bright;

The neon proclaims

for travelers to see—

Air conditioning, sauna, color T. V.

"No Vacancy," "Vacancy,"

pulse the signs:

Motels and hotels, the inns of our times.

There were no slick signs,

no flashing lights when

God's Son came down to the

dark world of men.

There was an inn

and a fire burning bright,

And food and shelter

and rest for the night.

Just a plain kind of inn,

but clean and warm—

Not a bad place for a child to be born.

But travelers were many

and rooms were few;

The innkeeper did what innkeepers do;

He had no sign, so he went to the door,

"No vacancy here,

no room for one more."

My heart is the inn,

I stand at the door.

The Christ Child is coming,

coming once more.

What have I done with the

rooms of my inn?

Are they full;

or do I have room for Him?

Are they filled with

tawdry pleasures of clay

Or ready for Him—

what will my sign say?

Marlene Moline

by Wilton E. Bergstrand

Memory is a wonderful—and a terrible—gift given to man. And with the galloping years Christmas becomes, each year, more poignantly, not only a time of *faith* and *joy*, but a season of remembering. With a curious and lighted power, the mind and heart leap back across the years down memory lane—to childhood.

Ah, memories! With memory a man can have icy winds in August and ghosts at his banquet table. But also "With memory," says J. M. Barrie, "a man can have roses in December."

Our childhood home in a small Minnesota town was very simple. We had little of this world's goods—though we did not lack for any of life's necessities. By today's standards, we were poor but I didn't know until years later. For in our home we had love, security, companionship, discipline, responsibilities to develop and mature us, and simple joys—without which a modern mansion with all its affluence and gadgets is poor indeed. So much ingenuity and so much love went into making our old rickety parsonage attractive and liveable that it was home in all the rich meaning of that word.

We had our chores—and it wasn't a question of what we'd get if we did 'em; we knew good and well what we'd get if we didn't: the board of education would be applied to the seat of understanding. One of my chores was to bring in hard coal for the stoves and then empty the ashes. You toasted on one side near the stove; you shivered in the corner of the room. The kitchen range had an enormous, indiscriminate, utterly insatiable appetite for wood. Sometimes I hated her—all the chopping, splitting, lugging, and still that wood-box seemed always to need replenishing. And yet, when I came in from skiing or sliding and that range was so cozy and warm, with the hot water tank on one side, the teakettle singing merrily on the top, the warm, crisp rusks (*skorpor*) in the cupboard above, suddenly all was forgiven and I loved her. In that moment she became the symbol of the warm heart of our home.

In December days everybody was busy getting ready for Christmas. The house was cleaned and polished from stem to stern till everything glistened—and that included the copper

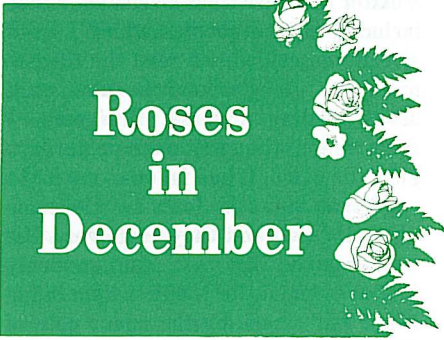
and silver. My dad got a sheaf of grain for the birds and mounted it on a tall pole in the backyard; all God's creatures must share in the wonder of Christmas. I raised chickens—even the chicken coop got its pre-Christmas cleaning. A large reserve of firewood must be cut and stacked, ready for the holidays.

The kitchen range groaned with the weight of food being prepared on it and in it until the very air not only smelled Christmas—it actually tasted Christmas. Mother baked her incomparable rye bread. Across the years I can smell it baking. It was bread to satisfy the hunger of a growing boy, bread of such gastronomic magnificence that once when I came in from skiing on the hill across Spring Lake, I ate nine jam sandwiches along with a like number of cups of cocoa. Mother made rolls, too—and what rolls! Some of the bread and rolls we ate as a family, but much of it Mother shared with the lonely, the sad, the troubled, the shy, the discouraged, the elderly.

"By today's standards,
we were poor
but I didn't know
until years later."

She did the same with the countless potholders she made; and the innumerable handkerchiefs around which she crocheted. "Others can do the big things; I can do the little things," she said. A little gift from Mrs. Bergstrand wrapped in a great love was the turning point in more than one life among the least, the lost in the communities where my folks ministered. Especially did she gift a lift of inspiration and encouragement to harried young mothers. One of my jobs, and joys, was to deliver some of these gifts.

The decorations were in charge of my dad. Red and green twisted crepe paper streamers converged from every corner of the living room to the center chandelier, from which there hung a great red crepe paper bell. The tree was a gift to me each year from druggist Gust Peterson. He sold them and I, as the pastor's son, could pick out any one I wanted from his stock.



Roses in December

On the tree we placed apples, paper loop chains, strings of cranberries, strings of popcorn, popcorn balls, and special ornaments that came to mean so much: a bird, an angel, a star, and live candles. Dozens of twisted six-inch wax candles which not only provided an enchanting light, but also gave off a singular fragrance. We had real candles on the huge trees in church, too—with a bucket and a wet mop in the corner for any emergency. Men lighted them with a taper at the end of a long pole.

