



THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

December 21, 1993



*Keeping Joy
in Christmas*



THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

December 21, 1993 • Vol. 31, No. 24

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

CONTENTS

Joy in a Genealogy	p. 3
Good Christian Men Rejoice	p. 6, 7
Singing the Same Old Song with Joy	p. 8
Joy in the Dumps	p. 9
My Most Joyous Christmas Eve	p. 14

COVER PHOTO

By Solveig Hjermstad

Subscriptions: \$15.00 year, U. S.
\$18.00 year, International

Write to:

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

Send all communications concerning this magazine to: Solveig Hjermstad, Assistant to the Editor, Box 423, Faith, South Dakota 57626. Phone (605) 967-2381. Fax (605) 967-2382.

USPS 588-620 ISSN 0746-3413

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

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

Rev. Craig Johnson, Editor
Mrs. Wayne Hjermstad, Assistant to the Editor

Editorial Board:

Rev. Wendell Johnson, Chairman
Dr. Francis Monseth, Secretary
Mr. Robert Knutson

Time Fully Come

In Genesis 3:15 we see the first promise of a Savior to be sent into the world. Over four thousand years later our Lord fulfilled that promise.

"When the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman" (Galatians 4:4). Everything had to be in the right place and every condition right before God would send His Son into the world as the Savior of mankind. So what was that world like into which God sent His Son?

When Jesus was born in that lowly Bethlehem manger, most of the civilized world was under the control of Rome. Luke 2:1 records that fact that Caesar Augustus was the ruling emperor. He governed the empire with great ability and wisdom. He improved the roads, organized police and fire departments, promoted peace and prosperity and generally improved the morale of the people. Part of his organizational plan required a census of the population and all of the property as a base for taxation. That is why Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem.

The Roman Empire grew in two ways: cities, states and territories either voluntarily joined the empire or they were conquered by force. They then became a part of a province. The peaceful and loyal provinces were responsible to the Roman Senate. The troublesome provinces were directly responsible to the emperor who in turn appointed his own governor and army to reside in that province. Palestine at the time of Jesus' birth was under the direct supervision of the emperor. Generally, the provinces were allowed to mint their own money. If they did not have local money when they came to the temple for their sacrifices, they would have to exchange their money at the money changers' tables. Jesus was much disturbed by this practice in the temple.

For several years before the birth of Jesus there had been a struggle within the Jewish community over who would be the king of the Jews. At the age of 22, Herod the Great had succeeded in maneuvering to the top position and was inaugurated by the Roman Senate

as king of the Jews in 37 B.C. Since he was not of Jewish blood he never did succeed in winning the friendship of the Jews. And so we see in Scripture a hard, heartless, ruthless, jealous king searching for a newborn King.

Slaves made up a large percentage of the Roman Empire. Probably half of the Roman Empire would have been considered slaves since they had been conquered by the Roman armies. Many of them were skilled and well educated. The New Testament speaks often about slaves.

Among the conquests of Rome were the Greek colonies. Many of the Greeks became slaves in Roman and Jewish households. Among the slaves were accountants, doctors, teachers, supervisors, musicians and traders. Many had more education than their masters. Greek slaves were especially sought because they could teach the household the Greek language which was the international trading and business language of that day. God would use that in spreading the gospel to distant lands in coming years.

And so it was that in that society God had prepared a very unique couple by the name of Mary and Joseph to usher in the Messiah.

This Christmas, the time has fully come again to receive this Jesus. He wants to come into your heart and life. He stands today saying: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne" (Revelation 3:20).



— by Rev.
Walter Johnson

JOY IN A GENEALOGY

Joy at Christmas? How can this be? Where is joy for the people of Bosnia or Somalia? Where is joy for the newly divorced? Where is joy for the child neglected and abused? Where does joy come from? If it comes from what happens to us, joy can be a scarce commodity; but joy is found in surprising places. In Matthew chapter one we read:

A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham; Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob ... Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram ... Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel the father of Abiud ... Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

Joy in a genealogy? How can this be? We of the western world do not appreciate genealogies. To our existential minds they seem unnecessary, even boring — but they serve a purpose. I read an account of a missionary who discovered that other people take a very different view of genealogies. The missionary had been working with a tribe for quite some time, translating the Bible and telling them about God. The people were polite, but noncommittal. When he finished the part of the gospel that contained the

genealogies, he gave it to one of the tribesmen to check his work. As the tribesman read it, he became very excited and called for his friends. Puzzled by their interest, the missionary asked them what caught their attention. They pointed to the list of names. "This genealogy, it means that what you have been telling us is real." The genealogies tell us the Bible is about real people, real places; things that really happened.

That is why we can have joy at Christmas. Jesus is real. At a certain time and place, God opened the heavens and stepped into our world. He became one with us. He experienced our pain, our loss and our grief and in that act brought the healing power of God to us. God, with His infinite power to bring justice, peace and healing, cared enough to come and lift us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

This is a real event. The disciples had this conviction: "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye witnesses of His Majesty" (II Peter 1:16). They found in the Messiah, Jesus Christ, a source of joy that did not depend on what happened to them. They had joy in prison or when facing death. The events in Bosnia, around the block or in your own home cannot change the fact that: "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).



— by Rev. Steve Snipstead
Faith Free Lutheran Church
Kalispell, Montana

A Real Reason for Joy

The Majang people live in the forested mountains of western Ethiopia. Traditionally, they have been quite isolated from the outside world. Their view of God and His relationship to themselves had nothing to do with joy.

As I understand their theology, it's roughly like this: "The creator god hates us." That is: "the creator likes other groups of people, but not us Majang." Not only does the creator god not like the Majang, he is also felt to be far away, distant, uninvolved and uncommunicative. Their religion consisted of sacrifices to spirits; animals ritually slaughtered; money left under sacred trees; pairs of people drinking from a double-spigoted pot getting drunk as an act of worship. The Majang lived in the forest with this gloomy theology, with little contact with outsiders.

In the late 1960s, Christian missionaries, Harvey and Lavina Hoekstra, moved into Majang land. Strange people, with strange clothes, a strange language, and a variety of

strange gadgets. Not only that, they had a strange message about the creator god. They taught the Majang that God the Creator is not distant and unresponsive. He is close and caring. Not only that, He loves us all, including the Majang! He loves us so much he sent His Son to be born for us and to die to save us.

That was good news! In the mid 70s, there was a great movement of God's Spirit among the Majang people at Christmas time. Hundreds of them turned from their old ways to worshipping Jesus Christ as Lord. Now, every year at Christmas, Majang believers have joyful celebrations and special church programs to celebrate the coming of their Savior.

Though they have no tinsel, no decorated trees, no wrapped gifts, no wreaths, they have "great joy ... for to you is born ... a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

We, like the Majang, have the same reason for real joy at Christmas. "a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

— Pete Unseth
Missionary to Ethiopia

Jeg er sa Glad Hver Julekved

(I am so glad
each Christmas
Eve)

— from *West Lisbon Messenger*
Newark, Illinois
December, 1993

Perhaps you have heard the Sunday School children sing this Christmas song. This well known and beloved Norwegian Christmas carol is called "the Child's Christmas song." It was written by Inger Marie Lycke Wexelsen. Marie was born at the farm Sukkestad at Toten, Norway and belonged to a famous family. Her mother was the sister of the famous Danish/Norwegian pastor and hymn poet Wilhelm Andreas Wexels.

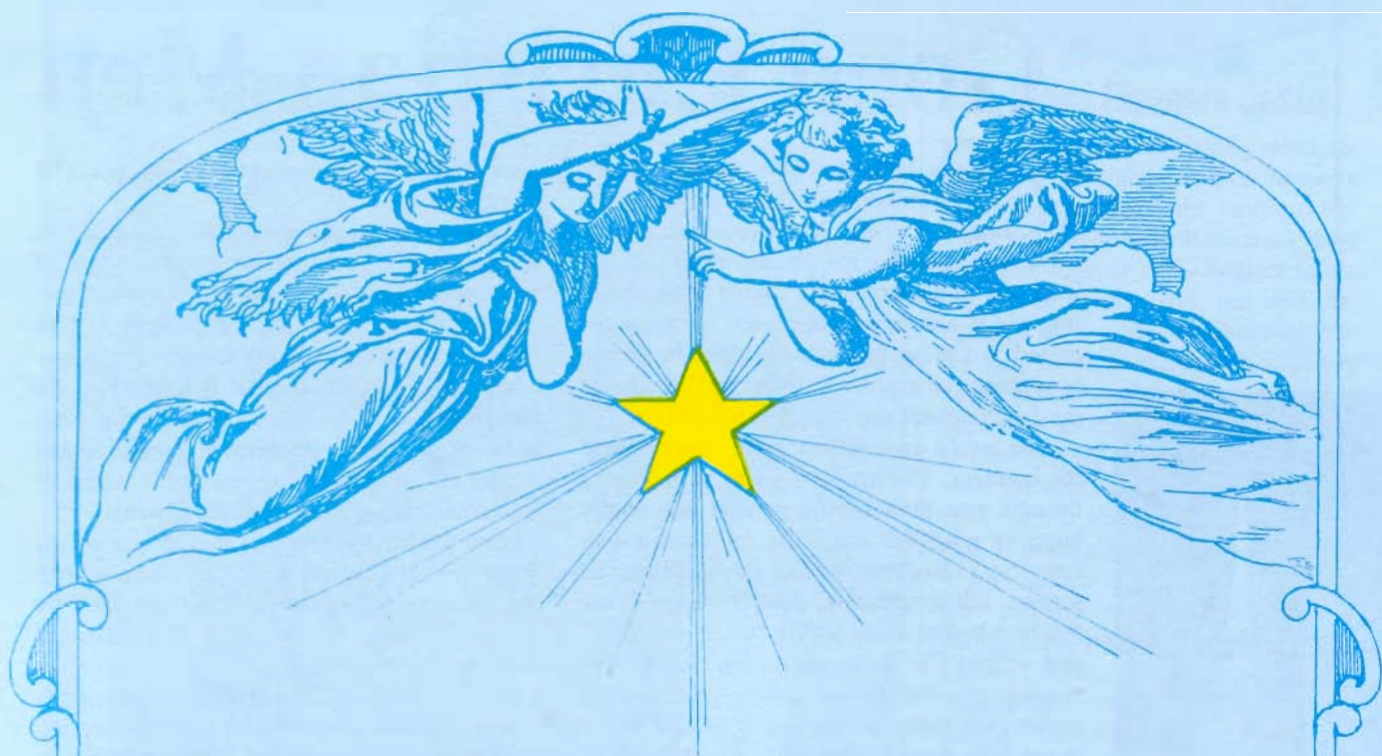
"I Am So Glad Each Christmas Eve" was written on a Christmas Eve in 1858. The well known Norwegian poet Ronald Fangen called it: "... one of the most inspired songs there is in Scandinavia."

