

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

December 4, 1984



Roger C. Huebner, D.D.S.

AT THE MASTER'S FEET



Lay Pastor Gustav Nordvall

It was Christmas!

The joyful time of Christmas is before us once more. The whole world celebrates because of an event centuries ago in an ancient picturesque town seven miles south of Jerusalem called Bethlehem Ephratah. This was the original home of the family of David. It was the home of Boaz and Ruth, ancestors of Christ.

Caesar Augustus ruled Rome when the edict was issued for the empire-wide census which brought Joseph and Mary from Nazareth of Galilee to Bethlehem.

It was there in a lowly stable that Jesus was born, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. The Christmas story has no parallel. The songwriter Phillips Brooks said it well, "The hopes and fears of all

the years are met in thee tonight."

No event, no matter how important, could have affected the world as did this one because there had been someone and that Someone was none other than God's own Son.

Messengers from heaven came to proclaim the great news to some astonished shepherds. "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11). Then a heavenly chorus sang: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

For centuries of time this message has brought peace, hope and joy to an unknown number of souls, in time of peace and in times of peril.

I recall the unpleasant Christmas of 1944 when our Army medical unit was operating a hospital in Belgium in the area where the Battle of the Bulge was fought. Our unit had to retreat. It was cold. The ground was frozen and covered with snow. On the day of Christmas Eve, I was assigned to guard duty outside the building we were housed in temporarily. It grew colder towards evening as darkness fell on the little town. I was quite alone on the dark street. The only sounds I heard were footsteps of sentries of other units in the town. The snow crunched under their feet and now and then I could hear the command "Halt!" in the still

night. All of a sudden there was a great light in the air above the village. An enemy plane had dropped a high powered flare. It was like daylight! Quickly I hid in the shadow of a stone wall. After the flare had burned itself out it became dark again. The cold was more intense.

This was Christmas Eve? In my mind were thoughts of home, family and the many Christmases of happier times. A bitterness came over me. While I knew that God had only good will towards men, at this very moment men were bent on destroying one another. I remember how the words of another Christmas song came to my mind. I identified with the words of Henry Longfellow: "And in despair I bowed my head: 'There is no peace on earth', I said, 'For hate is strong, and mocks the song, Of peace on earth, Good-will to men'."

Just then I heard voices of men singing inside the building. Our chaplain was having a Christmas Eve song service, singing the beloved familiar Christmas carols. The sound was muffled so I could not hear the words distinctly, but I knew them well.

It was Christmas! In spite of war with all its suffering, anguish and pain there was hope! It was for this very reason He came into our world of darkness! His very name Jesus means He is the Savior from sin.

A great sense of peace came over me, and hope! It was Christmas!

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

USPS 588-620 ISSN 0746-3413

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

All communications concerning contents of this magazine should be addressed to: Rev. Raynard Huglen, Editor, Newfolden, Minn. 56738.

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Send \$10.00 subscription to the LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR, 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, Minn. 55441. Second-class postage paid at Minneapolis, Minn.

Postmaster: Send address changes to THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR, 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, Minn. 55441.

Volume 22 Number 23

CHRISTMAS ON THE FARM



by Mrs. R. P. Haakonson,
Moorhead, Minn.

My parents, Soren and Karine Coltvet, lived on a 160-acre farm near Thompson, Iowa. God richly blessed them with ten healthy children – the oldest a son, and then nine girls. I remember asking my mother if she wasn't disappointed when one girl after another arrived. Her answer was, "Never. I just thanked God that my baby was healthy." That left a deep impression upon me, one which I've never forgotten. Dad would often say that all his boys "turned into girls." He did need much help on the farm and with only one son each of us girls worked in the fields like a man. Husking corn was one of the most enjoyable tasks because we were paid a penny a bushel. Even the younger ones would take turns helping as Dad made a wooden box, nailed it to the side of the wagon, and each child received a penny for each box filled. In this way we could earn our own money for buying Christmas presents for one another. Oh yes, we did buy *each* one a present! We visited the "Dime Store" and bought little gifts, such as a hanky, a pencil, an eraser, tiny pencil sharpener, etc. What fun it was to

buy and wrap these presents.

In reminiscing about the many wonderful Christmases spent on the farm it is very difficult to express one's feelings because so many precious thoughts come to my mind. Those Christmases were *very special* and many, many times I have longed for a Christmas just like we had on the farm. True, things weren't very fancy or decorative, but we had a real Christ-centered Christmas. Jesus seemed so near and we were all bubbling over with joy.

I can well remember the early preparations in helping Mother make lefse (stacks of it – *not* potato lefse), flat bread, large sugar and molasses cookies, krumkake, berline kranser and many other Norwegian "specialties." This was lots of work and fun! Note: We didn't get to eat all these goodies at this time. We waited until Christmas Eve and Christmas Day for these treats. Much of this baked goods was saved for company and for the poor and needy.

Most of all, I looked forward to Christmas Eve, not only because we exchanged gifts, but because of the homecoming of my brother and some sisters who were away at various schools and colleges. What a joy it was to be together as a united family

*"True, things
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centered Christmas!"*

to fellowship and sing praises to the Lord. Our large Christmas tree was placed in a corner of the kitchen as that was the largest room in the house. We decorated the tree with bought, reuseable little ornaments, white popcorn that we had strung, and colored candles that were placed in small candle holders fastened to the tree limbs. These had to be arranged very carefully so the burning candles wouldn't touch a limb or another candle. To this day I marvel that our tree never caught on fire. It could only be God's protection! A fiberglass-like angel was placed at the top of the tree.

Talk about excitement on Christmas Eve! We would hurry to do our outside chores early so we could eat supper and then go to our church for the Sunday School Christmas program. As soon as we came home we'd line up chairs for everyone to be seated in a semicircle. Dad would then read the Christmas Gospel in Norwegian, followed by prayer. What a prayer it was! He thanked the Lord for all His blessings and remembered the homeless, lonely, poor, needy and missionaries. This made me appreciate more than ever my wonderful Christian home. Those of us who had given recitations or given a musical number at church would now give the same for our family.

What a happy group we were as we exchanged gifts. Each one took a turn in opening his or her gift *very*

◇

Mrs. Gerald F. Mundfrom,
Osceola, Wis.

a Christmas in Mexico

We were going to Mazatlan for Christmas! The city of Mazatlan is on the Pacific coast more than 700 miles into Mexico from the Arizona border. Our missionary friend Jan had invited us to visit and the Christmas holiday was the best time for us because of school and work schedules. We would take the train, an economical way to travel, without the hazards of driving on unfamiliar roads through foreign cities. The train left in late afternoon and arrived at Mazatlan in the morning, an ideal way to utilize our time since we could sleep on the train.

But late December proved to be very wet, with unusually heavy rains in the area, and the railroad tracks were washed out in several places in Mexico so that trains were not running into Nogales. We were informed that the railroad would provide a bus to take passengers from Nogales about 50 miles to Benjamin Hill, which was beyond the affected

area, and there we could board the train.

The bus proved to be a typical Mexican run-down city bus with little room for baggage and it was crowded. After a swift and bumpy ride over some poor roads, we arrived at Benjamin Hill where the train was waiting in the dark yards. We immediately boarded, finding seats on the shabby, cast-off former "Empire Builder," as we discovered in the light of morning in the Mazatlan station. Perhaps we had been on this very coach before in our travels through North Dakota!

Hours after boarding the conductor finally came around to collect our fares. He knew nothing of a charge for the bus ride and charged us only for the train trip. The night seemed

long as the train stopped at a number of stations and many people were getting off and on. We slept between stops and were grateful to see the dawn, and then it was our turn to get off.

We did not see Jan at the station and waited long and in vain (she had heard that the trains were not running to Nogales and assumed we would not come). She had no telephone and most unfortunately I had left her street address at home, having only her post office box number in my address book. Finally, two of us took a taxi to the post office and after much persuasion and the intervention of a sympathetic English-speaking clerk they released her street address. And so at last we arrived at her apartment house and, sitting on our suitcases in

FARM...

carefully, one at a time so all could see what was received. And how we thanked each other. Now it was time to carefully fold the Christmas paper and put that and the ribbons in a box so they could be used the next year. I still do that!

I don't remember that any of us children were ever jealous of someone else's gift. This, I know, came from the Christian training in our home. We sisters have often talked about how unusual it was for our parents to always treat everyone fairly! Would to God we could have more of that spirit in America today! Christmas giving is so competitive that the true spirit is lost.

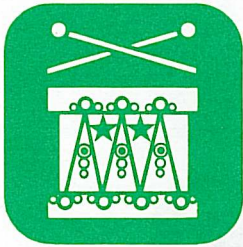
Speaking of presents, I remember that one of my sisters was wrapping hankies for each of us. She was in a hurry so as she snipped off part of the paper she also cut the corner of a hanky. She felt so bad she cried, but mother comforted her by saying it wasn't the gift that counted as much as the thought and love behind it.

After we had put our gifts in a corner or under a chair it was time for singing carols. Dad and my brother would move the kitchen table to one side and then place the tree in the center of the room (I can still see it). We would all join hands, walk around the tree slowly (first in one direction and then the opposite) and sing many carols. It was always special to hear Dad and Mom sing their Norwegian favorites such as, "Salig Jul, Hellige Jul" (Silent Night, Holy Night), and "Jeg Er Saa Glad Hver Julekveld" (How Glad I am Each Christmas Eve). The last song made an indelible impression upon me and it still means more to me in Norwegian than in English. We children marveled at the memory of our parents in singing stanza after stanza by memory. As we walked around the tree, watching the lovely flickering candles, these words from the last hymn meant so much: "Da tender Moder alle lys, saa ingen krog er mørk" (Then Mother lights the Christmas tree, and fills the room with light). It is an experience never

to be forgotten! Even to this day I prefer candles to electric lights.

Now it is time for our Christmas treats! What luxury! That night we didn't have to choose just one kind, but we could have one of each delicacy. Oh, how special!! And mother's "gomme" and "rødrevle" were super. How I wish I could make these like she did! Amid our plenty, Dad and Mother never forgot the poor, lonely, and needy - not even the birds! They would begin early to prepare packages and boxes of meat, butter, cream, cookies, bread, etc. It was often my privilege to go along in delivering these gift boxes. What a thrill it was to see the expressions of joy and thankfulness on the faces of the recipients.