Came Christmas Eve—the Day of Adam and Eve—the day to remind us of man's sin, which moved God to send the Saviour. At noon we "dipped in the kettle." Preparing the broth for this took a piece of beef, a piece of pork, and a sausage, all boiled together. The kettle was kept hot on the stove and each person dipped his piece of bread, fastened on a fork, into the rich, steaming broth.

"As twilight descended,
a stillness, a hush,
a holy calm,
seemed to settle
over all creation."

Late in the afternoon of Christmas Eve, we'd have our baths and get all dressed up. There was no nervous haste, no last-minute panic. All was ready. As twilight descended, a stillness, a hush, a holy calm, seemed to settle over all creation. The stars twinkled brightly in the winter sky. A white ermine mantle decked the whole countryside.

ROSES . . .

After the Christmas Eve supper that included all the goodies which I have already described, we read the Christmas story, going around the table, each of us reading a verse. One year, I remember as though it were yesterday, I lost the place. It had fallen to my lot to read that verse in John 1: "He came unto His own and they that were His own received Him not." And suddenly in that moment, for the first time in my life, I was struck by the minor note of Christmas—the rejection of God's Son by man. It was the fact that there was "no room in the inn." And the fact that though He came into the world's darkness and sadness with light and healing, yet men spurned—and still spurn—Him. I forgot to read on. My father gently chided me, until I explained. As a pastor he knew the hurt of it—men's indifference, their callousness, their strange perverse lostness, their choosing of the evil and turning their back on the good.

We sang Christmas hymns and carols, too, a half-dozen. We sang much in our home in those less fevered days. After supper Mother would often sit down at the piano and we would gather 'round.

After the carol concert, Mother and my four sisters put away the food and washed the dishes while the suspense grew. Then came the moment for opening the presents. No need to call twice! Those mysterious boxes had arrived and been locked in the closet. The last few days since they had been placed around the tree, they had been furtively pinched and shaken more than once. Here and there it looked as though a corner had been investigated.

By the time the presents had all been opened, it was getting late; a few hours of precious sleep must be had because

" . . . a few hours
of precious sleep
must be had
because we must all be up
for *Julotta* at 5 o'clock
on Christmas morning."



we must all be up for *Julotta* at 5 o'clock on Christmas morning.

It was so strange to get up while it was still dark. When we stepped next door to the church, we could see the candles burning in our neighbors windows and the smoke curling lazily heavenward out of the chimneys. The church was packed to overflowing. It was unthinkable not to be at church for the Christmas *Julotta* service. The church was ablaze with candles; and festooned with wreaths and bells. As a lad I thought to myself: "This is so beautiful; what must heaven be like!"

The pipe organ, pumped by hand by the old sexton, and played with real musicianship, sounded especially majestic, fit to lead the heavenly chorus itself as it thundered the opening chorale, "All Hail to Thee, O Blessed Morn! To tidings long by prophets born has Thou fulfillment given! O sacred and immortal day, when unto earth in glorious ray, descends the grace of heaven." And the final climactic stanza: "He comes, for our redemption sent, and by His glory heaven is rent to close upon us never; our blessed Shepherd He would be, whom we may follow faithfully and be with Him forever."

And then we listened to the solemn cadence of the great Christmas texts—the Epistle from Isaiah 9:2-7: "The people that walked in darkness have

seen a great light: they that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined . . ."

And the Gospel from Luke 2: "Now it came to pass in those days that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled . . ."

And the stately liturgy, and in between, the sermon—a simple, solid, evangelical message.

Yes, the great climactic memories center in the church—not in the family gatherings, or in the parties, or in the presents. And that is as it should be, for Christmas is the mass of Christ, the worship of Christ. The greatest thing in my heritage is the Christian faith, transmitted across the centuries. These external preparations are only the manger and the straw—it's the Child in the manger that counts.

And then there was the Sunday School Christmas program. What songs: the carols from many lands,

"The greatest thing
in my heritage
is the Christian faith,
transmitted across
the centuries."

BETHLEHEM . . .

ians and the Latins, was bewildering. Dark, winding steps, slippery with the drippings of many candles, led us down into the Grotto of the Nativity. It was a cavern perhaps forty feet long and ten feet wide, lit by thirty pendent lamps (Greek, Armenian and Latin): marble floor and walls hung with draperies; a silver star in the pavement before the altar to mark the spot where Christ was born; a marble manger in the corner to

including "When Christmas Morn is Dawning" and "Come, Let Us Now as Children Sing." There were the recitations—my first one given when I was two, in a little red suit made for me by the skilled and loving hands of Mother. She was an expert seamstress and worked miracles for all us five children with the odd pieces she got from a milliner friend in Chicago. And there was the prized bag given to each pupil: an apple, a popcorn ball, the crinkled ribbon candy, hard candy with patterns inside, and some peanuts.