The old folks at Toten relate the story of this song's origin: "Marie Wexelsen was sitting in the kitchen of her homestead of Sukkestad on Christmas Eve afternoon waiting for some guests to arrive. It was dusk outside, and the church bells began to ring in Christmas. Her mother was lighting the Christmas lights in the living room, as it says in the song: "When mother trims the Christmas tree, which fill the room with light, she tells me of the wondrous star, that made the dark world bright." This was the atmosphere in which this song was written.

It is indisputably the song most beloved to all children in Norway. They know it by heart and sing it with great joy every time. When in 1911, Marie was buried in the "Tilfredshet" cemetery in Trondheim, a large number of children were present. When they were to sing at the graveside they intoned: "I Am So Glad Each Christmas Eve."

For a long time the composer of the melody was unknown, but today we know that it was an organist Peder Knudsen at Alesund.

Artwork by Rosalie Paulson
Fosston, Minnesota



*I am so glad each Christmas Eve!
His praises then I sing;
He opens then for every child
The palace of the King.*

*And so I love each Christmas Eve,
And I love Jesus, too;
And that He loves me every day
I know so well is true.*



Good Christian Men

Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, rejoice (Philippians 4:4). Christmas is the time of the year when you would think there would be more joy than any other time. At least one would expect the church to be rejoicing; and if not the whole church, certainly the pastor! A Christmas message should be simple to prepare and a joy to deliver. Yet, because of our fallen natures and sin, joy is not a given.

The world experiences great stress during the holidays. The stress of trying to be happy through vain materialistic pursuits and empty hopes of good will weigh the spirit down with heaviness. Broken relationships, shattered dreams, selfish ambition, decaying morals cannot be whisked away with a "Deck the Halls" and a little Christmas cheer. No matter how much money one throws at these problems, no matter how many parties one is invited to, no matter how many perfect gifts one purchases or receives, no matter how many food banks one give to, they cannot produce joy or conceal its absence! Often the opposite is true. The glitter and gleam is only an outward covering for an increasing despair of life itself. Regardless of how many lights the world strings, the darkness of sin extinguishes the striving for joy. It is into this dismal scene that God descends with the radiant, hopeful message of joy.

The Christian also struggles at this time of year. The triumphant refrain, "How great our joy! Joy, joy, joy!" is replaced with the words, "How great our pressure! Pressure, pressure, pressure!" This too is a result of living in a fallen world and having a fallen nature. It is easy to get caught up in a whirlwind of activities, family gatherings, school and church programs, dinners: the list seemingly never ends! Activities with good purposes driven by people with good intentions, but often activities which seem to drain the joy right out of Christmas. The pressure is increased when the believer, already frustrated and discouraged, realizes he is to be doing all of this with a joyful spirit. Shouldn't good Christian men rejoice? The natural inclination is to put on a mask and give the impression of great joy only to increase the pressure by living under the bondage of guilt. It is as if a spiritual winter wind has blown the joy of Christmas away. It is into this spiritual whirl-

wind that God breathes the calming, peaceful message of joy.

Now it's the pastor's turn! Why, it would be second nature for him to have that message of joy; one which would enlighten the unbeliever and at the same time take the pressure off the believer. Yet, after seminary training and sometimes years of experience the thought: "How do I keep this old, familiar story fresh?" is foremost in his mind. He too operates in a world where everyone wants something new or if not new, at least something with an innovative twist!

Another thought that can plague him comes in the form of a cynical doubt, "Is there any hope that those who come only at Christmas could be changed through the preaching of a message? Will this message make any significant difference in the lives of Christians who have heard it time and again?" To even think this, let alone say it, causes him to be ashamed. He hears an accusing voice from within saying, "And you call yourself a man of faith!" Again, it is into these echoing recesses of the mind that God whispers the fresh, powerful message of joy.

What is this message of joy? How can it prevail? The answer is found in Jesus! He is the message! He is the source of all joy! He has triumphantly prevailed! Sometimes the most obvious is the hardest to see. Jesus is the priceless treasure who has come in human form. We declare to a darkened world that He is the gift which has descended into Hell itself in order that all might have eternal life, hope, and joy through Him!

"Regardless of how many lights the world strings, the darkness of sin extinguishes the striving for joy. It is into this dismal scene that God descends with the radiant, hopeful message of joy."



Rejoice!

The message radiates the forgiving love of Heaven, seeking to embrace lost sinners just as they are. "Joy to the world, the Lord has come!" The message announces, "... the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out!" (John 6:37). But this prevailing message does not stop here. It blows out over the whirlwind of life's pressures and says with the hymn writer. "O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant, O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem; Come and behold Him, born the King of angels; O come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him, Christ, the Lord. Amen!"

The message relieves the pressure by assuring the believer that His coming and His doing is our joy! Listen to Him. Adore Him. Rest in Him as His Word and work proclaim. "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 16:11).

Finally, the message speaks to the messenger. He says to pastors: "... preach Christ and Him crucified" (I Corinthians 1:23). Again He says: "... preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, that the cross of Christ should not be made void" (I Corinthians 1:17). Jesus reassures the preacher: "So shall My Word be which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11).

It is the only message known unto man that is living and active and powerful. The only message that brings with it the very power of God which enables its listeners to respond. Jesus whispers into the pastor's ears: "I, the eternal God, am ever the same, yet always fresh. I am able. Just preach it." What a joyful relief it is to follow the hymn writer's advice: "Go, tell it on the mountains, over the hills and everywhere; Go tell it on the mountains that Jesus Christ is born!"

Christmas joy is wrapped up in a person. He is the message. "Give ye heed to what we say ... now ye hear of endless bliss; Joy! Joy! Jesus Christ was born for this!" Truly it can be said, "Rejoice in the Lord always." Yes. "Good Christian Men Rejoice."

— submitted by an AFLC pastor



Joy and Love

*Joy and love embrace all people,
Jesus Christ is born today!
God gives us his Son, our Savior,
born a light to light our hearts;
Sing and shout the song of peace:
Joy and love are born in us!*

*Joy comes down from God to touch us
like the falling rain and snow;
Joy lifts hearts with bursting goodness,
giving hope to break our fear;
sing and shout the song of peace:
Joy and love are born in us!*

*Love gives comfort, warmth and beauty
like a candle in the dark;
Love burns softly in our sad hearts,
giving us new zest for life;
Sing and shout the song of peace;
Joy and love are born in us!*

*Joy and love embrace all people,
Jesus Christ is born today!
God gives us his son, our Savior,
born a light to light our hearts;
Sing and shout the song of peace:
Joy and love are born in us!*

— TUNE: LBW #250. UNSER HERRSSCHER
TEXT: Copyright Roger Lauren Tappert 1976



Singing
the same
old song

WITH
JOY!

From the earliest days of Christianity there have been joyful celebrations surrounding the birth of Christ. The story of the nativity has been the inspiration for songs around the world, many of which are an important part of our church services and celebrations during the Christmas season.

Martin Luther believed that next to theology, music should be given great importance and held in highest regard. Music can be a very effective way of communicating God's Word to those who may never come to hear the spoken Word. Here is the message that the old familiar carols bring:

God sent His only Son ...

"From heaven above to earth I come" (*From Heaven Above to Earth I Come*).

"Joy to the world! The Lord is come" (*Joy to the World*).

"For unto us a Child is born, a Son is given" (*Messiah*).

To be born as a baby in humble surroundings ...

"Once in royal David's city stood a lowly cattle shed, where a mother laid her baby in a manger for His bed" (*Once in Royal David's City*).

"Away in a manger no crib for a bed" (*Away in a Manger*).

"Amid the cold of winter when half spent was the night" (*Lo How a Rose E'er Blooming*).

"What Child is this, who laid to rest, on Mary's lap is sleeping?" (*What Child is This?*).

And that there was great rejoicing ...

"Hark! the herald angels sing, glory to the newborn King" (*Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*).

"Sing choirs of angels, sing in exultation" (*O Come All Ye Faithful*).