One of the most memorable Christmas Eves was an evening we went to our Sunday School program at church in a light snowfall. Dad feared a storm before we left but he didn't want to upset our plans so said nothing. Mother, Dad and one of my sisters stayed at home and prayed. When our program was over, a bliz-



"There in the yard across the street was a small boy with a bright new drum! Children are alike all over the world, ..."

the front yard, waited for her to return home. She was astonished to find us there and welcomed us warmly, explaining, and apologizing for not meeting our train. Her warmth and hospitality during the next few days more than compensated for any inconvenience we had experienced.

On Sunday morning we enjoyed an English service in the little mission church conducted regularly by one of the missionaries during the tourist season in the winter months. People were there from Canada as well as several northern states.

The church was located in a residential area where the buildings were built side by side with no space be-

tween and right up to the sidewalk. Some of the better homes had iron gates across the front of the house and the space where a car was parked, and many had iron bars in front of their windows, as also was the case in Nogales, where burglaries are common.

On the afternoon of Christmas Eve I accompanied Jan as she delivered a few Christmas presents to several families. We rode on the city buses, her usual means of transportation, and were invited in at each home and welcomed with coffee or a cold drink and some goodie. Though I could understand little of the conversation, I sensed a spirit of Christian love and warmth. Last minute plans and prep-

"Amid our plenty, Dad and Mother never forgot the poor, lonely and needy — not even the birds!"

zard was raging — a bad one! We got as far as a mile from home and could go no further. We walked to the nearest neighbor (one-quarter mile), hand in hand, and from there we called home. Dad was all prepared with sleigh and horses and Mother had warm flatirons, blankets and quilts for us. We all got into the sled and Dad covered us securely. The horses really took off! I was scared, so peeked from under my blanket and saw Dad standing with his back toward that awful wind and snow with the reins across his shoulders, letting the horses go at their own pace. I hollered to him, "Dad, where will the horses take us?" He answered with all confidence, "The horses know the way in a storm much better than I do." And they

did. We were taken right to the front gate! What could have been a very sad Christmas turned out to be a happy and thankful one because God in His boundless love and mercy had protected and cared for us all the way!

On Christmas Day, of course, we all went to church as a family. How we treasured that! One by one our family became smaller as each one left home, but our memories linger on. Praise God!

As I reflect on why I have so many precious memories of my family Christmas traditions, I realize that intertwined in the fun were basic Christian teachings that have touched all of our lives down through the years with eternal values.

arations were being made for the children's Christmas program at the church that evening.

The program proved to be much like those we were used to in our northern churches. There was much singing and though the words were Spanish the tunes were familiar and we could join in. The younger children told the Christmas story in recitations and Scripture readings, and the young people presented a dramatization. Then there was a potluck supper and we enjoyed the various Mexican dishes. At Nogales also, we had received tamales from a Mexican family on more than one Christmas Eve, as tamales were a special treat for their Christmas celebrations.

Early on Christmas morning my sleep was disturbed by a steady beating sound. When it did not stop and I was awake enough to wonder what it was, I got up and looked out the window. There in the yard across the street was a small boy with a bright new drum! Children are alike all over the world, I thought, recalling my childhood days of awaking early on Christmas morning to play with a new toy, except that in the north it had been indoors, unbeknown to the neighbors! A drum would be an appropriate means, I thought, to call attention to the great Gift God had given on that first Christmas Eve, if only the drummer had heard the good news of the Savior's birth!

The Christmas Day service was well attended but not to overflowing as had been the case the previous evening, the same as often happened in our country.

For our Christmas meals we had brought along some homemade julekake and ham, and we made meatballs, and Jan made her specialty, Icelandic Christmas cake, thus mingling some of our heritage into this holiday. Vegetables and fruits were in abundance but had to be

(Continued on p. 23)



you are invited
to the AFLBS
CHRISTMAS CONCERT
December 16, 4 p.m.
3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis

Our Christmas message

by Pastor R. S. Persson,
Astoria, Ore.

II Corinthians 9:15: "Thanks be to God for His incomparable gift."

Dear Friends in Christ: Again we are at a high tide of the church year in celebrating the wondrous coming of God's inestimable gift. We follow the traditions of the blessed company of believers down through the ages who like ourselves rejoice in the blessed hope in Christ. Historians tell us that in the early Church of the first three centuries there was considerable opposition to pagan customs of celebrating birthdays, although there is some indication that a purely religious commemoration of the birth of Christ was included in the feast of the Epiphany. We are interested in such evidence inasmuch as in the Sacred Writ there is no mention of Christmas observance such as we are accustomed to observe. However, it suffices us to know by the witness of the Holy Spirit that Messiah has indeed come and ours is truly a festive celebration as we have Christ in our hearts.

Certainly our first awareness of Christmas was wrapped up in the feverish expectancy of receiving toys and, of course, the festivities that excited our childish minds. Then gradually an awareness came that there was something more precious related to all the hustle and bustle, that all such pertained to the coming of the greatest Gift. Most of us can look back in pensive reflection and think of the many gifts that we so eagerly longed for. As a child I so longed for a steam shovel. All my hopes were centered upon receiving such. I spoke of it, cut advertisements out of the papers, dreamed how I would move tons of sand and dirt. Somehow I never did get the cherished gift. However, there were always more than sufficient toys which my precious widowed mother was able to provide.

Once we had a very sad Christmas. Daddy died on Christmas Day. Indelibly impressed upon our minds as little children is the sad memory

of waiting behind the kitchen door while the undertaker fixed up Daddy. Finally we were led into the front-room and there was Daddy in a beautiful casket. There we were, mother and four small children weeping over the remains of Daddy on Christmas Day. We children were remembered with many toys and gifts which, of course, had the intent of alleviating the intense grief. Big brother never could reconcile himself to such a despicable act of God on Christmas Day and in consequence lived and died without Christ. He failed to recognize the greatest Gift that provides such loving balm for our deepest sorrows and distresses.

We, all of us, can doubtless recall joys that have been experienced with the receiving of Christmas gifts. Many of us have received gifts that have long since been forgotten and possibly were not aware of the price that was paid in order that we might have joy in the receiving of the same. There is one gift that many of us have received that too often is lightly regarded, very often unclaimed, unrealized and sometimes even held in contempt. Such is the case with the gift that was given to us in infant baptism. How little do

"... the only answer is that all blessings are the glorious effect of that given in my infant baptism."

the Greatest Gift

we think of the love and high purpose and fervent prayers of parents who took us to the baptismal font in the aspiration that we would be the recipients of God's goodness and grace. Five years previous to that one very sad Christmas day the gift of baptism had been bestowed upon my twin brother and me as we were sprinkled in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It was to be many years before I would realize the worth of that gift in the blessing of knowing Christ as a personal Savior. Many times I have pondered why I have been so favored and the only answer is that all blessings are the glorious effect of that given in my infant baptism.

A renowned theologian has said, "The older I become, the more I creep back to my infant baptism."

Some years ago I lived close to Canton, S. Dak. (we have a church there now). While in the barber chair, the barber, upon learning that I was a Lutheran pastor, exclaimed, "Just wait until you meet up with Swanson. He'll talk to you about baptism. Boy oh boy, will he get you!" Well, I did meet up with Swanson and he, learning of my spiritual position, proceeded to tear my infant baptism to shreds. "Three drops of water, three drops of water," he disdainfully exclaimed. Then he proceeded to tell me of how wonderful his new faith was in the great healings, the tremendous prophecies (which later proved to be false) and of how much he had learned of

the Word and how great it was to be such a Christian in the exercising of the spiritual gifts. Then I said to him, "Now I've got you!" "What do you mean?" he questioned. I said to him, "Would you please tell me how do you know that all of the blessings of which you are speaking are not derived from that time and experience when your precious loving parents had you sprinkled with 'three drops of water'?" He was speechless and I hammered home unrelentingly the greatest possibilities of that precious loving act and gift.

Today we celebrate the coming of

the greatest Gift. We might rightfully raise the question, just what has that Gift meant to each of us. Is it a gift that is lying unrecognized for its intrinsic value or is it a gift that increases in value every day of our lives?

Time does not permit to speak of all the countless blessings that are derived in the greatest Gift. May I just speak of three blessings. The first blessing I will mention is the blessing of peace. Such was the very first possibility enunciated by the angels in the momentous proclamation that first Christmas Day. In a

world of turmoil, yea, rather, in a life of turmoil, uncertainty and darkness, in a life of anxiety and vexation of spirit, there comes instead the sweet peace that passes all human understanding. What sort of price can one place upon so great an experience? If one does not have peace within living in this hard world all else falls into confusion and disarray. Peace for myself came with the realization "that to him who worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness" (Romans 4:5).