We were invited to many homes for Christmas festivities the whole festive season which lasted on until January 13. On that evening we were always invited to the home of a Norwegian doctor for a meal, and the curtain went down officially on Christmas.

On a headstone, marking the home-going of a man who died on December 16, 1886, are chiseled these words in a Scandinavian tongue: "His highest wish was to celebrate Christmas in heaven with his dear Saviour." When you understand how much the Christmas celebration meant in those pioneer communities, you begin to sense the deep ardor of that man's aspiration to celebrate the eternal Christmas in the halls of heaven.

There are at least 25 nationalities represented in our Holy Trinity parish. Each ethnic group has brought the best of its customs into this new land for the enrichment of our common life. Many of these customs are basically the same. Each, when understood, has beauty and meaning. May each of us be able to find some "ROSES IN DECEMBER."

—Reprinted with permission from Lutheran *Bond*, December, 1971 issue.

mark the cradle in which Christ was laid; a never-ceasing stream of poor pilgrims, who come kneeling, and kissing the star and the stones and the altar for Christ's sake.

We paused for a while, after we had come up, to ask ourselves whether what we had seen was in any way credible. Yes, credible, but not convincing. No doubt the ancient Khan (the inn or caravansary—Ed.) of Bethlehem must have been somewhere near this spot, in the vicinity of the market-place of the town. No doubt it was the custom, when there were natural hollows or artificial grottos in the rock near such an inn, to use them as shelters and stalls for the cattle. It is quite possible, it is even probable, that this may have been one of the shallow caverns used for such a purpose. If so, there is no reason to deny that this may be the place of the wondrous birth, where, as the old French *Noel* has it:

"Dieu parmy les pastoreaux,
Sous la creche des toreaux,
Dan les champs a voulu naistre;
Et non parmy les arroyes
Des grands princes et des roys,—
Lui des plus grands roys le maistre."



But to the eye, at least, there is no reminder of the scene of the Nativity in this close and stifling chapel, hung with costly silks and embroideries, glittering with rich lamps, filled with the smoke of incense and waxen tapers. And to the heart there is little suggestion of the lonely night when Joseph found a humble refuge here for his young bride to wait in darkness, pain and hope for her hour to come.

In the church above, the Latins and Armenians and Greeks guard their privileges and prerogatives jealously. There have been fights here about the driving of a nail, the hanging of a picture, the sweeping of a bit of the floor. The Crimean War began in a quarrel between the Greeks and the Latins, and a mob-struggle in the Church of the Nativity. Underneath the floor, to the north of the Grotto of the Nativity, is the cave in which Saint Jerome lived peaceably for many years, translating the Bible into Latin. That was better than fighting.

We ate our lunch at Bethlehem in a curiosity-shop. The table was spread at the back of the room by the open window. All around us were hanging innumerable chaplets and rosaries of mother-of-pearl, of carnelian, of carved olive-stones, of glass beads; trinkets and souvenirs of all imaginable kinds, tiny sheep-bells and inlaid boxes and carved fans filled the cases and cabinets. Through the window came the noise of people busy at Bethlehem's chief industry, the cutting and polishing of mother-of-pearl for mementoes. The jingling bells of our pack-train, passing the open door, reminded us that our camp was to be pitched miles away on the road to Hebron.

We called for the horses and rode on through the town. Very beautiful and peaceful was the view from the southern hill, looking down upon the pastures of Bethlehem where "shepherds watched their flocks by night," and the field of Boaz where Ruth followed the reapers among the corn.

Down dale and up hill we journeyed; bright green of almond-trees, dark green of carob-trees, snowy blossoms of apricot-trees, rosy blossoms of peach-trees, argent (silvery—Ed.) verdure of olive-trees, adorning the valleys . . .

—*Out-of-Doors in the Holy Land*,
Charles Scribner's Sons,
Copyright, 1908

the Gospel call
in Madagascar

—by Mrs. Gerald (Karen) Knudsvig

On an early Sunday morning the catechist hammers his accustomed rhythm on a piece of scrap iron which serves as a bell. It is the Gospel call to the people in Madagascar.

The Good News is: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Thanks be to God for this message of hope and joy! Praise God that the Malagasy, and all the world may still hear the good news of Jesus, the Savior of all mankind. Ring out the good news! He gave His all!

Tell me, Mary

Mary, tell me, did you fear
To have an angel presence near?
How could you really comprehend
The mysteries that God would send?

Mary, tell me, did you thrill
At cousin Elizabeth's good will?
Did her excitement at your part
Give needed assurance to your heart?

Mary, Mary, did you cry?
When Joseph thought to pass you by?
And people whispered "What disgrace!"
Did you dread to show your face?

Mary, did you wonder why
"Blessed" should entail a sigh?
Yet reverence and joy you felt
When shepherds and the Wise Men knelt.

By faith in God you took your place
And you His glorious will embraced.
"Behold the handmaid of the Lord,
Let it be according to Thy Word."