"Gloria in excelsis Deo!" (*Angels We have Heard on High*).

"Glad tidings of great joy I bring to you and all mankind" (*While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks*).

Because this baby Jesus would bring freedom and salvation ...

"For Jesus Christ our Savior was born upon this day, to save us all from Satan's power when we were gone astray." (*God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen*).

"Peace on earth and mercy mild; God and sin-

ners reconciled" (*Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*).

"The King of Kings salvation brings" (*What child is This?*).

"Come, thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free; from our fears and sins release us" (*Come Thou Long Expected Jesus*).

"Light and life to all He brings, risen with healing in His wings ... born that man no more may die, born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth" (*Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*).

"Now ye need not fear the grave; Jesus Christ was born to save" (*Good Christian Men Rejoice*).

"And ransom captive Israel" (*O Come, O Come Emmanuel*).

"The dawn of redeeming grace, Jesus Lord at Thy birth" (*Silent Night*).

And will reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

"Come and worship, worship Christ the newborn King" (*Angels From the Realms of Glory*).

"Born is the King of Israel" (*The First Noel*).

"King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, and He shall reign forever and ever." (*Messiah*).

"He rules the world with truth and grace" (*Joy to the World*).

To this our response should be ...

"Let earth receive her King; let every heart prepare Him room" (*Joy to the World*).

"O come let us adore Him" (*O Come All Ye Faithful*).

"Truly He taught us to love one another" (*O Holy Night*).

"Go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born" (*Go Tell it on the Mountain*).

Because of my profession as a musician, preparation of Christmas music starts long before the Christmas season begins. These old familiar carols could become tedious. However, when it comes time to sing, play, direct or teach these songs, the music brings joy to students, audiences and to me.

If you are one who follows along in the hymnal but never opens your mouth to sing, or if you sing half-heartedly these "same old" Christmas songs, I challenge you to join in and sing from your heart the beautiful Christmas message. Surprise your pastor and lift the rafters of your church with the glorious sounds of Christmas music this season! As you do, may your spirits be lifted and may you too be filled with joy because of the message and the mission of the baby born so long ago in Bethlehem.

—Lois Presteng Forde
Elim Lutheran Church
Lake Stevens, Washington

Joy in the Dumps

Joy at Christmas is everyone's desire. My desire is to be down in the dumps at Christmas! I want that so much that I have been working toward that goal for the past nine months; ever since last February when my husband, Eldon, and I had our first down-in-the-dumps experience.

Returning to that Texas-Mexico border area has been a burning passion these past months. The Lord has marvelously provided for this return trip. On December 1, 1993, Eldon and I left our home in Hancock, Michigan, with a rental truck towing our car. The truck was packed with clothes, shoes, blankets, household goods, craft projects, school supplies, Spanish Christian literature, food and plenty of toys for the children in time for Christmas giving. All these goods were contributed by dozens of individuals in our Upper Peninsula community, two Sunday

Schools and a Minneapolis office. Even the truck rental fee was provided by an anonymous donor.

An empty house awaited us in McAllen, Texas. There we had our lodging as well as a place to unload and sort. Christian friends who had introduced us to the "dump people" last February were also waiting for us.

In McAllen, we were joined by our daughter, Kathy Peterson, of Minnesota Valley Lutheran, Lakeville, Minnesota, who flew down to aid in the distribution. This was especially meaningful because the project started with her discovering an article about the "dump people" written in a magazine at her job with the defense department. Joining us were our Hancock neighbors, Larry and Beverly Williams, who flew down to personally enjoy the blessing.

They joined two other AFLC cou-

ples who shared our experience last February — winter Texans Arvo and Rachel Keranen, Pelkie, Michigan, and Bill and Doris James, Minneapolis, Minnesota. Our hearts have been touched forever. Though our associations with these people have been brief, we have learned to love them dearly. They are beautiful and precious and **so needy!** Each of us is painfully aware of similar needs across Mexico, repeated more times than we can bear to comprehend.

Our joy this Christmas is described in Ecclesiastes 11:1-2, "Give generously, for your gifts will return to you later. Divide your gifts among many, for in the days ahead you yourself may need much help" (Living Bible Translation).

— by Alice Kinnunen
Maranatha Free Lutheran Church
Hancock, Michigan



A family posed for the author on the street in front of their home.



A Blessed Christmas Far From Home

When we think of Christmas, most of us include family reunions, traditional foods, culture, and our special family customs that go with our celebration of Jesus' birth. How then can we Scandinavian missionaries, accustomed to sub-zero, white Christmas with lutefisk, lefse and Swedish meatballs, accept a tropical Brazilian Christmas?

The sun sets south of the equator on Christmas Eve just as it does anywhere else in the world. But here in Campo Mourao, the thermometer can peak at 101 degrees in the shade. The cigarras or balm crickets, are active; the hotter it is the more noise they make. Their chirp is high pitched like a bicycle siren. If you are not accustomed to that sound, it can be nerve racking.

Often a rain shower cools the evening as Christmas carols waft in the tropical heat from open windows throughout the town. The street decorations are scarce and not as extrava-

gant as in the United States. Not all homes can afford their own Christmas tree or decorations; many can not buy presents for their children.

Part of our joy in ministry is distributing care packages of food and clothing to individual homes. There is always time to share the blessed Christmas message of the greatest gift given to this world. These homes of poverty seem so happy to receive the basic things of life and are even happier to know about Jesus Christ, the very reason for Christmas. The children always receive a piece of candy or some small gift and are overjoyed.

Our evening meal is generally eaten at sundown as the heat of the day takes away one's appetite. The perpetual sauna effect drains all human energies. Christmas Eve supper consists of salads, papaya, mangos, and maybe some cold cuts with panatone, a famous Italian fruit bread. This meal is washed down with iced tea and lemon.

The iron grated windows remain open always and room fans constantly hum. Our outer wear consists of thongs or saridles, shorts and T-shirts, which seemingly remain "sweat wet" during this season.

This Christmas, our small family will gather in the living room to read the Christmas story and pray. Our son, Chester, is spending his last Christmas at home. Next year he will leave us to go to the U.S. to study. All three of our daughters are thousands of miles away in Minnesota. We will likely reminisce about our 25 years in Brazil. We can still picture our first Christmas in Sao Paulo, when we bought a spindly Christmas tree. It was so thin and weak, we had to tie it up to make it stand. We learned our lesson to bring an artificial tree from the U.S. that could withstand the summer heat.

Tears fill our eyes as we recall the years when we were all together and all four of our children were home. This year, after we read the Christmas story we will especially remember our daughters in prayer. Then we will open the few gifts while listening to a tape of the familiar carols. Even now the thought comes: "How long can Carolyn and I keep the joy of Christmas when all our children will be so far from us?"

But our lonesome hearts are comforted as we focus on God's love. He loved this world so much that He sent his **only** Son from heaven to a dark, cruel world. He never became accustomed to this world so far from His home. He suffered, died, and rose again to give us salvation; the gift of gifts. And isn't that what Christmas is all about?

When Christmas morning comes we will begin our preparations for the arrival of the children from the Miriam Infant Home. We will enjoy sharing our Christmas Day meal with these children most of whom have never had a real home.

When evening comes, they will run to our home. The sound of children laughing and everyone talking at the same time will fill our home. With eyes wide open, little fingers will touch Christmas tree decorations



The Dyrud family.

for the first time in their lives. They will clamor to sit on our laps to show us a loose tooth or one that has already been pulled.

Each child will have a place around the ping-pong table. Their dinner will have to be supervised as most still are not accustomed to so much food. (When they first arrive at our children's home, they will often vomit after each meal because a starved child does not know when to stop eating.)

After the meal, we will tell the Christmas story. Wide open eyes and ears take in the beautiful message; some hearing it for the first time. Then we will pray. Many of the children love to pray and thank God for bringing them to the AFLC children's home. Eight-year-old Grace will be especially happy and thankful. She had been in our home for several months before the juvenile judge found a good home for her here in Campo Mourao. It was to be for a trial basis. Little Grace lasted only six weeks in her new home. According to her foster parents: "She cried everyday because she wanted to go back to the Miriam Home." They could not understand why an orphan, who was given lots of food, toys, clothes, etc. in their home would want to return to a children's home. Grace told us why: "I missed the Christian love, prayers and church. That's why I didn't want to stay with them." Christmas will be special to her this year because Grace knows that Christmas without baby Jesus is not Christmas.

"The sound of children laughing and everyone talking ... will fill our home."

The long-awaited time will finally come and the children can open all the presents under the tree. There will be wrapping paper scattered and toys and dolls squeezed by the happy fingers. Before the evening ends, we will have had lots of hugs and kisses. It will be a very tired but happy Dyrud family watching the children toddle off to



Edson, 6, and his sister Marciana, 4, at the Miriam Infant Home.



The Miriam Infant Home at Campo Mourao.

their beds at the home. Perhaps the clean up will wait.

Yes, we will have had a wonderful Christmas! Who would doubt for a moment that Christmas this year will be a very special, joy filled time with all our children. A joyous Christmas, where ever it is, is giving and not receiving.

"At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who is the greatest

in the kingdom of heaven?' He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: 'I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me'" (Matthew 18:1-5).

— by Missionaries
Connely and Carolyn Dyrud

Joy in Christmas Program Planning

If I were asked what part of my job as Sunday School superintendent is my favorite, without a doubt I would have an immediate answer — the annual Christmas program! I know it is a responsibility that many people would dread, but I find it a real challenge.