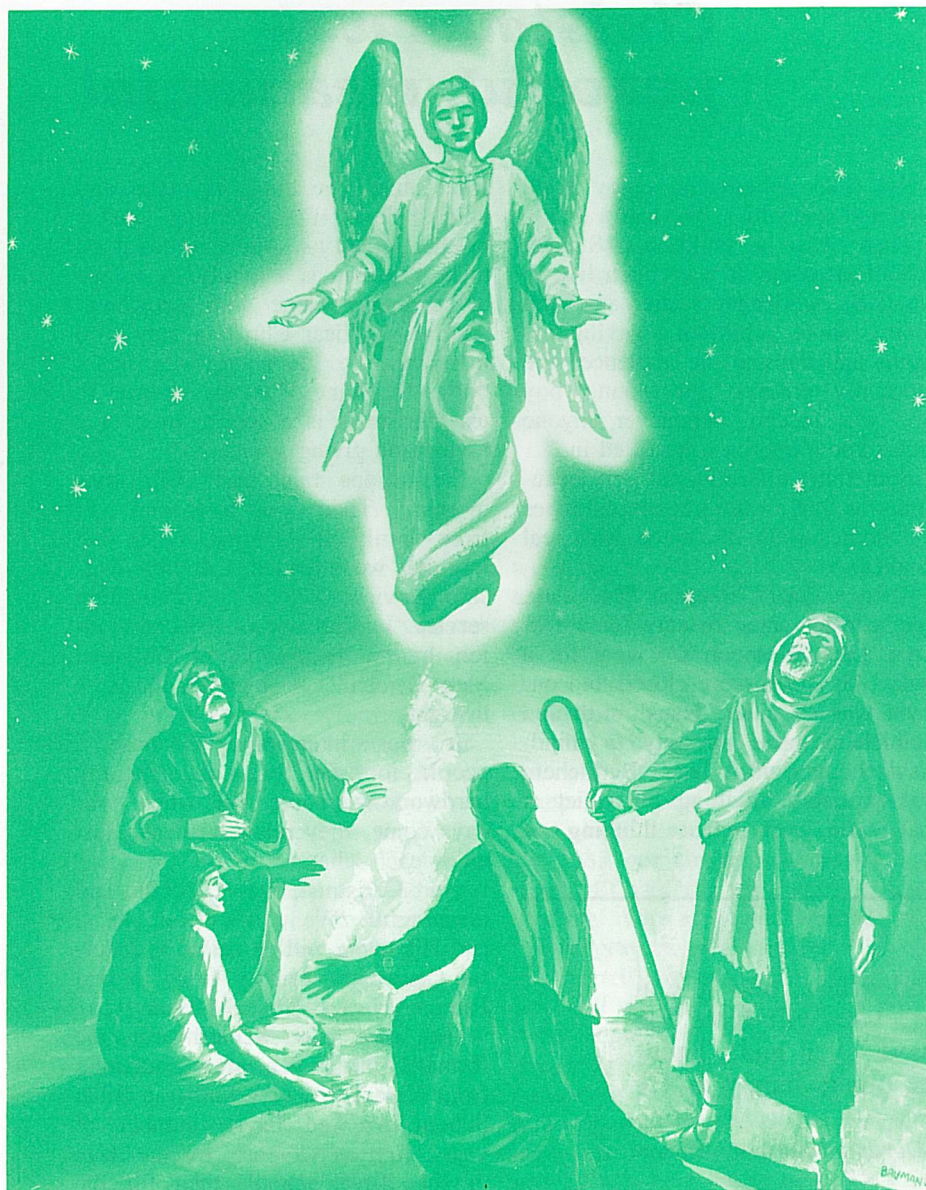
Secondly, there is the experiencing of joy. "And thou shalt have joy and gladness . . ." Such also is the divine effect of the coming of the greatest Gift. Personally, I have known what it is to be a morbid and unhappy individual, always looking for something to satisfy the inner cravings of the heart. You, too, may have had your dream castles smashed to the ground, unfulfilled aspirations and lived in a life of misery and dejection. God's Word tells us that, "therefore with joy shall ye draw water from the wells of salvation." And that is true! God never intended that the objects of His love, His greatest creation, should grovel in the misery and unhappiness of the world. Do you have that joy?

Thirdly, and I must close, there is the experience of love. Yes, there is love and it has been found in the Christian experience and in the church.

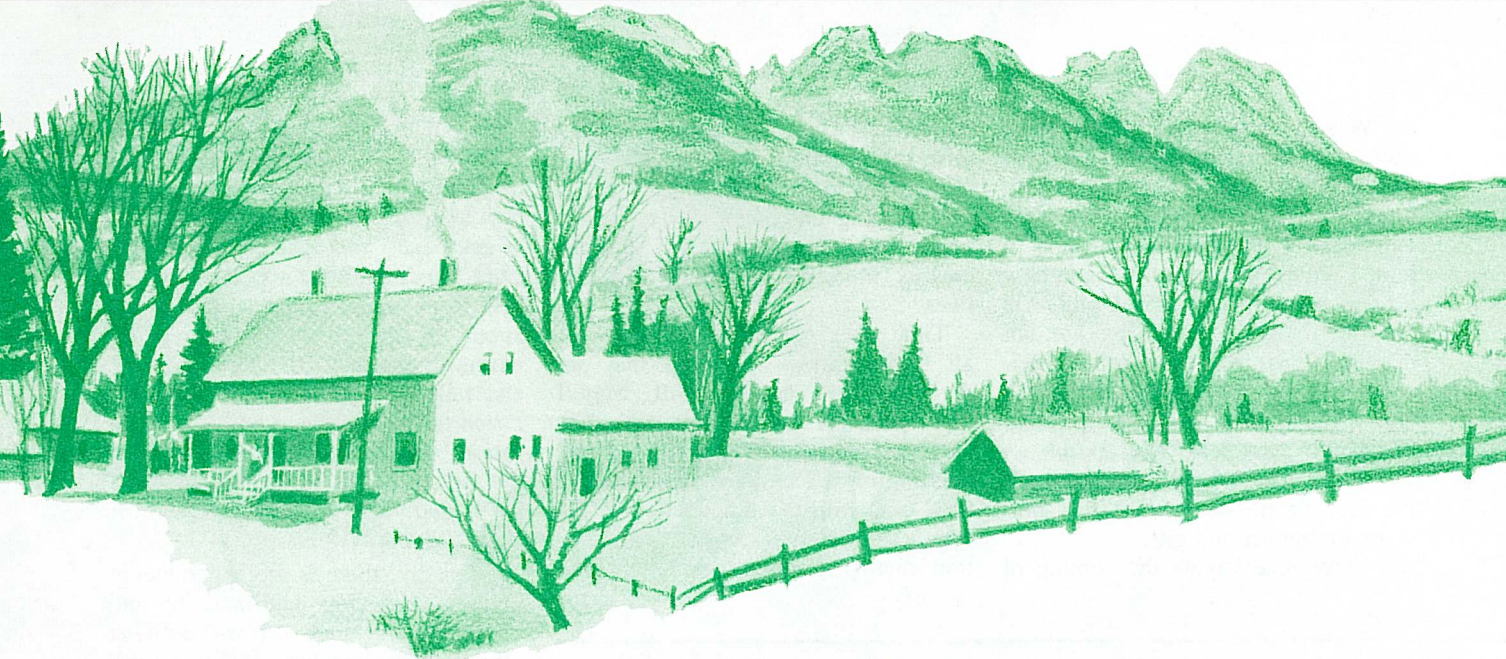
Now with all that is derived in Christ we know that we have received the greatest Gift. Such is even attested to by the recent survey that was made to determine just what people wanted most in life. In response to the question, "What are you looking for most in life?", when the results were compiled, the top three things people wanted in life were love, joy and peace. The child of God has derived all of these in one most beautiful and precious package, in having Jesus, blessed Jesus, the greatest Gift.

Can you say today, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift?"

God grant the effectual working of the Holy Spirit in every heart in the acceptance of so great a Gift.



Creator Art Studios



in Switzerland

Christmas was peaceful, meaningful

by Mrs. Jake (Orpha) Schaffhauser

Christmas 1983 was the first for Jake, our daughter Anne and me together in Switzerland. We received many cards and greetings from friends in the U.S., which we appreciated much. One stated: "We wish you a peaceful and meaningful Christmas." That thought stayed with me and made me aware of what was happening around us.

The stores and streets were decorated simply. There wasn't a lot of rushing. One evening we heard music in the streets. A small instrumental group was playing Christmas songs. I recognized only one. They were all beautiful.

There were some family gifts to buy. A couple weeks before Christmas we gathered as a family at the home of one of Jake's brothers. It was a good time together and the

Swiss, like Americans, enjoy good food and specialties. We had a lot.

There was a children's Sunday School program. It was much like in the U.S. A manger scene, an angel choir, small children waving to moms and dads in the audience. We especially enjoyed the young boy who was Joseph. Whenever anyone didn't know his lines, he filled in.

Something different and very beautiful was that all the trees in churches and homes were decorated with real candles.

Then came Christmas Eve day. Jake's sister came to stay for a few days. Late afternoon we went for a walk. All stores were closed and our town was so quiet. Jesus' birth and Bethlehem came strongly to mind. As I thought of it later, Bethlehem was probably anything but quiet at that time, yet when thinking of

Jesus' birth we think of peace and quiet. Later that evening Jake's brother joined us. Again it was good to be together as a family. A couple of neighbors came with good will gestures. A dear Christian lady who lives close to us came with many things for Anne. That was special to us. Christmas is a special time of a loving and giving spirit.

The phone rang early Christmas morning. There was a special call from family in America. Later that morning we attended a church worship service. It was a communion service. I recall one of the communion hymns being "Good Christian Men Rejoice." A good emphasis, I thought.

It was interesting to observe people, too. The Swiss are generally hardworking people. But when holidays come, they relax, visit and just enjoy each other.

Our Christmas was peaceful and meaningful. We thank God. "... and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

(Ed. note: Mrs. Schaffhauser, the former Orpha Flaten, after graduating from Association Free Lutheran Bible School, worked for a number of years, first as secretary for the dean of the Bible School, then for the president of the AFLC.)

If you take the present God offers, and if you will give Jesus your heart, you will have the happiest Christmas you have ever had. Then, too, you will want to make others happy as He did.

—Doran's Ministers Manual

Where Jesus walked

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the King . . ." (Matt. 2:1a).

We write our Christmas greeting to our AFLC having recently walked where Jesus walked and having felt His presence near. When one is able to do that personally, he experiences an impact in his life that could not be experienced in any other way. Scripture portions come alive with new meaning and Bible localities become real places.

The after-glow of that experience will always remain with one who has had the privilege of visiting the land where Jesus was born, where He lived, ministered, died and rose victorious over sin and death.

We arrived in Israel in the early hours of dawn. The glorious sunrise seemed to prime an anticipation that remained with us throughout the ten days of the Israel tour.

There is something mysteriously compelling and attractive about this little unique land of Israel. The country is, generally speaking, mountainous. But it offers a great variety of changing landscape, as well as contrasting climates. The phrase "from Dan to Beersheba" has been used to describe the extent of the borders. That is a mere 140 miles from north to south. Within a few hours you can reach any part of the country on good roads and by many types of transportation.

You can understand why this land has been a desire of every ambitious world ruler. It is strategically located at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. It is, therefore, at the crossroads of three continents and between two seas or oceans. It also forms the boundary line between the two extremes of the desert and fertile cultivation.

I will mention only one more geographic factor. The Jordan Valley is part of a great river rift that stretches about 4,000 miles, from the mountains of Turkey to Mt. Kilimanjaro in East Africa. The Sea of Galilee is over 600 feet below sea level, and the drop continues to the Dead Sea, over 1000 feet below sea level, the lowest place on the earth's surface.

One comes to realize that you literally go down when you journey from Jerusalem to Jericho which is in the Jordan valley, near the Dead Sea.

One could dwell at length on experiences at Caesarea, Nazareth, Cana, Capernaum, Jerusalem, Jericho, Mt. Tabor, Mt. Carmel and many more historical and Biblical sites. But space does not permit it. I would like to share my testimony of that which was most meaningful to me.

I had looked forward so very much to the visit to Bethlehem, the birthplace of King David, and of Jesus our blessed Lord and Savior. The simplicity and plainness surrounding Jesus's birth were not evident in the Church of the Nativity, originally built by Constantine in the 4th century. The peddlers in the street outside seemed to add to the inappropriateness.