—Doris Stensland

A Knock on Christmas Morning

Madagascar is the fourth largest island in the world, which is located off the southeast coast of Africa. It measures 1,000 miles long, 250-330 miles wide and has an area of 240,000 square miles, which is equivalent in land area to the state of Texas. This island has a population of some 9,000,000 people who have an ancestry that is linked with the people of Malaya, Indonesia and the islands north of Australia.

The Malagasy language is Indonesian, closely related to Malay, Batak, etc. There are 18 different tribes of people, each having its own dialect with minor linguistic variations. The inland Malagasy of the Hova tribe supplied a rich and beautiful language that was put into writing with the arrival of the first missionaries from Europe. This island is a one-race nation and is truly the "land at the end of the earth," as Malagasy poet Flanien Ranaivo calls it.

It was 25 years ago, as a new single missionary to Madagascar, when I experienced my first Christmas away from family, friends and my beloved country.

"This island is
a one-race nation
and is truly
the 'land at the end
of the earth' . . ."

This tropical island of great beauty, new climate and new people at Christmastime caused a "Vazaha" (white person) from North Dakota to adjust to:

- The hot 90-120 degree climate;
- The varied means of travel such as canoe, the cart pulled with oxen, bicycle, honda, open-windowed buses, by foot, car or the rickshaw;
- Eating fresh fruit as we enjoyed the shade of its tree;
- Walking on the hot sandy seashore of the Indian Ocean and going for a swim;

—Spearing one's own lobsters for the festival meal;

—Going to the open markets to buy all one's produce;

—Sitting on a straw mat in a one-roomed hut when visiting in a Malagasy home;

—Having Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, Ladies Aid or regular church services in a church, hut or under the shade of a tree;

—Seeing the variety of Christmas trees, such as cactus plants, palm trees, evergreens, etc., decorated with old Christmas cards, popcorn, pieces from old tin cans and candles;

—Practicing Christmas programs weeks in advance;

—The gift-giving of live chickens, geese, guinea hens and fish as well as fruit and vegetables;

—Being included with missionary families for the festive days and meals;

—Voices saying: "Arahaba fa tratry ny Krismasy hianao" (Congratulations, for you have been caught by Christmas!). This was the typical phrase used by the Malagasy and missionary alike during the Holiday Season;

—Going to Christmas programs every night for many days since each group had its own presentations. There would be the Sunday School, Luther League, choir, Ladies Aid and men's group. Each program would last anywhere from one to three hours;

—And, of course, always having the second day of Christmas services and programs.

Christmas is a festive time, a time of expressing our love to dear ones, both family and friends, in many different ways. I especially remember a little boy by the name of Jaona (John) who gave his all to share the love and joy of Christmas! Let me tell you his story.

Jaona (about the age of nine) attended a Vacation Bible School in a small village about 20 miles from the city of Fort Dauphin where I lived. I went there with two other Malagasy workers to teach the children for one week.

"I especially remember
a little boy
by the name of Jaona (John)
who gave his all
to share the love and joy
of Christmas!"

Children came from many smaller villages in the area. During the week we learned many Bible stories and songs. We colored pictures that went with our lessons. We ate all our meals together and most of us slept in the church on straw mats on the floor.

At the close of the week Jaona accepted Jesus as his personal Savior. He gave His testimony and thanked God in that He "gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever (if Jaona) believeth in Him (Jaona) should not perish, but have everlasting life." He then asked us to pray for him because he would be returning to his family of ten who were all heathen. In such a case he would be asked to leave or forsake his Lord. He was afraid to return home! However, we admonished Jaona to return home and to be faithful to Jesus and that we would pray for him daily.

He did return home and in his own way he showed God's love to his family. He was not asked to leave home nor to forsake his Lord! This took place in August. We continued to uphold him in prayer even though we could not visit him often.

Then on December 25th, about 4:30 a.m., there came a knock at my door at my home in Fort Dauphin. I thought it was the usual early morning vendor . . . but no, it was Jaona. It was raining very hard and here he was with a large banana leaf over his head as an umbrella and in his hand he carried something wrapped in a small banana leaf.

I welcomed Jaona into my living room. He then proceeded to tell me why he had walked 20 miles to come to my home on Christmas morning. He said: "First of all, I thank God for sending His Son to save me from my sins. Secondly, I thank the people in America for sending you to our country and my village and, thirdly, I thank you for

being the one to lead me to Jesus. I am so happy He is my Savior and that my family still accepts me. Thank you for praying for us!"

Then as he presented me that which he carried in his hands, he said: "I bring you this gift—it is all that I have. Thank you for bringing the good news of salvation to our village." As I unfolded the wet banana leaf wrapping, inside I found three very ripe bananas. I wept with joy and thankfulness to God for this little Jaona who gave all that he had to eat in order to share the love and joy of Christmas.

Yes, Jaona could have used those bananas but he gave what he had to show his thankfulness. I would have offended him had I not accepted them. I thanked Jaona and assured him that we would continue to pray for him.

Today, to my knowledge, Jaona has at least four more of his family who have accepted Jesus as their Savior! Praise God!