Planning our church program has become the highlight of the Christmas season for me. It's work, yes, but it's a job I have come to love and I can truly say that the hours I spend planning and preparing give me a great deal of personal satisfaction as well as a joy that comes from the telling of the old, familiar story. It can seem an overwhelming job at first. I need to examine my attitude and take time in the planning process so that the tasks involved do not strip away the joy I want to feel during the holidays.

As early as August, I begin to think ahead to what our Sunday Schoolers might do for the annual program. I pour over program

books, reviewing each line and each character, looking for just the right version for this year. Pre-planned programs are abundant, but it seems I've never found just the right one, the one that would make some kind of impact on the hearts and minds of these young people.

An idea comes to my mind — a general theme or message I would like to explore. When I cannot seem to find the material I am looking for, I search for bits and pieces — a little from this book, a little from that, I try to fit them together like a puzzle which, when completely assembled, will tell the most beautiful story ever told. It will hopefully be a story that will once again fill our hearts with Christmas joy.

My concern is that the program convey a message which is real and understandable, not only for our adult audience, but especially for the children involved in it. What an awesome responsibility we have to make sure that what we are teaching our little

ones and our youth is firmly rooted in the Word of God. That is no less important in the message of our Christmas programs.

Perhaps it is because of my love for music that I spend a great deal of time looking for songs that fit each particular part of the program. Many wonderful songs are available to use. I easily get distracted in my planning while I'm playing through the songs I have found. I play them over and over and find myself singing them in my head (and sometimes out loud) at work, in the shower, or at the kitchen sink. It's the songs I can't seem to forget that I know are the ones destined for our program this year!

If this year is anything at all like the past two years, I will leave our day-before-the-program rehearsal wondering if we are really ready. But regardless, Sunday evening will come. Before our procession into the sanctuary I will gather the kids together and we will pray, asking that the Lord will help us to do our best and that our program

Many people, I am sure, think of going to grandma's house for Christmas. Cousins, aunts and uncles all trim the pine tree together. The children flock to the foot of that tree early Christmas morning. The wrapping paper pile is knee deep when grandmother reminds everyone to "save the bows!"

How about Christmas dinner? The adults gather around the family table,

and the children are seated at the kids' table, much more interested in their new toys than they are the conversation or the turkey.

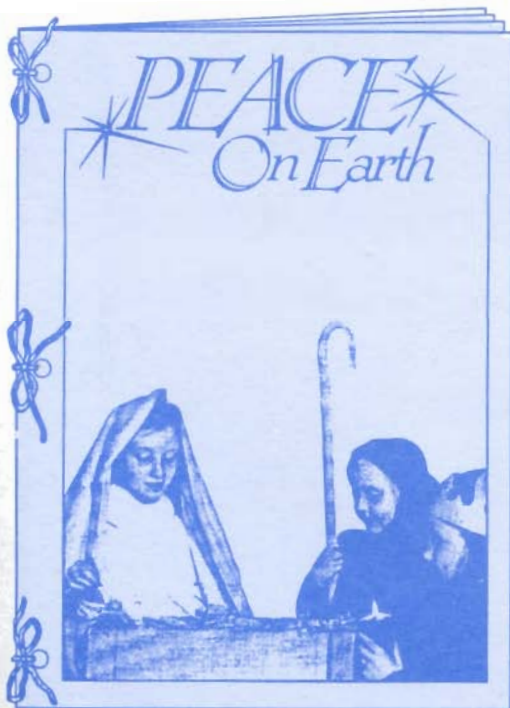
I have fond memories of Christmas with my grandparents and extended family. However, as a pastor's son, I have had very few of this type of family Christmases to look back on. Instead, my clearest Christmas memories are those spent alone with my parents, in a parsonage separated from

other family members by hundreds, sometimes thousands of miles.

As a pastor's son, I shared some of the trials as well as the blessings that

Holidays in a Parsonage





would speak to the hearts of those who listen. We will process into the church and line up in the front for our first song and before I know it — the program will be over! I will think to myself: "The children did a wonderful job and they sang out like a choir of

angels! Everyone said their part! Everyone stood in the spot they were to stand! The music was beautiful and the message was clear!"

This is joy! When the program is over, I reflect back on the hours spent planning, teaching the songs and learning the lines. I feel like I have shared something with these children about the Lord. It makes me feel like I have had a part in their lives. Maybe because of the lines they recited and the words of the songs they sang, I've helped them to grow in their knowledge of Him. Maybe this will all be part of their childhood Christmas memories: something they will share with their children and their grandchildren.

I thank the Lord for all the gifts He gives and the opportunities that come to use those gifts. If you ever have the chance to plan your church's Christmas program, I would encourage and challenge you to make the most of the opportunity. It has the potential to make your holiday season one filled with joy!

— by Marcia Sewick
Bethel Free Lutheran Church
Minot, North Dakota

came with Dad's ministry. One of these is the difficulty of leaving friends behind as we would move to a new church and ministry. There might be enough time in one place to make a friend or two, only to lose them at the next move. It was at these times that I learned to cherish my family. I have no better memories than those of Christmas with just my parents and myself.

Another occasional difficulty in being a "PK" during the holidays is that God's call does not always come with a large salary. Sometimes the tree looked barren and the number of gifts under the tree equalled the members of the family. Those were my favorite years. Looking back, I see that God provided the joy and things did not seem that bad. In retrospect, those "meager" holidays were the closest times my family ever spent together.

Although I would not have admitted it then, I enjoyed getting fewer gifts over excessive gifts because the more I received, the less my parents received. The gift of time was probably the best gift that we could give and receive in those difficult years.

I know now that some of these difficulties are not limited solely to pastors and their families. As a child, I thought they were. I realize though, that there are two things that bless me and anyone feeling separated from friends and other family members at Christmas: the love of my parents, and even more importantly, the love of God and His precious Christmas gift given in Bethlehem so long ago.

— by Bryan Hurley
Auburn University sophomore
Auburn, Alabama

Our President Writes

The First Christmas rush

Only ten more shopping days until Christmas. These simple words contain a stressful message for many of us. Only a few more days to purchase presents for friends and family. Only a few more days to finish addressing cards and letters. Only a few more days for decorating our homes and preparing our favorite foods for this holiday season — for wrapping and mailing, for programs and pageants.

Yes, the Christmas rush is a wearisome reality in the whirlwind lives of all too many people.

The first Christmas rush was different. "And they came in haste and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger" (Luke 2:16). Please don't miss the message of these few simple words: the first ones to celebrate Christmas were rushing to see Jesus!

My personal wish for you during this Christmas season is that Jesus Christ might be seen in the center of all your preparations. It's possible to wear ourselves out rushing from one holiday activity to another, and yet to forget the One whose birthday is the reason for the season.

It's not too late. Share the spirit of the shepherds as they hurried to Bethlehem. A Saviour has been born for you! Join the first Christmas rush to rejoice in Him and receive Him as your own.

Season's greetings to you from all of us here in the AFLC offices!

— Pastor Robert L. Lee



I have had many Christmas Eves, but my most joyous one had quite unusual outward circumstances.

We were in Lungchuchai, a comparatively small city far off in north-west China. There were many new Christians and many children, most of whom had never heard about Christmas.

Suddenly one night as we sat in our preparatory class, orders came that I had to flee at once. Lungchuchai was again in danger; almost completely surrounded by the fiendish troops. It was almost more than I could believe, but orders were orders.

With a sad, heavy heart, I stole out of Lungchuchai the next morning before the others were up. On my third day in Shangshien, the sheriff came to the home where I was taking refuge. "They have called from Lungchuchai and they strongly want you to come back again," he said. "If it wasn't that Christmas is coming, I wouldn't give you permission to do so, but now you must do so at your own risk." I accepted this as the heavenly Father's answer to many prayers. Also there was a military vehicle going to Lungchuchai the next morning which I could travel in. After some hours, I was among my dear ones again.

Immediately the Lord began to confirm that this was His will. That day there was a teacher who gave himself to the Lord; the next day two came.

And so Christmas Eve arrived. We didn't have any fuss about the meal; as usual that was forgotten, but now there was much to be arranged. Sometime after dinner, as I went about thinking that soon the church bells would be ringing in Christmas back home, I wished we had such church bells here, too. Then suddenly the cannons began to boom nearby; in between we also heard guns crackling. Yes, Christmas was coming! Who would dare go to the mission station on such a night? Perhaps it would be necessary to flee in the middle of Christmas night or have something worse happen. "On a night like this you will get prayers, God," I mused.

I then became gloriously surprised. I came to the church and

found it crowded with Chinese who gazed at the Christmas tree with radiant, excited eyes. Maybe there would be Christmas anyway. Just then we were shaken by a cannon. But everyone soon settled down again and the old glorious Christmas Gospel was read. I read a verse, then they read a verse after me. Later, we marched around the Christmas tree and all the beloved songs were sung for a long, long time. A little white tea (boiled water) was also served. Young and old sang solos and others witnessed. We knew that Jesus was among us. Time went altogether too fast. Soon it was midnight. Many went home to sleep because they were going to Juleotte early the next morning. Others said they did not want to sleep and asked if I would stay up with them. I knew I could not sleep during the bombardment by the cannons.

We went into a room which was smaller than the sanctuary and therefore warmer. We began to share about "the Word became flesh." We sang, "Silent night holy night, darkness flies, all is light." Professor Sung stood: "Missionary, is this true, this which you want us to sing? Isn't it ironic to sing about peace when the cannons

boom and rifles crack around us? The communists say that religion is the opiate of the people. Is that not true? You want us to believe something that doesn't exist."