Locations that mark our Lord's passion stand out with great significance. We traced Christ's path over the Kidron into the Garden of Gethsemane and remembered how our Lord agonized in prayer as He sweat drops of blood. It was there His enemies captured Him.

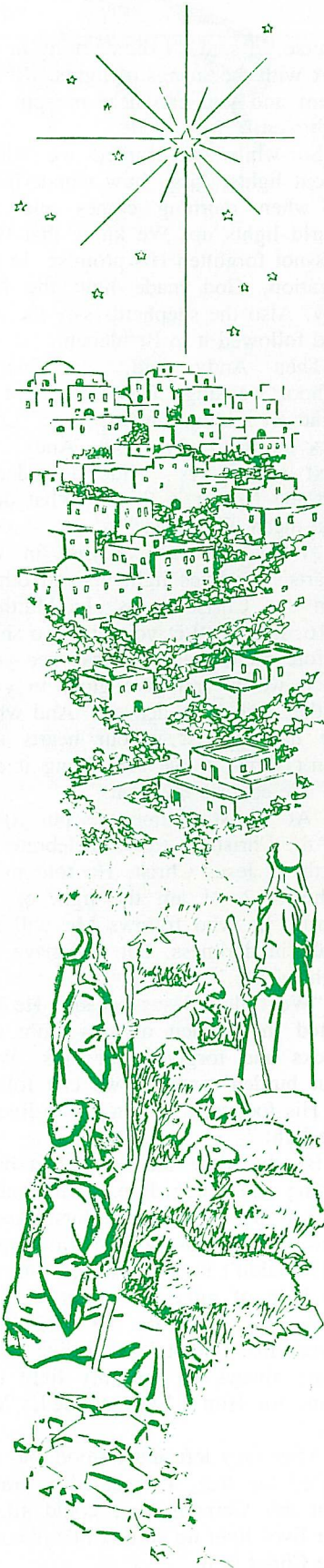
A most moving experience it was to walk the very steps that Jesus walked in the House of Caiphas for His trial. More moving still to go down into the pit where Jesus was kept, awaiting the verdict. It was a deep dungeon with just a small hole allowing the prisoners to be lowered and lifted out by ropes.

We walked the Via Dolorosa, the "Sorrowful Way," considered by Christians the holiest road in the world, for on its uneven path, Jesus was led from the place of condemnation to that of His crucifixion and death. We saw Calvary, "the place of a skull," where He was crucified.

The highlight of the whole tour was at the Garden Tomb. I stepped into the tomb to see "the place where the Lord lay." Praise God the tomb was empty, and we can rejoice evermore in the words of the angels, "He is not here, but is risen." Never has the Lord's presence been so real as at the communion service in that Garden.

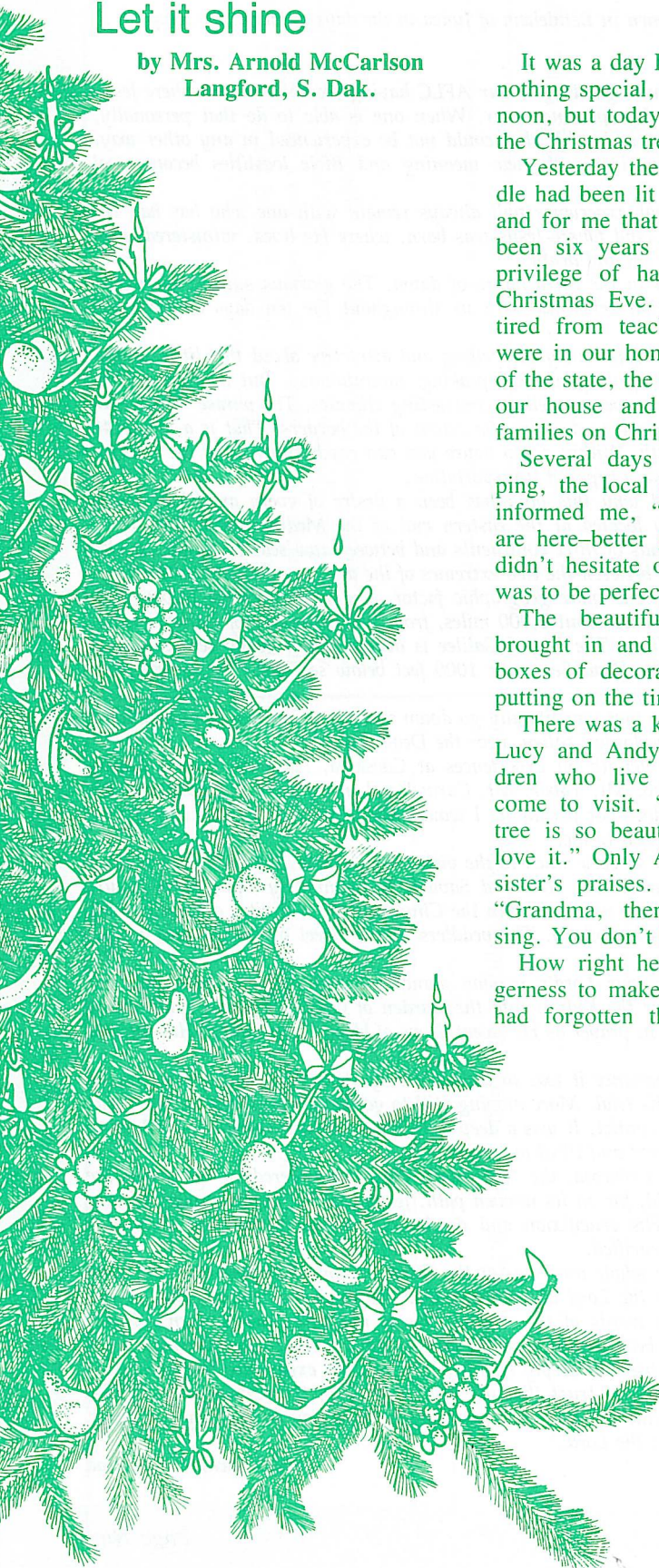
My Christmas has been so deeply enriched through the experience that was mine of visiting the Holy Land. I trust that my brief sharing of that experience will also help to enrich yours with joy for "unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior which is Christ the Lord."

—Pastor Richard Snipstead



Let it shine

by Mrs. Arnold McCarlson
Langford, S. Dak.



It was a day I had long waited for, nothing special, only a Monday afternoon, but today I was going to trim the Christmas tree!

Yesterday the second Advent Candle had been lit in the church service and for me that was a signal. It had been six years since I had had the privilege of having the family for Christmas Eve. Now that I had retired from teaching school and we were in our home in the eastern part of the state, the family could come to our house and still be with their families on Christmas Day.

Several days before, while shopping, the local grocer had smilingly informed me, "The Christmas trees are here—better get a first choice." I didn't hesitate one minute. Our tree was to be perfect!

The beautiful spruce tree was brought in and I had found all my boxes of decorations and was busy putting on the tinsel and ornaments.

There was a knock at the door and Lucy and Andy, my two grandchildren who live a block away, had come to visit. "Oh, Grandma, your tree is so beautiful," said Lucy. "I love it." Only Andy didn't echo his sister's praises. Hesitantly, he said, "Grandma, there's something missing. You don't have any lights."

How right he was! In all my eagerness to make the tree beautiful, I had forgotten the lights! "Why, of

course," I said, "I didn't bring in the box with the strings of lights. I'll get them and you can help me put the lights on."

So while we worked we talked about lights. First, how wonderful it is when morning comes and the world lights up. We know that God has not forgotten His promise. In the creation, God made light the first day. Also the shepherds saw the star and followed it to Bethlehem.

Then Andy said, "In Sunday School we sing 'This little light of mine—let it shine, let it shine'." Lucy was quick to say, "But, Andy, the next verse says, 'Hide it under a bushel? No—let it shine'. What does that mean, Grandma?"

"When we have Christ in our hearts, our lives light up—and others can see Christ in us. In Matthew 5:16, it says: 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.' And when we have Christ in our hearts and don't show it, we are hiding it and no one can see the light."

"At Christmastime we put lights on the Christmas tree to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. He told us in John 8:12, 'I am the light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'"

"We follow Jesus because He has lifted the burden of sins from our backs and forgiven our sins. With that burden removed we can follow in His footsteps. It is a joy to live in the light."

By this time the lights had been strung and plugged in, giving out a radiant hue of many colors. Andy, now pleased that the tree was beautiful, couldn't help but sing, "This little light of mine—let it shine." And then he turned to me and said, "Grandma, I want Jesus to live in my heart always so that my light can shine for Him." Lucy nodded, "Me, too."

After they left and I stood and admired the tree, I breathed a prayer that this Christmas we could all let our lives light up so that others could see Christ in us.

The Christmas story from A to Z

A is for ANGELS, shining and bright, telling of Jesus that first Christmas night (Lk. 2:13).

B is for BETHLEHEM, crowded and old, birthplace of Jesus, by prophets foretold (Micah 5:2).

C is for CATTLE—their manger His bed, there in a stable where He laid His head (Lk. 2:7).

D is for DAVID and his ancient throne, promised forever to Jesus alone (Lk. 1:32).

E is for EAST, where men saw the star, and rode away quickly to follow it far (Matt. 2:1,2).

F is for FRANKINCENSE, with myrrh and fine gold, brought by the wise men, as Matthew has told (Matt. 2:11).

G is for GOD, who from heaven above, sent down to mankind the Son of His love (Jn. 3:16).

H is for HEROD, whose murderous schemes, were told to the wise men and Joseph in dreams (Matt. 2:12,13).

I is for INFANT, taken by night, down into Egypt, from the wicked king's sight (Matt. 2:13).

J is for JOSEPH, noble and just, obeying God's orders with absolute trust (Matt. 1:24).

K is for KING, a true king was He, coming to rule in great majesty (Zech. 9:9).

L is for LOVE Jesus brought down to earth, that night in a stable in lowly birth (I Jn. 4:9).

M is for MARY, His mother, so brave, counting God faithful and mighty to save (Lk. 1:47).

N is for NIGHT, when the Savior was born, for nations of earth and people forlorn (Lk. 2:8).

O is for OMEGA, meaning "the last," He's eternal: present, future and past (Rev. 22:13).

P is for PROPHETS, who foretold Jesus' story, in visions of Bethlehem, Calvary and glory (Num. 24:17).

Q is for QUICKLY, as shepherds who heard, hastened to act on that heavenly word (Lk. 2:16).

R is for REJOICE, the sorrow of sin, is banished forever when Jesus comes in (Lk. 1:14).

S is for SAVIOR, to be this He came; the angel of God assigned Him His name (Matt. 1:21).