Many changes have taken place in my life since I returned to America in 1973. It was then that I met Gerald and we were married in 1974. God has blessed us with two healthy girls, Sheila and Sara. This Christmas, as every year, we will remember the story of Jaona and be reminded that it's not the amount of the gift that is given but that it be given in love! We pray that we may always be willing vessels for Him to let His love flow through us according to His will! "For God so loved the world." His love is boundless, limitless and unchangeable. Its supply is inexhaustible. Let us ring out the good news . . . He gave His all for all mankind!



The Christmas Tree

Roger C. Huebner, D.D.S.

the old man had seen Jesus

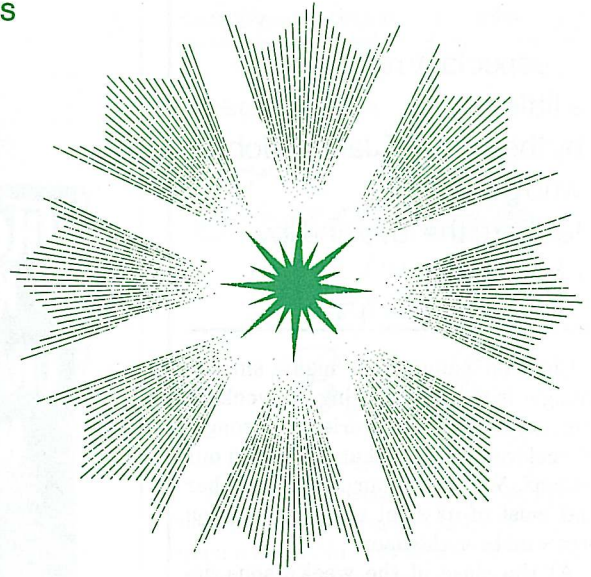
A light for revelation to the Gentiles

It was bright and comfortable in the little church room. The service was over and the congregation was gathered around a large table. About 30 people were present, the older and the small. The church in Kurayoshi on our northern field in Japan is no cathedral, but a simple and practical Japanese house well suited for accommodating a group of people.

There had been a baptism in the congregation that day. Doi-san had heard the Gospel for the first time only a few years earlier. That Sunday he had been made a member of the Christian church on earth. His testimony gripped all of us who were assembled. Also those in the room who still were heathens felt the power which filled that genuine, joyous testimony about the Lord.

by Egil Grandhagen,
Norwegian
Lutheran Mission,
Oslo, Norway

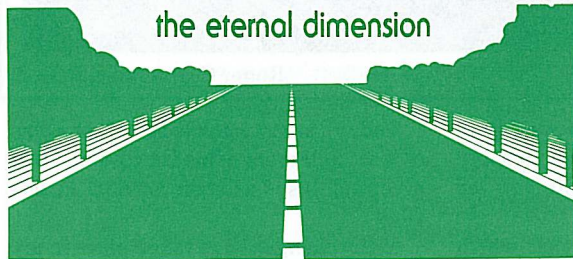
While we sat around the table, opportunity was given for anyone to speak. The believers told freely about how rich life with the Lord is. Then all of a sudden an elderly man got up at one end of the table. He began to tell about himself. He had been a Buddhist his whole life with the responsibility of taking care of the ancestral altar in his home. He thought and lived as a Buddhist. Then one day his oldest son became a Christian. That was a shock for the father, but the son repeatedly in-



“He had been a Buddhist
his whole life
with the responsibility
of taking care of an ancestral
altar in his home.”

vited him to come to church. Eventually he came to a meeting.

“I didn’t understand anything the speaker said,” said the old man. “But



the eternal dimension

a new
dimension
in Christmas
celebration

When I reflect on Christmas, much of that reflection returns to my childhood. I suppose that’s because Christmas was the most special time of the year for me. Out of my reflection comes a mixture of the religious and non-religious. It is a mixture and a blend of happy things. In spite of all the non-religious, I was very aware that Christmas meant that God must think of me in a friendly way, wishing to befriend me. You, no doubt, have your Christmas memories. I suppose Christmas memories are as varied as the people sharing them.

All of this brings me to wonder what God’s Christmas thoughts are. Does He get as excited about Christmas as we do? Are His thoughts better than ours? What did God think about that first Christmas? Galatians 4:4-7 may give us a few ideas. There we learn what time it was when the Savior was born. It was exactly the right time. It was “in the fullness of time.” It was God’s proper time. God is always on time. Second, it was the sending forth of His eternal Son, by way of a human birth, into our world. Third, it was the sending forth of that Son to live under His perfect Law

that He might redeem a fallen race, which the Law could only curse. Fourth, it was an undertaking that would make it possible for God to receive such people into His family, through adoption as Sons. The text says this is what makes it possible for God to send forth His Spirit into our hearts, that we might have the heart of a simple child calling upon a Father. Sinners need no longer be slaves, but rather sons. Last of all, it says because we are sons, we are also heirs.