"Professor Sung," I responded, "this peace can be the greatest reality in your life now. Jesus Christ, God's Son, He who loves you will forgive, cleanse and fill you. He is our peace."

The professor quietly answered: "That I can't believe before I have seen it."

"May I read a little for you about Thomas?" After he said yes, I continued: "Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed." Professor Sung, do you want this blessedness to be yours?"

"I do, Missionary. Brother Chang, Brother Ma, sisters, pray for me. I cannot resist any longer. Pray for me."

I read the promises to him and he received them one after the other. He cried out: "Just what I need!" He read: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that Sung, who believes on Him, shall not perish, but have eternal life." He continued: "Missionary sister, I believe I will write this date down in the little testament you



My Most Joyous Christmas Eve

The real meaning of peace found in war torn China

gave me because this is the greatest day in my life. And now we must get on our knees and pray."

There were still two unsaved individuals in the little room. The one officer sat on a stool over in a corner and wept silently. I stepped towards him and asked: "Officer Chang, how are things with you? Do you want to be saved and find peace tonight also?"

"I came here to Lungchuchai exactly for that. Is it possible for me?"

I read the promises again and he received them. Peace came into that suffering and restless heart.

Sung stood beside his chair. "Can't we begin to pray now?" he asked impatiently, like a child who can't manage to wait any longer.

There was one more to be guided into salvation's harbor that night, so Sung had to wait. When that one had come through, Sung fell to his knees, quickly followed by the rest of us. Professor Sung broke out in praise to God in a manner the like of which I had never heard in one newly saved, either before or since. It was clear to everyone that it was God's very Spirit who had so filled him that it flowed out of him. I could only cry for joy.

We had nothing of the usual outward joys of Christmas; no spare ribs, no baking, coffee or Christmas goodies. We were in the midst of paganism's darkness with fighting and danger around us in every direction.

It was where we experienced the most glorious Christmas Eve and Christmas night. I was filled with thoughts of the incomprehensible God! Then someone touched my shoulder. It was the young teacher who had come to Jesus two days earlier. He quietly asked: "May I have the opportunity to thank Jesus also?"

I smiled: "Certainly you can give thanks. That was what I asked you to do when you received Jesus."

"Yes, but then I felt that I was so

unworthy. Now it is as though I am bursting. I must speak!"

"Just wait until Sung is through."

"I can't wait; he takes so much time."

Nevertheless, he had to wait. I whispered to him that he should praise the Lord silently. I realized that was not so easy for him. When Sung had barely said "Amen," he began to praise Jesus for salvation full and free. Officer Chang followed. There was no one waiting upon the other that night. It was necessary to begin as quickly as possible or someone else would speak. They had so much to thank the Savior for.

When we arose from the time of prayer and thanksgiving, we were surprised to realize that six hours had flown by.

"What shall we do now?" I asked.

"Go out and sing and tell this to others," they answered in unison. Now the one who criticized me for singing "Silent Night" was the most eager. Sung said: "We will sing that song outside the windows of the believers who are nearby. Then you can read the Christmas story. Then we will wish them a blessed Christmas and tell them the Savior has come!"

Our little group did just that. Out in the cold, dark morning we went, singing and calling out the glorious news which we had just experienced in a marvelous way.

We returned to the mission church in time for the Juleotte. It was filled with people. Each one had learned a Bible verse beforehand with the word "light" in it. Each spoke their verse in turn as they lit one of the lights on the Christmas tree.

The meeting began with songs and rejoicing. One suggested that we should have a time of sharing. Professor Sung immediately stood. Those who had not been there during the night meeting were surprised. Sung had been to a couple of Sunday meetings but no one could have thought that he would be saved. Now he was standing there telling them about his hardheartedness, his resistance and how the Savior called him. During the night, through Christ, he had been born

anew to a living hope. "I am a new person now," he blurted out. He continued and the teacher who had been saved two days earlier, came to me and whispered: "Big sister, may I have permission to tell that I was born again on Monday?"

"Yes, yes, but just wait until Sung is finished." He sat on the edge of his chair as if he was afraid someone else would jump up and take his turn to witness. In time, he too told how he had come to see himself as a condemned sinner and how the Savior came to him and made him a new creature.

When Sung sat down, Officer Chang stood and revealed that he had believing parents, was engaged to a believer but he himself had been an atheist until he had come to Shanghai. There he wanted to study English and had come to the Bible classes I was holding in the area using the English language. A longing awakened in him. He realized that we had something he was missing. Then last night, Christmas night, he found that peace he was searching for.

The other dear brothers and sisters looked at each other and began to regret that they had not stayed up all night too. Rejoicing overcame all and we had to sing from the heart: "Silent night! Holy night! Darkness flies, all is light!"

Yes, I had never heard music so pure, clear and glorious. That Christmas night the thunder of the cannons was drowned. Fear disappeared. Several hearts which never before had known about Christmas, now could join the songs of praise. "Rejoice, every heart He has saved!"

— by Annie Skau
from Kristen Jul. Translated
from Norwegian by
Rev. Raynard Huglen,
Newfolden, Minnesota

(Note: much of the story was written in the present tense. I have taken the liberty to translate it in the past tense, which seemed more reasonable. Also, the words of our song "Silent Night" have been used instead of the rough equivalent of that song in Norwegian. R.H.)

Learning from Experience

Few people seemed to notice when the heavens opened and our heavenly Father again touched His creation in that little town of Bethlehem through the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ. In fact, the general public was simply too busy with their plans and possessions to pay attention to the fact that God was in their midst in a simple stable.

When these thoughts were expressed to Caroline Jacobson, her quick response was: "People are just the same today. In fact, they seem to follow King Herod in trying to do away with any idea of such a Savior being born. They don't want Christ in their celebrations, homes, schools, nor any other place!"

Caroline is a little Norwegian lady who has seen many changes in her 103

Christmas celebrations. She says: "I was born on an Iowa farm, and in those days it was much different when the church was the center of the community, and the Christmas stockings had holes in them. Yet, people were happy. We just put some straw in the bobsled, placed a rug over that with our hot bricks to keep our feet warm, and took off for church. When we arrived, the horse blankets went over the horses so they stayed warm for us on our way home. We never had much, and I remember how pleased we all were when the church gave us an orange after the Christmas program. You see the main thing was Christ in our hearts. Nowadays we have so much other stuff in our hearts that there's no room left for Jesus."

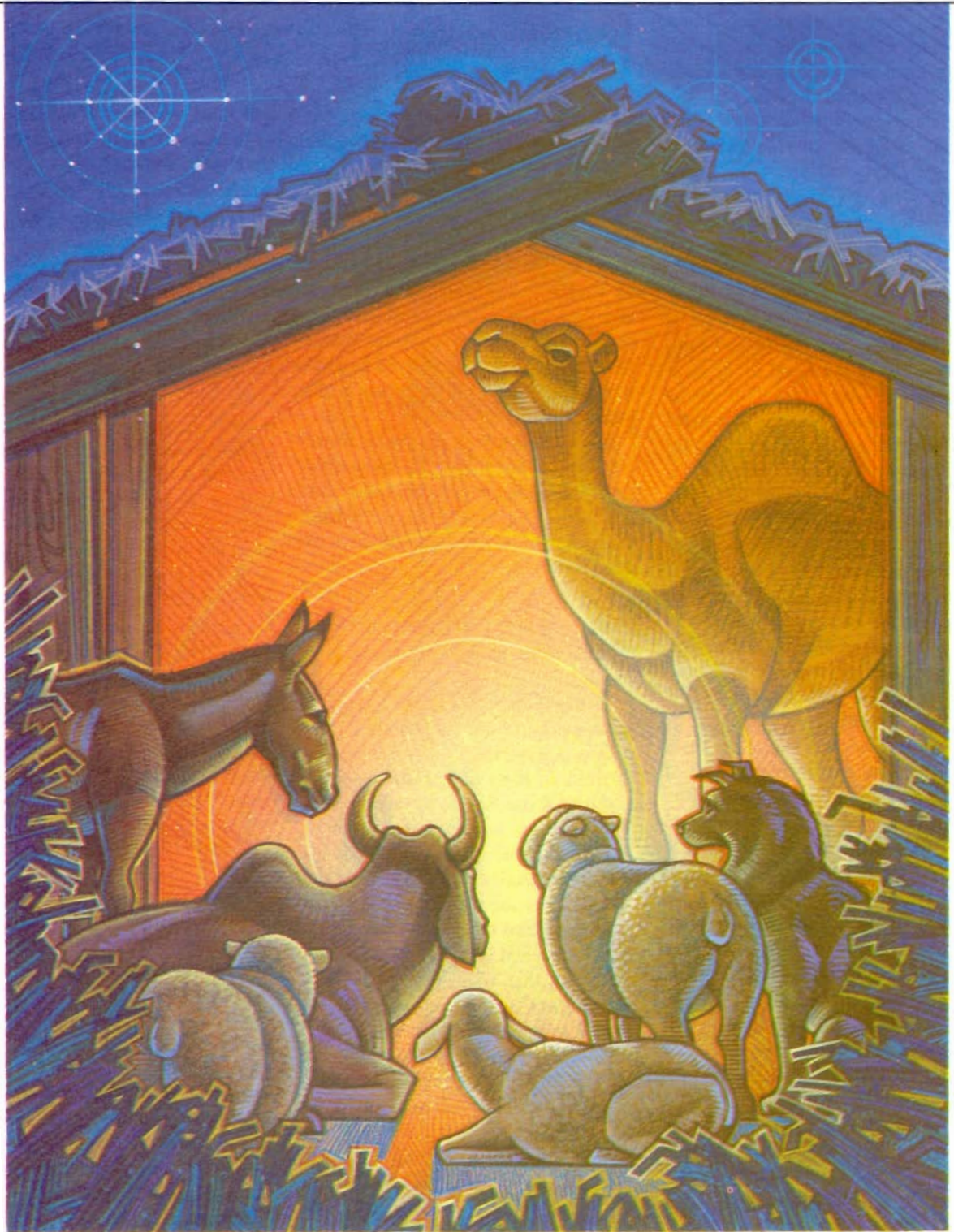
Caroline has never been motivated

by her age, but by her Christian convictions. It was not a shock but a privilege when she found her first gray hair. Yet, she does admit that growing old challenges her inwardly. "Now I have to live beyond the grave in Christ, so when I leave my loved ones, death won't bother much." At present, her privacy is filled with her Lord through praying, reading, and planning for the best Christmas she has ever experienced here on earth.