T is for TIDINGS, related to all, telling of Him who was born in a stall (Lk. 2:10).

U is for US, to whom Jesus was given, to show us the way and take us to heaven (Lk. 2:11).

V is for VIRGIN, foretold by the sage, God's revelation on prophecy's page (Is. 9:6).

W is for WONDERFUL, that's the Lord's name; with wonderful words and works He came (Is. 9:6).

X is for CHRIST, when in Greek it's read. He's our Savior and Lord, the angel said (Lk. 2:11).

Y is for "YES" to all God's ways, like Mary, whose "yes" filled her spirit with praise (Lk. 1:38).

Z is for ZEAL, that burned in God's Son, from His childhood years 'till His life's work was done (Jn. 2:17).

Sunny-Hope News
Stacy, Minn.

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CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

The heavens blazed in glory
On that first Christmas night,
And the shepherds were affrighted
Before the awesome sight.

The angel of the Lord came down
And bade them have no fear,
For he had come to bring to man
Glad tidings of good cheer.

He told them that in Bethlehem
A King was born that day . . .
And bade them go and seek Him
Where He in a manger lay.

They followed a moving star which
seemed
To lead their feet aright,
And came, at last, to the holy place
when half-spent was the night.

There in His mother's loving arms
The infant Jesus lay;
His royal robes but swaddling
clothes,
His throne, a mound of hay.

But the radiance of God's own
light
Shown round the royal pair.
The shepherds knew they had
found their King
So they knelt and worshipped Him
there.

And still at Christmastime we see
The heavens filled with light,
For then the stars appear to shine
With radiance more bright.

In every light His spirit dwells,
As on His natal day
Beneath the Star of Bethlehem
The infant Jesus lay.

And so it seems that light has
come
To symbolize His birth . . .
This gentle Child who came to be
Our blessed light of earth.

Thomas Patton Mock
(Free Lutheran *Lamplighter*,
Roseau, Minn.)

On a wintry Christmas Eve in Germany

by Edmund Tondt

(Translated by
Pastor Edward A. Johnson,
Lincoln, Nebr.)

One wintry evening in the year 1498 a cold northerly wind was whistling through the snow-covered streets of Eisenach, Germany. Only a few of the residents were out, hurrying home after buying their Christmas presents. To the great delight of the children, a beautifully decorated Christmas tree stood in nearly every home.

At that same time a little group of boys was hurrying through the empty, quiet streets. First one and then another shivered in the cold. Their coats were so short, so thin! Now and then they stopped, and their youthful voices were raised in song, at the sound of which the house doors opened and benevolent hands reached out to the boys with a piece of bread and something warm to eat.

Right out in front of the house of one upright lady of the town named Ursula Cotta, a little schoolboy chorus of four voices was singing. Among their group there stood out the remarkable voice of a 15-year-old boy soprano, with its remarkable beauty and harmony. He looked pale, but in his eyes excitement and devotion shone.

Frau Cotta was so moved by the beautiful singing that she stood on the threshold of her home, turned to the boys (who by now were almost frozen stiff) and said: "Come on inside, boys. Come in and relax and get back your strength."

The boys didn't waste much time mulling over this friendly invitation, especially since supper was almost ready. But one of them seemed less drawn to the food than to the bright, shiny Christmas tree which he stood contemplating with folded hands. Moved by his interest, Frau Cotta asked with interest: "I suppose you've probably never seen such a Christmas tree before?"

"Oh, yes!" he answered. "In bygone years in Mansfeld, in spite of

"Among their group there stood out the remarkable voice of a 15-year-old boy soprano"

our poverty, my parents always put up a tree for Christmas. But my uncle, Lindemann, the church sexton I'm living with now, has no money for anything like this."

"You poor boy!" she exclaimed. "Perhaps you only have the bare necessities where others have chefs, and your stomach is sometimes empty?"

"Yes," the boy agreed.

"So," Frau Cotta said, "you come to my house every day and you'll always get a bowl of warm soup and

a piece of bread with some meat."

The boy was deeply moved. "But—but how will I ever be able to pay you or show my thanks for all this?" he murmured.

"Oh, sometimes you can just sing me some of your Latin hymns," she said.

"Oh, yes!" he replied. "Every day I will praise the Most High with a song!"

And Frau Cotta not only got her wish but is remembered for her generosity. The strange little boy she took in was a very welcome guest in her home for many school years. His name: Martin Luther.

—Reprinted by permission of
Kirchliches Monatsblatt,
Mrs. Irene Schlenker, Editor,
Huntingdon Valley, Pa.

How to have a special Christmas Eve at home

Take time to plan a special Christmas Eve family celebration around the Christmas tree. If you are looking for suggestions, see the following list.

Get ready.

- Have an early supper.
- Use special dishes, centerpieces, tablecloth.
- Dress in your best clothes for this festive occasion.

Have a family program (each one do something).

- Recite a Christmas poem.
- Read a Christmas story.
- Pantomime or dramatize a Christmas story.

Sing Christmas hymns.

Read the Christmas Gospel.

- Father read the Christmas Story (Lk. 2:1-20).
- Each family member (those old enough to read) read a part of the Christmas Gospel.

Talk about the Christmas Story.

- Have each person tell which part of the Christmas Story he particularly enjoyed this Christmas.
- Mother or Father comment briefly about the meaning of Christmas for the family.

Open the Christmas presents.

- Take turns opening the gift packages (start with the youngest—it's hardest for him to wait).
- Thank God for and ask God's blessing on each giver.

—Parish Paper
Kalispell, Mont.

editorials

THE CRADLE THAT ROCKED THE WORLD

A pastor inquired about a family's absence from church one Sunday. He hoped there hadn't been any problem, any illness. No, he was told, nothing like that had caused them to miss church. The family had gone to another community for the birthday of a parent (grandparent). Then the pastor rejoiced in the feeling of warmth connected with such a family special time.

How involved are we with the Savior's birthday? Do we delight in it and wish to observe it?

In recent time we have observed the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's birth. Now Luther was a great man. Not faultless, by any means, but someone whom the Lord could use. But at Christmas we think of one much greater than Luther, Jesus the Son of God. Luther died and was buried. His tomb is with us to this day. Jesus also died and suffered burial, but He arose, the firstfruits of resurrection. He is the blessed Savior.

The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem was a lowly one. That fact will be proclaimed from a hundred thousand pulpits on Christmas Day. There was no room in the inn and so it was that a stable was the delivery room for God's Son. A manger was His cradle. What humiliation! What a Child!

A good many years ago Wm. Ross Wallace wrote these lines:

"Blessings on the hand of women!
Angels guard its strength and grace,
In the palace, cottage, hovel,
Oh, no matter where the place;
Would that never storms assailed it,
Rainbows ever gently curled;
For the hand that rocks the cradle
Is the hand that rules the worlds."

A pastor once gave as his Christmas sermon theme, playing on those last two lines: "The Cradle That Rocked the World," and we shall think along that idea, too.

But first let us notice that the very birth of Jesus was a judgment on sin. It was said of the Infant, a Savior is born. Even before His birth His name was given: Jesus (a Savior). In the best loved of our carols there is this clause: "Christ the Savior is born."

A savior saves from something. Here it means, from sin. Sin is all that opposes God's holiness. The manger cradle of Jesus was a judgment on sin. Of course, there is more to the story. There was Calvary, but it all began at Bethlehem.

Sin is serious business. You wouldn't know it from watching much of TV programming or reading some of our magazines and papers. Even some pastors don't seem to be greatly exercised by its reality. But it is serious, so serious that God sent His Son as Savior because that was the only hope for anyone.

The Cradle of Christ speaks of three things.

First, the Cradle rocked the notion of salvation by works. And that is an old, old idea. Paul labored vigorously against it. Go back to the prophets, who reserved some of their harshest language for those who trusted in religion but not in God. The spirit is alive and well in our day, too, but Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). The invitation is "Come to Me and live."

Second, the Cradle rocked the citadels of evil, proclaiming release for the captives. And release comes through simple faith in Jesus who didn't only come to earth but gave Himself up, atoning for sin. The wages of sin is death. Jesus paid the wages or penalty. You and I don't have to if we bring our sins to Him and leave them there. This redemption shakes the strongholds of the evil one.

Third, the Cradle rocked the idea of hopelessness in our world. The Savior *is here*. There's a lot of futility and despair among mankind. Some scientists have set the time clock for the world at three minutes to 12. Some people feel it as life's calling to protest against the nuclear arms race. This, they feel, is the best way to use their time and serve their fellowmen. I don't know how much time there is, but in Jesus there is refuge amidst the world's despair. The Babe of Bethlehem, grown to manhood, spoke the deathless words, "I am the resurrection and the life," and again, "I have overcome the world." The Cradle rocks and jolts the spirit of hopelessness.

Some ask, where is the "peace on earth" the angels announced that first Christmas night? Jesus was born about 135 miles from the tragic city of Beirut. Off to the east lies India, scene of recent religious riots. Has Jesus failed? Oh no, He hasn't failed, but His peace is inward. "Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in." In every nation under heaven there are those who have that deep abiding peace through the Christ of Bethlehem. Would that many more will come to know Him at this glad Christmas time.

A blessed Christmas to you, our faithful *Ambassador* family.

A CHRISTMAS MEMORY

Pastor R. S. Persson, who has written our Christmas message this year, says in it that his father died on Christmas Day. What a sad thing to happen on what should be a special, happy day. Oh, even if there is the blessed Christian hope among those involved, there is a pall which is cast over the festivity of the season. The loved one may have "gone Home for Christmas," but there is a great lonely void for those left behind.

My maternal grandfather, Grandpa Lee, died on Christmas Day, too. He was the only grandparent I remember at all and my memories have to remain those of a four-year-old.

✧

EDITORIAL . . .

You see, we lived far away from Newfolden, Minn., where he was. Our family lived in Saskatchewan. We had been back the summer before he passed away so the memories are from then and they're very sketchy. I remember some of us grandchildren walking with him to the pump to get a pail of water. He was blind and when alone followed a rope tied to the house and pump. There is also the recollection of the man with whiskers seated in the kitchen near the stove. I have heard he was a great whittler of wood, just for the shavings he could make.

So those aren't many memories to have, but they're all I have. There are some snapshots from that summer and other times that help. On some Grandpa is seated with smaller or larger groups of grandchildren. On one he is sitting in a chair, my infant brother on his left knee, his right arm around my waist as I stand beside him.

