



# THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

December 8, 1992





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## THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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## Light on the Way

## Putting The Gospel Into Christmas

*For God, Who said, 'Let Light shine out of darkness,' made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (II Corinthians 4:6).*

Each year we watch one of the greatest events of the church year and of our faith disintegrate into a secular holiday. An increasing number of people in our society today do not know or even care to know the true meaning of Christmas. This became a startling reality to me some years ago at a shopping mall. Late one December, while returning from a board meeting in Minneapolis, I was to find some Christmas cards. Two young nurses were also browsing through the cards. Suddenly one discovered a box of cards with Scripture and a religious greeting. She turned to her friend and said, "Oh look, they're even putting Christ into Christmas now!" She was visibly disappointed. She was serious and I was shocked into reality!

Each year business opportunists try to "wring" everything they can from the Christmas season. Now we see the business community begin their promotions right after Halloween. Thanksgiving is blended into the one grand holiday season.

Why do we experience this predicament each year? Could it be that we in America, for the most part, have lost the meaning? Are we, as God's people, making the most of opportunities in our communities to emphasize to true reason for Christmas? This year, let's make it a Holy Day in our community.

We put the Gospel into Christmas when we focus on the true meaning of why we celebrate on December 25. We must look beyond the decorations, presents and parties and come face-to-face with the fact that some-

thing happened 1992 years ago. Our world has never been the same since then. No one can read the Old Testament without being convinced of the fact Christmas began not in Bethlehem, but from the very time man fell into sin in Eden. Genesis records the first promise of God's gift of a Savior.

We can discover anew the Gospel of Christmas when we focus on the purpose. The first part of II Corinthians 4:6 reveals the fact of Christmas. God Himself made it happen! The second part shows the purpose of Christmas, namely to bring the "light of God" to mankind, who without Christ, gropes in the dark night of sin. Scripture records God became man to communicate this "light" to all peoples; to tell us about God and His plan to the world. Then too, we understand the Gospel of Christmas when we come to grips with the fact that Christmas cost God something.

**"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life," John 3:16 (NIV).**

A true understanding of the Christmas Gospel requires a response to God for the gift of His Son. We too must give ourselves to God and our fellow man as an appropriate response for so great a Christmas gift. Jesus is the reason for the true meaning of this blessed season!



—by Rev.  
Larry Severson



# Yonder Breaks A New And Glorious Morn

## Isaiah 9:2

**T**here are those events throughout history that have changed the world so greatly that it will never be the same again; for example the discovery of penicillin and the invention of the hydrogen bomb. What happened on that holy night when Jesus was born was the greatest of all events! Truly the world will never be the same.

Isaiah says: "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned," (Isaiah 9:2). We realize this prophecy is about Christ because it says: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." At the beginning of Christ's ministry in Matthew 4:16, He declared that this prophecy spoke of Himself.

Because of what happened that holy night, history will be forever affected. The statement has been made: "The hinge of history is on the door of a Bethlehem stable." Many unbelievers might scoff at that declaration, but scoff as they will, they can not ignore the fact that the world dates history as though the universe was changed that night. We date history backward and forward from that night and each time we write a date we attest to the fact.

Consider what happened that holy evening as we think of the words of the scriptural hymn entitled, "O Holy Night."

### Before That Night

Before the night of Jesus' birth, people were walking in darkness and living in the land of the shadow of death. They were not walking

through the shadow of death as Psalm 23 describes. They were actually living there.

The hymn writer expressed it this way: "Long lay the world in sin and error pining." The world lays in the darkness of sin. Romans 3:23 says undeniably: "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Our exhortation before communion is so true: "If we examine ourselves, we shall find nothing in us but only sin and death, from which we can in no wise set ourselves free."

Before that night, the world laid in the darkness of sin and the only hope was death and punishment for "the wages of sin is death," (Romans 5:23). This bleakness remains today for those who refuse to believe in the Baby who was born that first Christmas night.

Joseph Bayley relates that sense of hopelessness in his book entitled, "The Last Thing We Talk About." He tells of the time he returned to his son's doctor to thank him for his help the day after his son had died of leukemia. While there, he spoke to a mother who also had a son dying from leukemia.

Bayley said to the mother: "It's hard bringing him in here every two weeks for these tests isn't it?"

"Hard?" she said: "I die every time. And now he's beginning to sense that something is wrong."