At Christmas, it's a joy to hear the wisdom that flows from the lips of our older generation, who have for years understood the true meaning of this blessed holiday. In our mad rush for achievement we should listen to these old saints who have not forfeited inspiration for the excitement of success. They are living now, not in an age of stagnation, but an age of opportunity for inner spiritual growth. "My old prejudices and my silly interests are now gone so I have no difficulty in understanding the will of the Lord when I read His Word," says Caroline. As Mary, "kept all these things in her heart," so also from the hearts of our fathers and mothers we can glean and appreciate the spiritual insights that dwell there. They too may have seen special things as did one old man who said, "... For mine eyes have seen thy salvation which You prepared for all people to see" (Luke 2:30, 31).

— by Rev. Viney Will
Innanuel Lutheran Church
Springfield, Missouri

Note: Christmas 1992 was the last Christmas on earth for Caroline Jacobson. Shortly after this interview with her pastor, she passed away.



God became a man. While the creatures of earth walked unaware, Divinity arrived. Heaven opened herself and placed her most precious one in a human womb.

— Max Lucado
from *GOD CAME NEAR*, page 25
Multnomah Press, Portland, 1987

It's Christmas time again and our hearts seem torn in two, being filled with great joy and yet at the same time being burdened and heavy.

As Christians our hearts are filled with joy as we remember and reflect upon the first coming of our Lord Jesus to earth at Bethlehem centuries ago. We rejoice in the words of the angel who said to Joseph "And she will bear a son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). We are encouraged in the comforting words of the angel to the fearful shepherds who heard "Do not be afraid, for behold I bring you good news of great joy which shall be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10, 11). Christmas, for us as God's believing children, is a time of great joy and rejoicing because the story of Christ's birth reminds us of God's amazing love in sending to us His only Son so that we can be saved from our sin and given the gift of eternal life in heaven!

But even while our hearts are filled with joy as we celebrate the birth of our Savior, they are also burdened by the spiritual need of our unconverted family with whom we gather. The true story of Christmas — the birth of the Savior of the world — is pushed aside by empty family holiday traditions and activities which have little or no eternal value. Our hearts are burdened as the celebration of our Savior's birth is overwhelmed by the secularizing and commercializing of the season. We are saddened as our loved ones dip into the holiday "spirits" instead of listening and responding to the Holy Spirit who is trying to reach their hearts through

"... this burden can be so great it threatens to rob us of our joy in the midst of family gatherings."

Keep Joy in Family Gatherings

the story of Jesus' birth. Perhaps our family members, both unintentionally and deliberately, deride and mock our Christian faith and even our precious Savior. Though it is a time to rejoice and celebrate the good news of Jesus' birth, the sad truth is that for many of us who love the Lord, Christmas is also the time when the burden and concern for unsaved family is most keenly felt. In fact, this burden can be so great it threatens to rob us of our joy in the midst of family gatherings.

How can we keep the joy of Jesus' coming in our hearts as we gather with unsaved family members this Christmas? I would suggest four things to remember that will help us keep this joy.

First — be sure to remember the story of Jesus' birth as you gather with your family.

It is easy to become so distracted by the busyness of our various family traditions and activities that we lose sight of the true story of Christmas — the coming of our Savior into the world. Therefore it is important that we make it a priority during our family gatherings to personally read and re-read and re-read again the story of Christ's birth from the Word of God, meditating on its meaning and blessing in our lives.

Doing this will help us in three ways. It will help us remember as we gather with our family members that the birth of Christ at Bethlehem made it possible for us to become members of God's family. It will also remind us as we share gifts with our loved ones that God gave the greatest and most priceless gift the world has ever known — the gift of His own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. It will also help us remember, as we receive gifts from our loved ones this Christmas, to thank God that by His grace we were blessed to receive the gift of eternal life through faith in the Lord Jesus.

Christian friends, if we can remember to keep our focus on the story of the Lord Jesus' birth as we gather with

our families this Christmas we will have no problem keeping the joy that God has placed within our hearts.

Second — be sure to remember to share the story of Jesus' birth with your family this Christmas

Perhaps more than any other time of the year, Christmas time provides us with golden opportunities to share the good news of Jesus with our families, even with those who have been the most resistant and apathetic. Even in predominantly non-Christian homes, Christmas is usually a time of good will, of giving and sharing words and feelings with loved ones. Why not then, as Christians, take the opportunity as we personally rejoice in the birth of our Savior to share His story with our families and loved ones this Christmas? Doing this in Christmas letters or cards, in words or actions, in casual conversation or even in mealtime prayers will not only fill our hearts with joy but plant the seed of God's Word in the hearts of our loved ones where God can use it to win them to His kingdom.

Third — be sure to remember that the Christ of Christmas loves and wants to reach your family with the gospel more than you do.

There is nothing that can bring sorrow and discouragement to our hearts more quickly than when our loved ones reject the Lord Jesus. This burden is an especially heavy load to bear at Christmas when we are so clearly reminded of the awesome love for sinners that God demonstrated by sending Jesus to earth. But don't lose heart, Christian friends, as you gather with unconverted family members this Christmas. Instead, remember that the Lord Jesus Christ, the baby of Bethlehem and Savior of sinners has an even greater love for your family than you do.

Fourth — be sure to remember to pray that God would fill your heart with joy.

The Word Reveals Jesus

Evangelism is a lifelong need for every Christian and also for every congregation and community. There is no substitute. If we think there are other ways or if we neglect to use the gift of evangelism, our spiritual houses will be in disarray and will soon disintegrate to wrack and ruin. Every pastor should be doing the work of an evangelist as Paul instructs Timothy in II Timothy 4:5. In our AFLC we are most fortunate that this is our experience. That is not to replace the work of God gifted evangelist.

Evangelism must begin with those who call themselves Christians. The world cannot wait any longer for that to happen. Neither can we wait for it to begin with someone else. The big question is: Am I willing to be re-evangelized? As mentioned in the last article, this will not likely be an easy road nor will it be a short one.

In the AFLC we have great confidence in the Word. We strive to be defenders of that Word. Let us never lose our awe, respect and reverence for the Word of God. Let us be ever quick to defend it. May we not forget it is the vehicle that holds the Savior. We can be along for the ride and never meet the passenger who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

The Word is very important when, as a vehicle, it is properly run and maintained it reveals Jesus and becomes the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16-17). We can, however, hold to the Word with our mouths and disavow it with our actions. Over the past years we have witnessed a steady decline in the amount of days given over to evangelism in our congregations. Is it reasonable to say that evangelism is no longer a priority in the AFLC? Is a full church calendar or the excuse our people are involved in so many other "good" things plausible? For example: Do you think our children would rather be in some sports hall of fame or in heaven? It is possible to have both but not when congregations and

(continued on page 21)

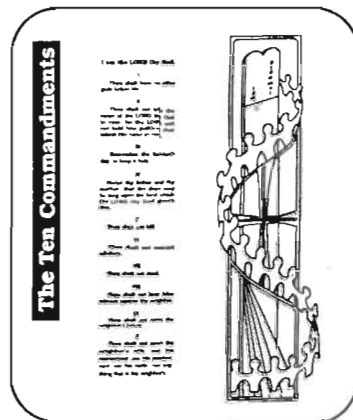


This is one of the most important things we can do to keep the joy of Christ in our hearts. Spiritual warfare will be taking place as we gather with our families. The devil would like nothing more than to steal our joy and fill our hearts with discouragement and hopelessness this holiday season. Therefore, it is essential that we bathe ourselves in prayer so that God would fill us with such a heavenly joy that the enemy of our souls would be sent running for cover and our loved ones might see this incredible joy of Jesus within us and want it for themselves!

Dear Christian friends, your hearts need not be torn in two this Christmas season. Your burden for unsaved loved ones need not steal your joy. Join with me in remembering these four suggestions and I am convinced that this Christmas will be one of the most blessed and joyful you have ever experienced as God encourages your heart and seeks to win the hearts of your loved ones!