And I've heard about Grandpa from Mother and others and I've read about him, even two or three letters that he wrote. I get a very fine picture of him in my mind from all this. Best of all, he was a Christian man. Not flashy, not much out in front, but steady, dependable, someone to count on. The Norwegians have a word which may describe another attribute of his. It is the word *stillaferdig*, that is, gentle, quiet. He was one who rose early and used some of that early time to read his Bible.

Grandpa was one of the homesteaders in our community, one of the very earliest to strike down roots here, and in the process uproot a lot of brush and small trees on the "Humboldt prairie" so that crops could be planted. Somehow he became a storekeeper and postmaster for his neighbors, for varying periods of time, in addition to his farming, and opened one of those little country stores. He was along in organizing a Lutheran congregation, Folden, which 12 years later would build a church a half mile south of his farm. In politics, this Norwegian immigrant became and remained a Republican.

When he was almost 70 years, Grandpa and Grandma, who had raised a family of seven children, retired and moved into Newfolden to live in a house they had built on 21 acres of land on the edge of town. On that acreage he kept a cow or two and some chickens, cut and split wood, and generally kept busy. It was in his nature to keep active.

Grandma, who was ten years the younger, passed away first, at age 69, after a hard bout with cancer. Grandpa lived almost four years more, living in his home with his youngest daughter. At age 83 and with Christmas coming on, he took sick, going to bed to stay a week before Christmas. Today his affliction in all likelihood could have been handled with antibiotics, but then there wasn't much to do. A doctor's visit was of no avail. Children and grandchildren who lived nearby hovered near in great concern. One of his daughters asked him on what ground he believed that he was going home to God. His answer was the simple statement: "It is all of grace." That was one of the last things he said.

On Christmas Day, 1932, at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, Grandpa, Ole O. Lee, slipped away to be with the

Lord. He was "Home" for Christmas. Now that I live close to that house where he lived and died (it's unoccupied now), I think about him on Christmas Day.

Dad went to Grandpa's funeral. Mother, with a baby and all her children quite young, couldn't make the winter trip. On the day of the funeral she had us all dressed up in our best clothes and we sat quietly during part of the time when she knew the service in Newfolden would be in progress. It was one way of paying tribute to a beloved father and grandfather who passed away on a Christmas Day.

—Raynard Huglen

ASSOCIATION OF FREE LUTHERAN CONGREGATIONS

3110 East Medicine Lake Boulevard
Minneapolis, Minn. 55441

BUDGET RECEIPTS

February 1-October 31

FUND	TOTAL BUDGET	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% of TOTAL*
General Fund	\$ 193,152.00	\$127,220.54	66
Schools — AFLTS	102,232.66	45,191.49	44
AFLBS	165,251.34	74,468.95	45
Home Missions	237,739.00	118,493.24	50
World Missions	274,720.00	123,936.00	45
Praise Fund	30,000.00	20,738.31	69
TOTAL	\$1,003,095.00	\$510,048.53	51
1983-84	\$ 963,916.00	\$434,095.15	45

*Goal 75%



The Christmas Star

A star is on our Christmas tree,
Do you know why it's there?
It happened many years ago,
Upon a night quite fair,
That shepherds, biding in the
fields,
Were awakened from their sleep,
And watched a lovely, shining
star
Across the heavens creep.

They followed it until it stopped
Above a stable door.
They tiptoed in and saw a Babe,
Then followed it no more.
For Jesus in that manger slept,
A star had shown the way.
That's why a star is on our tree
On every Christmas Day.

—Bulletin
Elementary School
Newfolden, Minn.

January, 1985

8. Give quality time to your family. Titus 2:4,5; Eph. 5:33; I Pet. 3:1; Deut. 6:6,7; Eph. 6:4 _____

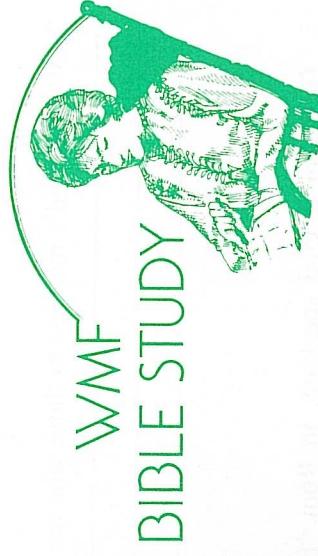
9. We hear the expression, "For time and eternity." Time is a preparation for eternity. We are living in the days of grace now, and, as we mentioned before, how important it is for our souls to be prepared for eternity. Also, we are given time to win others to the Lord. Read Dan. 12:3. Who is wise, in Prov. 11:30? _____

"Room and *time now* give to Jesus, soon 'twill pass, God's day of grace." "Only one life 'twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ shall last."

Let us seriously apply this lesson to our lives. Time is so precious; let's not waste it, but ask the Lord to fill each precious moment with His presence and purpose.

In closing let's sing prayerfully "Cleanse Me."

Mrs. Alvin Grothe
Astoria, Oregon



A CLOSER WALK WITH JESUS

Col. 2:6: "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him."

It is my prayer that each of us will have a closer walk with the Lord this new year. Each month we will be studying a different theme (pertaining to that month) on our spiritual walk with the Lord. Please let us be in prayer as we study together, allowing the Lord to speak to us, that His Word would truly live in our hearts and be applied to our daily lives, which will result in a closer walk with our Lord Jesus. Let us pray also that we will have a part in revival, by our own hearts being revived each day to a greater love for Jesus, a deeper desire to live a life pleasing to Him and willingness to serve Him because we love Him.

LESSON ONE-REDEEMING THE TIME

In our first lesson we are going to center our study on Time. If we are going to have a closer walk with the Lord, we have to give Him time. As we look back over the past year, has the Lord had first place in our hearts and lives? As we face a new year, and if the Lord tarries, let us pray that we will be more yielded to Him, and make better use of the time He gives us.

1. Time is very precious! We all know how quickly it goes, too. Read Jas. 4:13-15. What is our life likened to? _____

2. What is God's message to those who are unsaved, in II Cor. 6:2?

3. To whom is God speaking, in Rom. 13:11? _____

4. Do we waste time? Discuss ways in which we do. Prov. 18:9; Heb. 6:12 _____

5. Read Eph. 5:16. What is the meaning of this verse? _____

6. A Christian woman ought to dedicate *all* her time to the Lord, since all honest labor pleases Him. However, I recently read of a lady who decided to give the Lord a tithe of her time. That means that in 24 hours she will give (at least) 2 hours and 40 minutes to the Lord. Do we? _____ (II Cor. 9:7) God loves a cheerful giver of time, too.

7. Discuss ways we can give *specific* time for the Lord:

a) Personal devotional time

1) Bible reading and meditation. Col 3:16; Ps. 119:111; Josh. 1:8 _____

2) Prayer. Ps. 55:1,17; Acts 6:4 _____

b) Time for preparation. II Tim. 2:15 _____

c) Worship and prayer meetings. Heb. 10:25; Ps. 122:1 _____

d) Serving and visitation. Acts 9:36-43 _____

home mission news

Our church in Williston

Matthew 16:18 quotes Jesus as saying, "... and upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it". That simple statement by our Lord outlines the very essence of Home Mission life. The experience of Emmanuel Lutheran Church has not been an exception.

It has been over four and one-half years now since our pastor, John Rieth, received a letter of call from the Home Mission Board to begin the work here in Williston, N. Dak. The time has passed quickly and God has been good to us.

Williston was full of activity when our congregation began. The oil boom you all have heard so much about was at its peak. Available housing was nearly non-existent and along with that was the concern for a place for us to begin holding services. We saw from the very beginning that God keeps His Word. He did provide a place for our pastor and his family to live. They were able to purchase a townhouse, not even built at the time, and moved here in August of 1980. Our concern for a church building was also satisfied when the Seventh Day Adventists consented to rent their facility to us. That served as our church home until January of this year.

The Home Mission work here was really almost a start from scratch. While Williston has a strong Lutheran tradition, some of it with Lutheran Free roots, there was actually only one family committed to the work prior to our first services. God had His people for us, however, and even before that first Sunday in September of 1980 there were a few who showed interest in beginning an AFLC work here. We were fortunate to have close to us strong, established congregations in the Tioga and Culbertson areas. Many of our members were involved originally in the Tioga area of the AFLC.

There were 48 people at our first worship service in September, and by

Christmas we had organized a Sunday School. God continued to bless us with visitors who later felt the conviction to become a part of our fellowship. Many of these people were mature Christians and we were blessed perhaps beyond the average Home Mission experience with able leadership. For this we also thank and praise God.

We began meeting in homes late in 1980 to share in Bible study and work on the steps toward compiling a constitution for our congregation. After many suggestions, it was decided to call our new congregation "Emmanuel," for God had certainly been with us.

1981 saw many changes and much of the work begun in 1980 was completed. We spent many weeks on our constitution and it was finished. We voted to purchase three and one-half acres of land inside city limits and secured much of the needed funds from Church Extension. That land was paid for in 1983.

In 1982 we elected a building committee to research and recommend possible plans for a new church building. Hundreds of hours were spent over the next two years and several different plans were considered. There were times of discouragement as what seemed to be open doors closed. We were a growing congregation and our increasing size, coupled with growing restrictions on the use of the Adventist church, compelled us to seek a more permanent place to meet and call our own. By 1983 our charter membership of nearly 40 baptized members had doubled and more room was needed.

Our prayers were answered in an unexpected way when the church we now call our home came up for sale. After negotiating with the Williston Assembly of God, we reached an agreement to purchase the church building with nearly all the furnishings left intact. Most of what we needed was here when we came. Our first service at 1213-3rd Avenue

West was held on January 8, 1984. Dedication of the church took place in March. Our baptized membership now is 94.

There are so many more things that one could write. We've shared some of the mechanics of our beginnings, but more important than that is the work God has done in our lives. Many have come to know Christ as Savior. Christians have grown and are reaching out to their friends with the Good News. Our concern throughout this time has been that we never forget that it is "His" church. We have tried and failed when we have spent our own efforts and insight. But, we have grown closer to Him and to each other when we have remembered both what true success is and who gives it.

We have found that people ask often, "How are things going?" Much of the time that can be translated into "How many people do you have and how are the offerings?" While both are valid concerns, we have learned that growth and progress in Home Missions or any other work cannot be gauged solely by these criteria. Each work is unique. Each work is different. We thank God that He has blessed us so. We at Emmanuel thank Him that the success of this congregation rests on His ability to keep His promises to us all. And, we thank you, the members at large of the AFLC, for your prayers and financial support, your words of encouragement and vision for Home Missions. We are especially thankful to God for our Home Mission Director, Pastor Elden Nelson.