This leads me to see that I have failed to understand and celebrate the Christmas of God in all its fullness. I have failed to trace God’s thoughts from the beginning to the end in this Christmas matter. There is much which is right about past Christmas celebrations, but I see that God’s Christmas mission is not yet completed. All the redeeming work of Christ is one, that is, has one purpose. That purpose is to bring me to that great consummation when Christ

the next Sunday I had to be along with my son to church. And now I have been coming here steadily every week for several months. To begin with I felt how much I disliked in going to the meetings. There were so many filthy and evil things within me. Many of them I had never thought about before. My will was evil!"

I had to look more closely at this man who had such strong Buddhist roots and who so suddenly had come to see himself in a new way.

"But now I have come to see something else," he continued. "That Jesus has taken care of all that which is wrong with me."

Then the word from Simeon's testimony about Jesus stood before me: "A light for revelation to the Gentiles."

The parents of Jesus, in accordance with the law of Moses, had taken the child with them to the temple. Here they met one of those who waited for the time when the Savior would come as God had promised, Simeon. Then it was that Simeon took the child in his arms and said:

"Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for the glory of Thy people Israel."

"Precisely because Jesus
was given for all,
have all people the right
to hear about Him."

The little child Simeon had in his arms was the salvation of God. The light is the exact symbol of salvation. Jesus was to be a light for revelation to the Gentiles. The heathen, it is certain, have an idea who God is. Both in nature and conscience they have a weak standpoint for their belief in God, but the revelation of light, of God's glorious salvation, they cannot know by any other means than that the message about Jesus be proclaimed. The hope of the old Japanese man was that he got to hear the Gospel preached. Through what he heard, God revealed Himself to him both in His holiness and in His boundless love.

All people were in God's thoughts when He sent His Son to this earth. The child in Simeon's hands was to be an atonement for all the sin of the world. Precisely because Jesus was given for all, all people have the right to hear about Him. The misfortune of the heathen is that they don't have any knowledge of God's rich grace in Jesus

Christ. If the heathen are to be saved, they must personally be acquainted with the Gospel. And the Gospel is revealed neither in nature nor conscience. It must be told by witnesses who have met Jesus in His own Word.

It is this which is our mission. Together with Simeon and all the Lord's witnesses we are ourselves to bring God's message of salvation everywhere, to the uttermost parts of the earth.

"Now I have seen something more," said the old Japanese. "Jesus has settled up for all that was wrong with me."

What blessing when the Lord, also through the work we get to have a part in, reveals Himself to the heathen. There are many who have gotten to experience this this past year and we who are friends of missions thank God.

A blessed Christmastime!

—Reprinted from *Utsyn*, December 22, 1985, Oslo, Norway. Translated from Norwegian.

shall come out of heaven again, and He's coming for me and all who have made Him their Savior. I have not yet received all that God put into Christmas and I will not receive all of it until the Christmas mission is completed.

I have another thought. It would seem to me that the completion of the Christmas mission may not be far away. The "fullness of time" could be very near. It could be that God will soon send forth His Son again. I can only praise God for such a prospect. Christmas takes on a new dimension. Christmas is more wonderful than I have realized. I have long believed in Christ's second coming, but I have not before made it a part of the Christmas mission. I share it with you. This year, as you celebrate Christmas, look into the future also, for the Christmas mission awaits its completion! I wish you a blessed Christmas!

*Pastor Emerson Anderson,
Cleveland, O.*

Great Joy

Hearken unto me, you of sad and troubled heart, I bring you good tidings. For He hath not come down to earth and been made Man, that He might cast you into hell, much less was He for that end crucified and given over unto death for you. But He has come, that with great joy ye might rejoice in Him. And if thou wouldst truly define Christ and properly describe who and what He is, mark well the angel's word, how he defined and describes Him, saying that He is and is called: "Great Joy." O, blessed is the man who can well understand the meaning of this word, and hold it truly in his heart; for therein dwelleth strength.

Martin Luther
(*Day By Day We Magnify Thee*)

by Mrs. Arnold (Lydia) McCarlson

Thanksgiving was only a memory as the household settled down again after the weekend visit of relatives and the aroma of all the good food. Peace and quiet reigned, but not for long.

The loud ring of the doorbell, followed by several more persistent rings, told me someone wanted to come in: of course, it was my grandson Eric and this time something important was on his mind.

"Grandma, do you know that Christmas will be coming soon?" I knew, because he was covered with fresh snow and snow and Christmas go hand in hand.

Calming him down long enough to remove his coat and boots, we finally could talk. "Where have you been, Eric?"

"Oh, I've been over to the church getting my part for the Christmas program. And know what, Grandma, this year I'm not going to be a wise man like Benny and I were last year; I'm going to be a shepherd!" His eyes widened in excitement and anticipation.

May I be a shepherd?

I was a little taken aback and said, "But, Eric, you looked so nice in your robes and carrying gifts to Baby Jesus."

"But, Grandma, that isn't it. It's not what you look like, it's how you feel. I've looked at pictures of wise men and they are rich, ride camels and carry expensive gifts. I'm a farm boy and I love animals, cows, horses and sheep."

"... this year I'm
not going to be a wise man
like Benny and I
were last year;
I'm going to be a shepherd!"