—Pastor Brian J. Pearson
Calvary Free Lutheran Church
Arlington, South Dakota

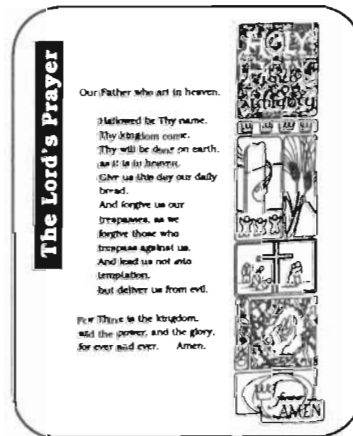
Martin Luther's Small Catechism in Illustration



The Commandments teach a man to know his illness, so that he feels and sees what he can do and what he cannot do, what he can and cannot leave undone, and thus knows himself to be a sinner and a wicked man. — Martin Luther



After that the Creed shows him and teaches him where he may find the remedy, — the grace which helps him to become a good man and to keep the Commandments; it shows him God, and the mercy which He has revealed and offered in Christ. — Martin Luther



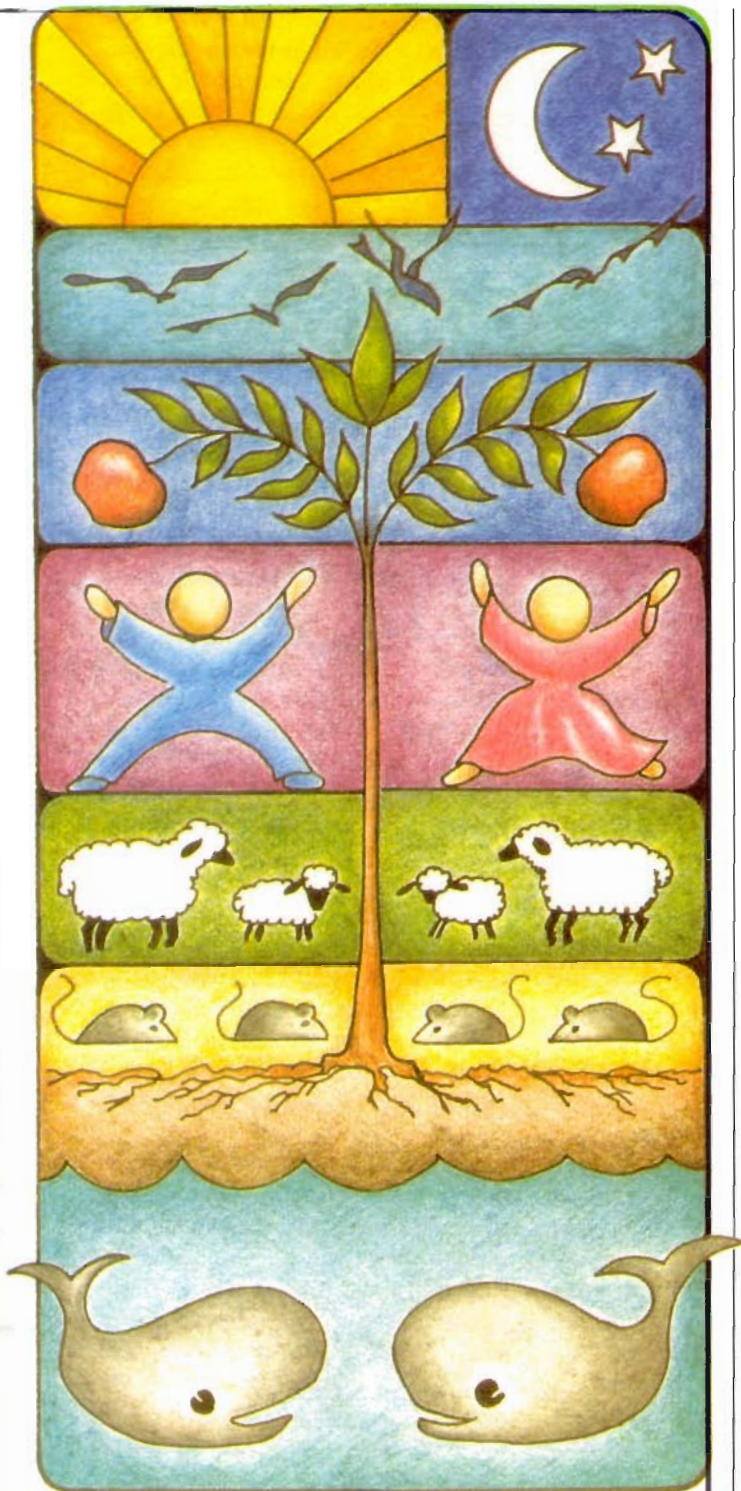
In the third place, the Lord's Prayer teaches him how to ask for this grace, get it, and take it to himself, to wit, by habitual, humble, comforting prayer; then grace is given, and by the fulfillment of God's commandments he is saved. — Martin Luther



So today the Word itself, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper are our morning stars to which we turn our eyes as certain indications of the Sun of grace. For we can definitely assert that where the Lord's Supper, Baptism and the Word are found, Christ, the remissions of sins, and life eternal are found. — Martin Luther

© 1993 The Board of Parish Education,
The Association of Free Lutheran
Congregations.

© 1993 Illustrations by Susan Brue
All Rights Reserved.
Used by Permission.



Four, full color, 23" x 32" posters in each set suitable for framing and displaying singly or as an arrangement. Teaching guide included with each set.

Only \$34.95 per set. (U.S. Funds please)

Available from **AFLC Parish Education**

3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.

Minneapolis, MN 55441 (612) 545-5631

THE LAST WORD

families treat evangelism as some kind of yearly competitive game that we must somehow cram into our agendas.

Dutifully, we work hard at freeing up three or four nights for special meetings but do not expect our schedules to accommodate more than that. Well, I'm sorry, that kind of thinking and doing will never bring to us and the world the renewal and healing spoken about in II Chronicles 7:14. If we want God to do what He says He will do in that verse, then we are going to have to be prepared to plan our evangelistic emphasis open ended. The calendar will have to be wiped clean and nothing must interfere. We must wait upon God to do His work in our midst.

James 4:7-8 says: "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded." The Word must be given the time to do this work in each of our hearts. The Lord has gifted His church with evangelists for this purpose.

But you say, "If the Word is so powerful cannot this work be done in a few days?" Yes, that would be more than possible if God was dealing with mere matter but not so when He is dealing with the human heart. Only a persistent application of the Word of God can soften and change the hard and rebellious human heart.

There are practical steps we need to take. Pappua, New Guinea probably has the fastest growing Lutheran church in the world. They have over 3,000 full-time evangelists; one for approximately every 270 members. We do not have one full-time evangelist in our AFLC. What kind of message does this send to our people let alone those around us? Since 1986 we have said we cannot afford an evangelist let alone the minimum of six that we should have in place. As people of the Word, can we afford to continue this way?

What is it going to cost? Much less than if we remain disobedient in this matter. One cannot expect the dollar cost to be less than \$1,000 a week. The cost of six evangelists would be roughly \$225,000, if we are going to pay them on the same scale as other workers in the kingdom. That would mean each congregation in the AFLC would have to budget at least \$1,000 each year for evangelism.

We must pray about the men that God would desire for this task in our midst. They must have the gift of an evangelist, not just the gift of the gab. I'm confident God has already given us the men but it is up to us to put them to the task for which God has gifted them.

God wants to do a mighty work in and through us. Time is running out but while grace yet abounds we can experience what was promised to the Israelites of old in Exodus 28:1-14. (Please do not neglect to study this portion.)

Dear Lord, please grant us the willingness to be participants in the renewal and healing you desire us to experience, even in this life. God of mercy we plead for your continued mercy. Amen.

—Pastor Gene Sundby

Christmas was always a special time at our house. Preparations were started as early as time would allow. As the snow silently fell, I began to unpack the Christmas tree decorations. I pulled out the usual bulbs and ornaments. When my hands lifted out the angel which shone from the tree top for many years, I paused and slowly turned the angel around. My thoughts slipped back to that rainy afternoon last summer when I had a discussion on guardian angels with my four grandsons.

Eric, Todd, Mike and Tobias were spending time with me at our lake cottage. The rainy afternoon found them all sitting on the sofa looking at me as if to say: "Well, Grandma, now what do we do?"

Tobias, the nine-year-old, suddenly asked: "Grandma, did Grandpa and Uncle Ray fall through the ice last winter? Do you think their guardian angels helped them?"

I sat down across from them and began telling the boys that angels are spirits that God created to serve Him and care for His children. There are millions of them in heaven ready to do the Father's bidding. They are sent where and when He needs them. I read Psalm 91:11-12, and assured the boys that in time of danger, we too, can say: "My guardian angel was there."

"You asked about Grandpa and Uncle Ray," I continued, "Well, it had been good fishing and the lake was seemingly still frozen thick. They hadn't been out for a week so they weren't exactly sure of what was ahead. They arrived close to their shack when they felt a big jerk. The front wheels of the 4x4 pickup had broken through the ice. They stepped out and Grandpa started over to the shack. Just then, behind him he saw Ray go down into the icy water. Grandpa was able to grab the hood of his parka while hanging on to part of the shack and lifted him out of the water."

"Oh I remember," Eric said. "Grandpa called my dad from the cabin. He brought out a 'come-a-long' to save the pickup from sinking into the lake."

"Grandpa said later that there was

A story for children

Guardian Angels

an extra hand that helped him pull Ray out of the water."