The work is far from over. Remember us in your prayers and in your giving to Home Missions, as God supplies.

—Submitted

(Mrs. Rieth, Jan, concluded a six month's series of chemotherapy on Oct. 30. She is doing well. She will have checkups at the University of Minnesota Hospital every three months in 1985, thereafter at less frequent intervals. With no reoccurrence after five years one is considered "cured." Pastor and Mrs. Rieth express thanks to all who have remembered them in prayer.



SING UNTO THE LORD

Sing unto the Lord, ye nations sing,
Our God hath done a wonderful thing.
Among the people His praises tell;
Draw water out of salvation's well;
Now water is freely flowing.

Behold, a branch of Jesse's stem
Is born in the town of Bethlehem.
He shall grow up as a tender shoot;
The true Vine bearing eternal fruit;
A Vine bearing fruit everlasting.

The people lost in dark of night
Rejoice to see a shining light.
Salvation has come to one and all,
To sinners lost since Adam's fall,
The light of the world now shining.

A Child is born, a Son is given,
This gift of God sent down from heaven.
Respond, glad heart, with melody;
Our Saviour God has come to thee,
The heavenly Gift of salvation.

E. J. Mork
Bottineau, N. Dak.

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

Christmas, an old story

The rushing, the shopping, the glitter, the music and the excitement of Christmas rush are all upon us once more. We must, this year more than most, try to "tighten the belt" of the spending even though those lists are long.

This is too often the story of Christmas or should we spell it Xmas? For me and my family the second spelling does not exist. Christmas to us has a far deeper meaning.

I'd like to take you back to a simple farm home in Central Minnesota. It was during those lean years of the '30s. I was one of the youngest kids among the cousins and I really learned what hand-me-downs were. However, I never dressed in anything I had to be ashamed of. Somehow my saintly parents found a way to keep us well-fed, well-clothed and full of love. Ours was a home filled with kindness, understanding and love. There was always room for the extra relative or visitor who just happened by. Our house was so small, but our "home" was a mansion. You see, home was a God-centered one where love knew no bounds.

I remember those early Christmases. There was so much hustle and bustle it could make your head spin. Yes, there was shopping—looking so carefully for the special gift for each family member and friend. With that detail out of the way we could get on with the important details.

How we longed to get home to smell those grand aromas from Mother's marvelous holiday baking. . . . There was always enough for everyone and there was no limit on number of helpings. We never ate "just one" cookie.

As the days neared Christmas we all pitched in, first to pick out the tree and then to decorate it and the house. I'll never forget when we first had electricity and Dad got our first tree lights. Many tears of excitement and joy were shed as they were lit.

Our gifts tucked under the "world's most beautiful tree", we would spend those memorable evenings with someone at the piano and

all of us singing the beautiful carols. . . .

We never forgot why Christmas came. Many times we were warmly bundled up and driven (sometimes hauled by horse and sleigh) to church to sing and praise the Christ Child of the manger.

So many memories are in our hearts today. I cannot forget three Christmases when critical illnesses nearly took three of us away. There was Christmas 1941 when just before Christmas I successfully survived a near fatal surgery; the time when Dad survived a bloodclot on his heart; the time when my only brother lay motionless on Christmas Eve as the result of a tragic auto accident.

But, you know, we survived each of these and because of them we

grew stonger and our faith, severely tested, grew so strong.

The memories, some sad, but mostly so beautiful, have given us so much to hang on to.

This Christmas, let each of us resolve to put down the tinsel and glitter in our lives and look to that age-old star on top of the tree and remember why it is there. When you carefully wrap that gift, make sure that it is carefully filled with love—His Love. May the words of the carol ring true today as they did nearly 2000 years ago—"Joy to the world, the Lord is come; Let earth receive her King."

May the joys and blessings of the Real Christmas be with you and yours always.

Frank Curry



Legend of the robin

The small robin they say is blessed of Him
Who was born long-ago in Bethlehem.

When the angel songs had faded away,
When the shepherds had gone, the oxen lay
In sleep. All was still. Then kind Joseph slept.
Then the wind gusted chill, but no one kept
The fire burning bright in the drafty barn
So that mother and Child might still be warm.
The cold snow fast battered the broken pane;
Lower, lower shrank the now fading flame.
Not a thing stirred to rouse the dying spark
But a small brown bird awake in the dark.
With his tiny wings he a bellows made;
In dread fear of the flame, yet unafraid.
The fire blazed once more; the flame seared his chest.
But love overflowed the pain in his breast.
His wings quickly beat till the whole barn glowed,
Till the welcome heat in a blanket flowed
To enfold the manger where lay the Boy.
Still his wings beat with the rhythm of joy
Till the woman and man with warmth beguiled
Softly stirred in their sleep. The Baby smiled.

The brown little bird always bore the stain
Of his deed of love and the burning flame;
And his children forever on their breasts
Wear the badge of him who gave of his best.

Marlene Moline
Lansing, Ia.

Christmas in the land where it began

by Liv Høyland

Take Christmas tree lights and decorations with you was one of the bits of advice we were given before we began packing our belongings to send them ahead to Israel. A little sign that from now on we would be celebrating Christmas in a strange land with different customs and traditions.

We arrived in Israel in mid-January and so we had a long time to get acclimated to the country and her people before we actually had to think about our Christmas away from home. Both October and November are generally months with pleasant temperatures and much sunshine. Therefore, it felt strange to work on Christmas mailing while we could still spend our days off at the seashore. Also, the gifts to Norway had to be bought in good time. But Christmas gift wrapping and parcel wrapping were more of a problem. We learned in a hurry that pretty paper is something one must take good care of. The children were busy making things to pack with – not a bad idea, however, if one wishes to be a little personal.

No Christmas Rush

While at home in Norway we were caught up in the hectic Christmas rush as early as mid-November, life goes on in Israel society at its usual pace at that time of year. I got a little shock, at any rate, when three days before Christmas I was going to buy groceries and I heard that the price of food had gone up 25% overnight. Because of the terrible inflation we can experience such jumps. We just hadn't figured on that in our Christmas budget.

Home in Norway we knew that December was a very hectic month. Father as pastor had a schedule filled

with programs, "We welcome Christmas with songs," and school services in addition to all the usual duties. All the while Mother as a teacher in the high school sat buried in a heap of composition papers and had to work as fast as she could to grade them. And in the midst of all it was necessary to get cakes baked and make some decorations with the children. And so it was good to have Aunt Johanna – our baby sitter, who always had time to let the children take part in Christmas preparations.

Here in Israel the preparations had

"... it felt strange to work on Christmas mailing while we could still spend our days off at the seashore."

a wholly different look. Christmas isn't set apart either by the end of a semester at school or by making an impact upon life in another way. It is always an exciting time when there is vacation from school, at Christmas or any time. The first year we were here we were fortunate. The Christmas and Hanukkah, the Jewish festival of lights, fell at the same time. At other times we have to ask that the children be excused for the first and second days of Christmas so that we can celebrate Christmas together. Arrangements in the congregation must also be adjusted to the work schedule. It isn't taken for granted that the congregation can gather on Christmas Day at 11 a.m..

Away from Our Loved Ones

Both old and young were anxious about how it would be to have Christmas in a totally different region of the world. How it would feel to observe the festival so far from our

own people. For our own family, however, this wasn't something completely new. As the parsonage family in Namdalen, well over 100 miles (likely 700 miles in U.S. miles – Ed.) from parents, brothers and sisters, we didn't really lose the idea of a family Christmas. And it was because we experienced the staff fellowship and companionship of the congregation as something especially wonderful. The children very quickly found new aunts and uncles and didn't need to fear a lonely holiday.

Not only the absence of family had an influence on our Christmas. The time for our family Christmas also varies from year to year. It isn't certain that our family observance will necessarily be on the 24th of December. The first Christmas Eve we celebrated together with the congregation. The first scheduled program was a large festival dinner at the home for the aged together with the residents and workers there – a fine experience there was when Christmas songs were sung in 8-10 languages – and we really experienced the Christmas good news as something that leaps over boundaries. It is a special experience when people from 12-15 different countries can unite in hymns of praise to the Savior who was born – to Messiah who has come.

The Christmas Message Goes Out

At 6 o'clock the church sanctuary was filled to the last place for the Christmas service. To do away with the need for translation that day, there was instead of the usual Hebrew sermon, four mini-sermons in Hebrew, English, German and Romanian, in that order. Strange and maybe a little confusing for a newcomer, but also this is witness to oneness across language barriers. In the future only Hebrew will likely be used. Many Israelis are to be found in church on Christmas Eve. Some come to see the Christmas tree – others to hear beautiful music – some have memories from their previous homeland – for others all is new. The big thing for them is that they come and get to hear the message that the Messiah has come – that Israel's God is a faithful God who desires to save all people. Christmas

can therefore present a great possibility for reaching out with the Gospel. People in Israel hear and react to what they hear. The Christmas service therefore doesn't become only a ritual like we now and then experience in Norway.

Mingling in the parish hall after the service gave opportunity for fellowship. Some days earlier, a large ferry travelling from Hellas to Haifa began to burn and was wrecked in dangerous water right along the coast – and some of the ship's company who had lost everything, came and celebrated Christmas with us. In such a situation it is essential that they find an open fellowship.

It was an unusual Christmas Eve we had but a good one because the Christmas evangel was in the center of it.

A Large Family

A blot on our happiness was that Anne Helene, our oldest daughter, had to spend the day in bed with bronchitis and high fever. Fortunately, she was better the next day when we were going to have our family Christmas. That that took place on Christmas Day no one minded.

A well-filled fir tree with 20 centimeter needles (this would mean almost eight-inch needles, possibly a mistake – Ed.) – decked with Norwegian Christmas tree lights resembled our Norwegian Christmas trees and was given the place of honor in our room. Tradition ordained that the mission staff be divided between the two families celebrating Christmas. Since we always have wanted to widen the family group on Christmas Eve, we think it's great to have a large gathering at Christmas.

The menu for Christmas which for us from the south of Norway traditionally should consist of good fresh cod, this time had to be pork steak



and sauerkraut and the various things that go with them. We haven't become acquainted with the kinds of fish available here. It isn't so simple to secure pork either in a land where pork is considered unclean. After persistent efforts, however, we found an Arab butcher who got for us what we wanted. To indicate that he was a Christian and therefore was fully within his rights when he sold pork, he had hung a picture card of Jesus on the cross on a wall of the shop.