"This summer, in Vacation Bible School and Sunday School we've studied about Jesus as our shepherd and how we are His sheep. And Mother read stories to me about Christmas Eve and the shepherds who were out on the hillside just doing their job of watching the sheep when the angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone over them. They were afraid but the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. This very day in David's town your Savior was born—Christ the Lord." They heard singing and praising. They left their flocks and went into Bethlehem and found Mary, Joseph and Baby Jesus. They knew that a great event had taken place. "The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them" (Luke 2:20 KJV).

"So, you and Benny want to be shepherds. I think you have chosen wisely.

about our writers . . .

Dr. Francis Monseth is the dean of Association Free Lutheran Theological Seminary . . . Mrs. J. G. Erickson (Fosston, Minn.) and Mrs. Richard Gunderson (Lake Stevens, Wash.) are AFLC pastors' wives. The latter will be a regular contributor to the *Ambassador* in 1987 . . . Rev. Richard Snipstead is the president of the AFLC . . . Henry Van Dyke is known for his poetry and his little book *The Other Wise Man* . . . Rev. Harvey Carlson is a retired AFLC pastor, living in St. Paul, Minn. . . Rev. Wilton Bergstrand is an LCA pastor and was once youth director of the former Augustana Synod . . . Mrs. Gerald Knudsvig, Buxton, N. Dak., was a missionary under the ALC and is now a housewife and mother . . . Don Rodvold is the former director of music and instructor at Association Free Lutheran Bible School and the Theological Seminary . . . Mrs. Arnold McCarlson, Langford, S. Dak., Mrs. Doris Stensland, Canton, S. Dak., Mrs. Kenneth Tweed, McHenry, N. Dak., and Mrs. Marlene Moline, Lansing, Ia., are housewives who have the avocation of writing . . . Martin Luther and Walter A. Maier, Sr., need no introduction and several other writers are unknown to us, unfortunately.

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 she held membership.

MINNESOTA

Greenbush

Thilda Emilge (Em) Brandvold, 78, Nov. 1, Rose, Roseau, Minn.

Fertile

Ona E. Broden, 78, Nov. 15, Maple Bay. (Miss Broden was the organist of her church for 64 years.)

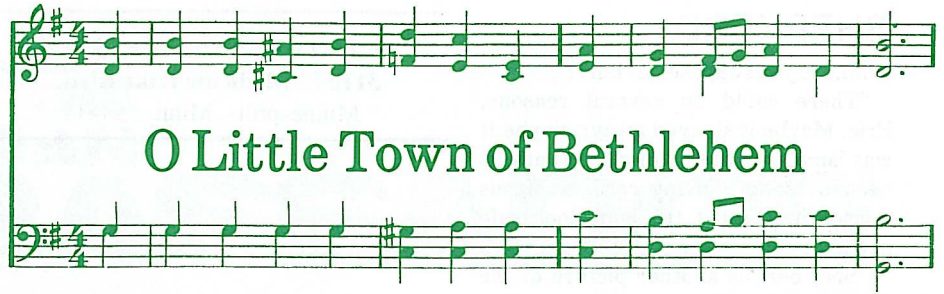
Let's look in your Bible Story book and find pictures of shepherds and sheep." So Eric and I sat down to look at pictures. "Look, Grandma, Jesus loves little lambs and sheep! He's carrying the

cont. on p. 24



our hymn study

Concordia, No. 133
Phillips Brooks, 1868
Tune: St. Louis
Lewis H. Redner, 1868



In 1865 Reverend Brooks was given a leave of absence from his Philadelphia parish to visit the Holy Land. During the Christmas season he visited Bethlehem and in a letter to his congregation he wrote of that visit.

"After an early dinner, we took our horses and rode to Bethlehem. It was only about two hours when we came to the town, situated on an eastern ridge of a range of hills, surrounded by terraced gardens. Before dark, we rode out of town to the field where they say the shepherds saw the Star. It is a fenced piece of ground with a cave in it . . . where the shepherds sleep. As we passed we saw shepherds 'keeping watch over their flocks.' Somewhere in those same fields the (Biblical) shepherds must have been."

Brooks goes on to describe the events of that evening. He went from there to worship in the church that is constructed on the traditional site of the Nativity. As the impact of the emotion-filled events of that day cultured in his mind he was inspired to record them in this carol, especially written for the children of his Sunday School at Holy Trinity Church in Philadelphia.

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

For Christ is born of Mary;
And gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wond'ring love.
O morning stars, together
Proclaim the holy birth;
And praises sing to God our King,
And peace to men on earth.

How silently, how silently
The wondrous gift is giv'n!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His heav'n.
No ear may hear His coming,
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will
receive Him still,
The dear Christ enters in.

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

St. 1) The little city is quaintly pictured—quiet under the starry heavens and at rest after a busy day, not knowing that the promises God gave to us through the prophets are being fulfilled at that moment in history. The "everlasting Light" is not the Star of the East but "The Light of the World" (John 1:9 and 8:12). The hopes and fears of all time are reckoned in the birth of the Incarnate Son of God, our Savior.