I could see Eric's eyes become serious as he recalled the time when his guardian angel protected him. Then he began telling his story: "Everyone was excited about our Luther League sledding and skiing party. After several times down the hill, I decided to go down on my back. It was thrilling until I felt a big bump! Rachel was skiing down and her ski struck my back when we collided.

"I was stunned and all the while in the emergency room, it was like a dream. I had to lie perfectly still for 24 hours until all injuries were determined. Everyone was so quiet, I knew I was going to die. But I trusted in Jesus and I knew He would take care of me."

"The next day was my birthday. the radiologist came in and said: 'You are a lucky boy. Your spine only has a hairline fracture. You will be okay!' I said a silent prayer of thanks to Jesus. I know my guardian angel had been with me!"

Mike was obviously listening intently. "Grandma, I thought I was just lucky that morning, but now I know it was my guardian angel."

"What morning was that?" I asked.

"Well, about six years ago, mother and I got up earlier than usual. She was going to leave for work and I was to wait for the school bus. Mom asked me

if I wanted a ride to school. I was ready, so I jumped in the car with her. Within 20 minutes, our mobile home was in flames. They said it would have been impossible for anyone to get out. Now I know that wasn't just luck."

Todd and Tobias both jumped as they suddenly remembered an incident last fall. "Grandma, tell us about Mom's accident!"

"Well, you know your mom has two artificial hips so she always has a concern for her legs. She was putting a big pumpkin in the trunk of the car. She had leaned in to try to slide the pumpkin over. Suddenly the car began to move ahead. She tried to grab the door handle as pain shot up her legs from the knees scraping on the cement curb.

She slipped down more with her face only inches from the tire. She screamed: 'Jesus, Jesus, not my legs.' Then just as quickly as it happened, she was flat on her back on the lawn! Your mom definitely believes that the Lord sent an angel to deliver her. Psalm 34:17 says: 'The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.'"

That rainy summer afternoon we continued to tell of times when guardian angels had protected us or someone we love. I told the boys about the time their little cousin, Jenna, choked on a Gummy Bear. I recalled the story of my son, Jerome, who at the age of three wandered off down the cow path. We had passed nearly the whole afternoon telling these wonderful stories of God's protection in our lives.

I suddenly realized it was not summertime at the cottage, but a cold December day and I was still holding the Christmas angel in my hand. I began singing "Angels From the Realms of Glory" in my heart. Then I thought of Matthew 24:31: "He will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of the heaven to the other."

He will come again. When His angels come one day to take us to heaven, may we be found faithful.

— by Lydia McCarlson
Tabor Lutheran Church
Webster, South Dakota

Learning to Celebrate

It was a big, modern shopping mall, full of people. Christmas was just around the corner. Santa Claus was present with his full beard and heavy, red wool suit. This may not sound like an unusual scene, except it was taking place in Curitiba, Brazil. December is the beginning of summer in South America. Temperatures were over 80 degrees Fahrenheit. Santa's outfit did not look too comfortable or appropriate for that kind of weather.

Looking at a Santa Claus in a winter outfit while in a summer climate makes a person wonder: where did these people get their ideas as to how Christmas is suppose to be celebrated? Who was the biggest influence on their Christmas expectations? It appears the one who taught them how to celebrate Christmas came from a cold, northern climate.

Each of us needs to consider where we have gotten our ideas from as to what is necessary for truly enjoying Christmas. Often it appears society has had more influence on us than the Bible. The idea takes root that a beautifully decorated home, warm with the smells of delicious baked goods, populated by a large, intimate family, is a prerequisite for one to experience Christmas joy. Those things are nice, but for many in this life, they will only exist in a dream. You may be one who can't afford to put up more than some basic decorations. You may never have learned to bake like your mother. Your family gatherings may frequently overflow with tension and strife. Is Christmas then, a failure? Can joy still be found?

Joy can be found when we look to God to find out what Christmas is all about. On the first Christmas, the shepherds were glorifying and praising God not because they had gotten all their cards sent out on time. They did not rejoice because the tree was so beautiful and the cookies turned out so great. It does not say their happiness came from being together. They were "praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told" (Luke 2:20).

The heart of the Christmas message is that we no longer need to be alone. Jesus has come! "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Someone is here to bring healing to our broken lives; to help us overcome our seemingly insurmountable obstacles. We have One with whom we can share our joys and sorrows. We are not left on our own to stumble along in finding our way through the maze

of life. A Faithful Guide and Friend is available. Our Savior and Lord has come.

I think it is nice when friends travel 100 miles to see me. Jesus left heaven to be with us. It was an incredible trip, motivated by incredible love. Because He came to be with us, we can have joy, even if we do not have a lot of others with us. The Best Friend we could ever wish for is right by our side.

A recent newspaper article was entitled, "Holiday blues-ridden single parents best avoid TV." The article quoted an individual as saying, "The commercialism of Christmas we see in the mass media creates a world of unreality for the majority of people." Many see scenes on TV and then think they must emulate them in order to have a complete and happy Christmas. They are on a journey to endless frustration.

Maybe you have listened to something else in determining what is necessary for Christmas joy. It could be another family in your congregation. You think your home has to be like their's in order to be happy. It could be traditions that are wonderful and nice, but impossible to recreate. Christmas may not be the same, but it can still be full of joy. The good news remains the same: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). Let that unchanging truth determine how we celebrate Christmas. Let that good news be our eternal source of joy. Have a wonderful Christmas!

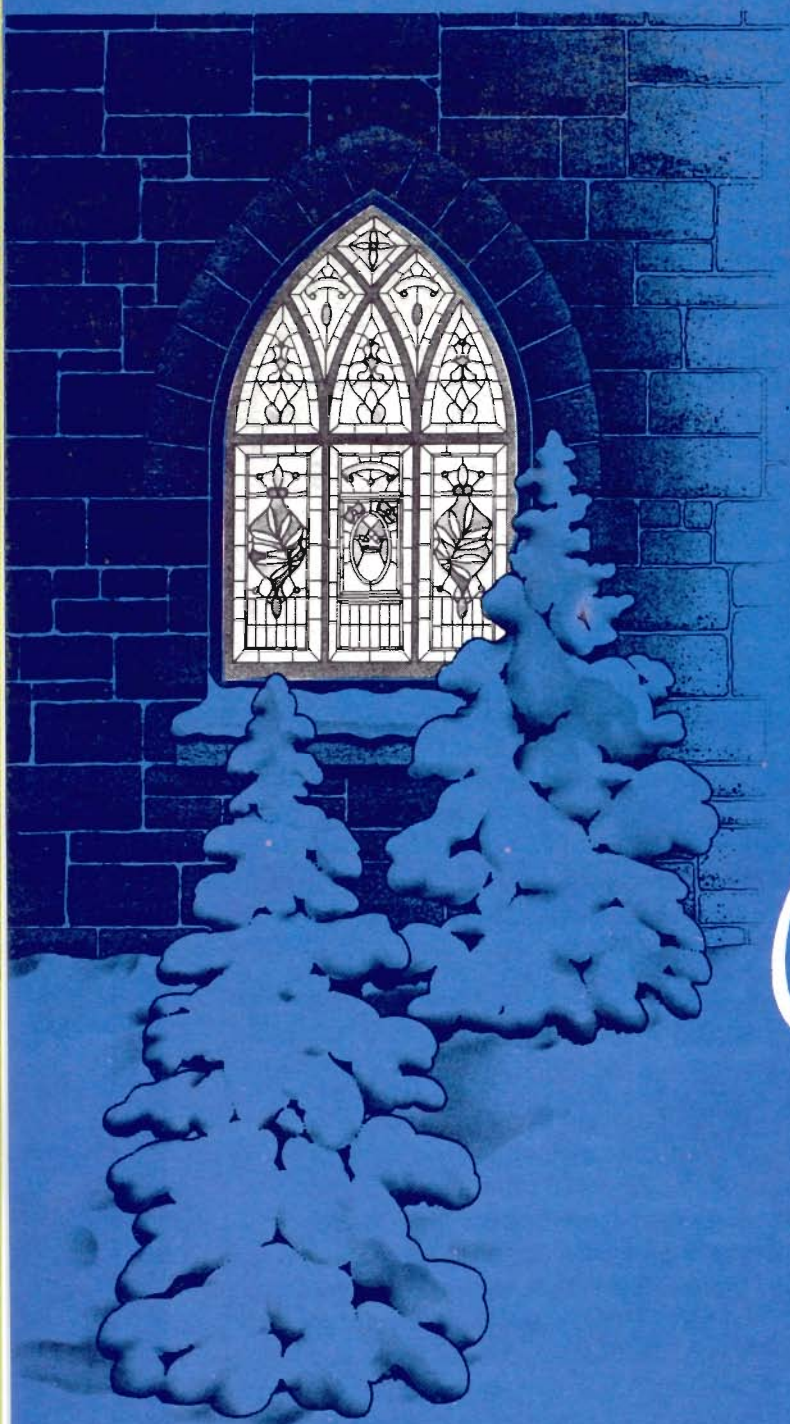
Thank You

We would like to thank each one who has contributed to this special issue of the magazine. A special thanks goes to Pastor Walter Johnson who has written the Light on the Way column and Pastor Gene Sundby who has written the Last Word column. Both of them have been sharing with us for the past six months. Beginning next month, Pastor Jerry Holmaas of Chassell, Michigan will write the Light on the Way column and Pastor Jim Ritter of Bloomington, Minnesota will share in the Last Word column. We look forward to God speaking to us through them.

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

Second-Class



Joy
to the
world

The Lord
is come.