Also the traditional Christmas baking was to be seen. To be sure it was a little more difficult to buy the right spices, but with the help of wordbooks, first Norwegian-English, and then English Hebrew, also that purchase was accomplished.

The Familiar and Beloved

It is doubtful that we have ever sung the familiar Norwegian Christmas songs with such great joy. After having wrestled with many languages and new languages to us in our breaking-in period, it was good to be with something familiar and beloved. Anne Helene, Knut Helge and Inger Lise were very happy and ventured that this holiday ranked fully as

highly with previous Christmases. The Christmas presents – both those which came in large boxes from Norway – and those from our new country, brought joy and happiness. The smallest girl was fascinated by a movie projector, so every time the projector light was turned on she came running with her most beaming smile. Thoughts went, of course, to grandparents in Norway and telephone conversations with them was one of the gifts we perhaps held most dear.

Christmas in Christmas Land

The first Christmas in a strange land was a good experience and the strange land was after all not so strange. For we had Christmas in the land of Christmas, under the same heavens where the great wonder happened some 2,000 years ago. We didn't have any white snow—but the shepherds in the fields likely didn't have that either that first Christmas night. That it could be bitterly cold so that they needed a fire to warm themselves, we can attest to. We shivered also in the ice-cold wind that first Christmas of ours.



"For we had Christmas in the land of Christmas, under the same heavens where the great wonder happened some 2,000 years ago."

Christmas Memories

by Mrs. Sandra Herrala,
Negaunee, Michigan,
as told to her daughter,
Marie Rogers

Christmas time in my early childhood was very simple compared to what it is today. In the years 1905 and on, we lived in the small log house that Father had built out in the country some miles from the nearest town. Our Christmas tree, which was only two or three feet tall, was hung from the rafters. It had real candles on it and homemade paper decorations of bells and stars. Usually, the only gifts I received were a small bag of candy, some kind of fruit, and perhaps a little toy. I remember when I was about five years old that Mother had given me a doll for Christmas. However, I enjoyed it for only one day, for the next morning when I got up I discovered that our dog had torn my little doll all apart. It was a sad experience for me.

Our food for the Christmas season was traditionally Finnish. Mother would always bake a dark molasses bread, along with the usual homemade bread that included "rieska," a rather flat, round oven bread. And there was lutefisk cooked in milk. Along with the rice pudding ("riisiveiliä") for dessert, would be a fruit sauce cooked with prunes and

raisins, and flavored with molasses. There weren't many sweet cakes in those days, but we were well supplied with dry toast that came in a big wooden barrel purchased especially for "coffee time." The "pop man" came out twice a year, in the summer and before Christmas, to sell what was then called "cider." Mother would buy a box of cider and some fruit syrup which made a delicious hot or cold drink when mixed with water.

Church services were usually held only once a month in someone's home or in the schoolhouse when a preacher would travel out into the country to hold a meeting, so there weren't Christmas Eve or Christmas Day services until some years later. But there was always a Sunday School program, with recitations of poems and stories to relate the birth of Jesus, after which the children were given homemade popcorn balls and bags of hard candy. The day after Christmas was visiting day, getting together with the neighbors.

In those days there were no cars on the roads, so to get from place to place meant a ride in a horse-drawn sleigh. For the Christmas season, Father would hang bells on the horses that jingled all the way to our destination, adding to the festive spirit of this special time of year.

Country style devotions

"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (II Corinthians 8:9).

IN A STABLE

Oh, lowly barn,
Tonight you softly beckon me
to pause in your abode.
No decorated palace this . . .
No dainty nursery here.

I probe the Christmas mysteries;
My voice breaks through the dusk

Why would He leave a heavenly throne
To come to earth for this?"

Then a soft sound answers me,
A pigeon's kindly coo.
It so clearly enunciates . . .

"For you! For you!"
And cows and kittens join the song

"For you! For you!"

—Doris Stensland
Canton, S. Dak.

Personalities

Pastor Rodney Johnson, recently ordained, is not serving Zion Lutheran Church in Willmar, Minn., as was reported in the Oct. 23 issue. He is only serving Green Lake Lutheran, Spicer. Zion is in the process of securing her own full-time pastor.

In Memoriam

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

MINNESOTA

Spicer

Mr. Oliver Emil Stulen, 87, Oct. 22, Green Lake



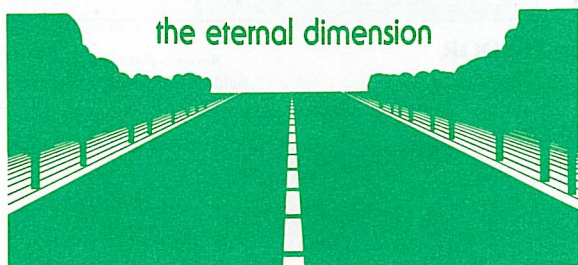
Christmas land . . .

"Fear not. I come to you with news of a great joy, joy for all the people. Today is there born for you a Savior in David's town: He is Christ, the Lord."

This was the angel's announcement to the shepherds, and that rings out to Israelites also today. This Jesus who was born in their own country, He was not only "Jeshu ha Nostri"—Jesus the "Kristne"—as the Jews call Him, no, He was the Savior, Messiah who was promised and who was born in David's city, Bethlehem, just as we find it recorded by the prophet Micah in the fifth chapter.

—Reprinted from *Misjonsblad for Israel*, December, 1983.

Translated by the *Ambassador* editor, with assistance from Mr. and Mrs. T. J. Forland



what kind of Christmas will you celebrate?

Have you ever seen something being used for a purpose for which it was not intended? We are told that many church buildings in Communist countries have been turned into museums, or even into grain storage buildings. Many of the old one-room school buildings in our country were eventually abandoned as schools and put to a different use. Perhaps you have found a new use for an old item. Perhaps you have almost forgotten what the old item was originally intended for. How about Christmas? Do you use it according to its original purpose?

Isn't it true that many people seem to have forgotten what the Christmas celebration was at the beginning? Haven't many turned it into something different? We cannot doubt that many still observe Christmas as a special holiday. Many parties are a tradition of the Christmas season. Party centers begin in summer to remind prospective customers to reserve their facilities for their Christmas celebration. We are told that it is the Christmas buying which can make or break a department store. Whether it makes an annual profit or winds up on the loss side of the ledger depends on its Christmas sales.

When Christmas Eve comes, almost every commercial business is closed down and remains closed until the day after Christmas. This indicates that many people are still observing some kind of Christmas. The question is, "Are they using Christmas according to its original purpose?" How about you? Are you using Christmas according to its original purpose?

What was the original Christmas all about? We will have to go to the Bible for the answer. In Luke's Gospel, chapter 2, verses 8-20, we read of an angel visiting shepherds as they tended sheep outside Bethlehem. To them the angel said, "Fear not! for,

behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." That is the original Christmas. It was heaven's gift to your world. The gift was meant to give you great joy. We know it is for you, for it is said to be "to all people." It is a gift which you need very much, for it is the gift of your Savior. The angel said to Mary, "You shall call His name Jesus, for it is He Who will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). Please notice that first Christmas gift was given by God to you, and that that gift was Christ the Lord, Who was to become your Savior.

What kind of Christmas will you celebrate? Will you use Christmas according to its original intent? Isn't it too bad that many have lost the real intent and purpose of the Christmas celebration? Such are left with a super-glorified party. When the party is over they are left empty-handed and empty-hearted. Isn't it sad that the greatest Gift of all is forgotten? Don't let that happen to you. Be sure to receive the original and greatest Christmas gift. Be sure to receive your Savior and celebrate Christmas in the right way. For unto you (was) born (that) day . . . a Savior Who is Christ the Lord. Let Christ be the center of your Christmas and you will have the best Christmas of all. Our wish for you is a *very joyful, and blessed Christmas!* Celebrate it the way it was first celebrated.

—Pastor Emerson Anderson
Cleveland, O.

Emmanuel came to us as a tender little baby, so simple, so beautiful, so Wonderful; such a logical way for the Prince of Peace to visit us.

P. Buchan

"But when the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:4,5).

MEXICO . . .

cooked or we could use a variety that could be peeled. We had a delicious fresh pineapple that was exceptionally sweet and juicy, as well as tangerines and oranges.

After dinner most of the family went to the beach for a swim. The weather was cloudy and rather cool (in the 70s) during our stay in Mazatlan, but we had to spend at least one afternoon enjoying the sandy beach and the ocean breakers.

On other days we purchased fresh fish directly from boats just in with their catches and had the new experience of shopping for produce and meats at an open-air market a square block in size.

Too soon our holiday came to an end. We took the bus to the railroad station. This time it was not crowded with passengers standing in the aisles and, to my amazement, even on the boarding steps and halfway out the doors! We bought our tickets and still had some pesos left — they had gone farther than we had anticipated.

The next morning at Benjamin Hill we sat in the railroad yards literally for hours waiting for a bus to be repaired, and finishing up our tangerines which we would not be permitted to take across the border into the U.S. Finally we arrived home feeling very tired and dirty.

It had been a unique Christmas and we thanked God for the privilege of sharing it in another culture and with missionaries and Mexican Christians. Truly God is forever the same there and here!

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Fear not

Luke 2:10,11

This was God's message to weary nations
On that first Christmas morn:
"Fear not, for unto you I give a Saviour;
This day the Christ is born."

And still the words are ringing down the ages
Above the world's despair:
"Fear not, for unto you is born a Saviour,
And here is rest from care;

"And here is free and plenteous
redemption
For all the sons of men;
Beauty of flame among their dead, gray ashes,
From death, new life again.

"And here is light for those who sit in darkness,
And joy for those who mourn;
And here is peace amid the world's disquiet,
Fear not; the Christ is born."

—Annie Johnson Flint

The most special Christmas of all

The most special Christmas of all
Came when a little Babe was born.
Of lowly birth, He came to earth
Before breaking of the morn.

As an Eastern star shone brightly
And stillness caressed the cool air,
An angel of the Lord appeared
To herald the Babe, so fair.

Shepherds watching their flocks of
sheep
Gave heed to the angel's clear
voice;
They hastened on to Bethlehem.
A Savior is born! Rejoice!

Then a host of heaven's angels
Sang loud praises to God above—
"Glory to God and peace on earth,
Goodwill to men who show love."

Wisemen followed the guiding star
That led to Mary and her Child;
They honored Him with precious
gifts,
Worshipping the Babe, so mild.

The most special Christmas of all
Is the reason we celebrate
The birth of Jesus Christ, our Lord,
Who gives us peace, hope and
faith.

Pauline Bondy
Grand Forks, N. Dak.