St. 2) The scene focuses on the choir of angels singing o'er the fields, the same choir that sang together at the creation (Job 38:7).

St. 3) Jesus came in silence and humility and that is also how God imparts His Spirit to us today, to whoever will receive Him.

St. 4) The hymn concludes with a childlike prayer, an invitation to make our hearts His home. To a child, the metaphor "Be born in us" means a feeling of love filling the heart, chasing out our "badness." We earnestly plead, "Come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel," Emmanuel meaning God with us.

Phillips Brooks, the boy, was raised in a musical atmosphere where memorizing and reciting hymns was the order of the day. By the time he went to college he had memorized over 200. Brooks, the man, became a famous and successful hymn writer and preacher and the implication that there is a connection is absolutely intended. Teach your children now what you would have them be, in all things, including music, and you'll raise up a noble servant. Shun baby music as you would baby talk; wean them from milk to solids, not only in real food but in spiritual and musical food. We are what we eat. Put something of substance on children's lips and before long it's in their hearts. Put into their mouths and hearts the pure, strong and edifying words of good hymns and they will be brought up in the pure teaching of the Church.

St. Louis was composed for this hymn by Lewis Redner, organist and Sunday School superintendent at Brooks' church in Philadelphia. As Christmas approached, Brooks told Redner that he had written a simple carol and wanted him to set it to music. It was done in the nick of time, just hours before Christmas. Redner awoke in the night with the tune on his mind. He wrote it down and the next morning arranged its harmony and, just hours later, in Sunday School on December 25, 1868, it was sung for the first time. Over 20 years passed before it found its way into common use through publication but since then it has swept the world.

Brooks, who had a delightful sense of humor, suggested to Redner that "if he wrote a suitable tune he would call it 'St. Lewis.'" When the carol was finally published, Brooks wryly named it *St. Louis*, disguising his organist's first name with a different spelling, a little joke that will last a long time and be enjoyed by a lot of people.

—Don Rodvold

SHEPHERD . . .

lamb. Do you suppose it is hurt?"

"There could be several reasons, Eric. Maybe it strayed away; maybe it was lame or not as strong as others. It needed tender, loving care, so Jesus carried it. Doesn't the lamb look safe and happy?"

"See, here is another picture of the shepherds on Christmas Eve. That shepherd is carrying a lamb, too, and he's pointing to the light that shone all around them. That's what I can't figure out. There were lots of people in Bethlehem, even rich people, but the angels chose to tell the shepherds. Why? asked Eric.

"Questions, questions," Grandma thought. "Only the Bible has the answer." So she turned to Leviticus and read silently. Turning to Eric, she explained, "It's a long story, but for now just listen. In the Old Testament times people brought burnt offerings to the Lord. Often a lamb without blemish was killed or other animals offered. Jesus' death on the cross made the final offering for all of our sins so that we could be forever washed clean. When you hear the words 'redeemed in His blood,' 'whiter than snow,' 'the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world,' you realize God sent His Son to die for our sins. In Psalm 23, one of my favorites, we read, 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.' He is the Good Shepherd and we are His sheep. He is as concerned about us just as that shepherd on the hills of Bethlehem on Christmas Eve cared for his sheep.

"Jesus said, 'My sheep hear My voice: a stranger will not they follow, for they know not the voice of strangers' (John 10:27).

"That reminds me of a story I read recently. A young boy who had been blind from birth underwent surgery which the doctors were confident would give him sight for the first time in his life. The bandages came off and the boy could indeed see. But when he looked at the woman beside his bed, he didn't show any sign of knowing her. It was only when she spoke that he smiled and the tears of joy flowed. He had never seen his mother but had learned to trust and love her voice. We, too, love and trust the voice of our Good Shepherd.

"Eric, I'm so happy you wanted to be a shepherd this year for the Sunday

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School Christmas program. I see it means a lot to you."

Eric smiled happily, "Thanks for telling me about shepherds. God had it planned all the time, hadn't He?"

After eating his snack of milk and cookies, Eric put on his coat and boots and disappeared into the gentle, falling snow which truly meant Christmas would soon be here.

Into my mind came the verse, Isaiah

53:6: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." If the Good Shepherd had not searched for us until He found us, many of us today would still be lost in the ravines of sin.

This Christmas, let us thank God for His Son, for we are precious to Him and by His grace we are saved through faith in Jesus.

GOSPEL STORY

A star above a stable
To guide the seeker there,
A mother's gentle lullaby,
A shepherd's humble prayer.

A simple home in Nazareth,
A boy who loved God's Word,
A patient, loving teacher,
A firm triumphant Lord.

A cross outside a city,
The sky as black as doom,
A cave hewn in the hillside—
There was the Master's tomb.

A sunlit first-day morning,
A stone was rolled away,
The joy of God's salvation
Was brought to light that day.

Oh, Man, who's looking inward,
Toss off your load of care.
Look back across the centuries
And find your answer there.

Mrs. Kenneth (Ruth) Tweed

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