He replied: "It's good to know that even though the medical outlook is hopeless, we can have hope for our children in such a situation. We can be sure that after our child dies, he'll be completely removed from sickness and suffering and everything like that, and be completely well and happy."

"If I could only believe that," the woman replied. "But I don't. When he dies, I'll just have to cover him up with dirt and forget I ever had him." And she turned back to watching her little boy push a toy car on the floor.

That sad hopelessness was what the world faced before that holy night.

### After That Night

But "on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." **Yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!**

We can see this in Christ's mission. Before that night we were God's enemies. But He came to over power the darkness and bring peace. John 1:5 explains: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot over power it."

The words in "O Holy Night" remind us that "His Gospel is peace." this is not a peace between men but that far greater peace between God and men. The angels proclaimed that peace

◇

"Truly  
the world  
will never  
be the  
same."



## GLORIOUS MORN

to the shepherds: "Glory to God in the highest, and peace to men on whom his favor rests," (Luke 2:14).

Formerly we were bound in the chains of sin from which we could not set ourselves free. The hymn writer goes on to say: "Chains shall He break." Another hymn writer wrote of these broken chains in "Worthy Is The Lamb:"

*Hear the cries of the shackled — from the onset of time.*

*For the chains of defeat there's no key.*

*See the tears of the broken, hear the cries of the slaves,*

*"Is there no one worthy to set us free?"*

*Then the crying is stilled, as the chorus rings out.*

*The shackled released from their chains.*

*And thousands of voices are swelling the song,*

*Worthy is the lamb that was slain.*

*And has redeemed us to God by His blood.*

Adolphe Adam included some of the most comforting truths from Scripture in "O Holy Night." The Savior born that night knows our need and to our weakness He is no stranger. "In all our trials born to be our friend."

As the familiar hymn says: "What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear, can we find a friend so faithful, who will all our sorrows share."

Because of that holy night, the world was changed and our personal lives as well. Consider the words: "He appeared and the soul felt its worth." He brings joy into our existence and now we possess: "A thrill of hope, the weary soul rejoices."

Oh yes. We can only respond in worship as we fall on our knees and hear the angels' voices. Behold our King! "Let all within us praise His holy name."

There have been many events that changed the world, but there is not one that compares to the magnitude of what happened the night of Jesus' birth. And thank God, we will never be the same. For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!



— by Rev. Del Palmer

## O Holy Night

O holy night! the stars are brightly shining,  
It is the night of the dear Savior's birth;  
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,  
Til He appeared and the soul felt its worth.  
A thrill of hope the weary soul rejoices,  
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn; ...

Led by the light of faith serenely beaming,  
With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand;  
So led by light of a star sweetly gleaming  
Here came the wisemen from Orient land.  
The King of kings lay thus in lowly manger,  
In all our trials born to be our friend; ...

Truly He taught us to love one another,  
His law is love, and His gospel is peace;  
Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother,  
And in His name all oppression shall cease.  
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,  
Let all within us praise His holy name; ...

— Adolphe Adam

Art by Linda Mohagen.





## THE CHILD

The child we celebrate  
these cold days of winter  
was a child named Jesus,  
born in the days of history  
to be a child among  
the children of earth;

he laughed and loved,  
he cried and was hated,  
the boy child of Israel,  
a child for earth's children.

We, children of earth,  
old, middle aged or young,  
confused by the world  
that our hands have made,  
seek warm, healing love,  
but we cannot find it.

But in that earth event  
of so many years ago  
God's love touched earth  
for a moment of joy  
and compassion on suffering;  
that moment lives now  
in our Christmas celebration,  
but, most of all, it lives  
in the hearts of earth's children  
who accept its truth and beauty.

— copyright Rev. Roger L. Tappert, 1975, 1985



# A Righteous Man: Joseph of Nazareth

*Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her, desired to put her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 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.' Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which translated means, God with us. And Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took her as his wife, and kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called his name Jesus (Matthew 1:18-25 NASB).*

**T**he name Joseph is a common one in Scripture. One of the most famous men of the Old Testament, Joseph the son of Jacob, was used by God to bring deliverance to the Hebrews from famine. The meaning of the name in Hebrew is "he increases."

Joseph was a carpenter by trade in the Galilean community of Nazareth. He was descended from King David and thus was a part of the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises concerning the perpetuation of David's kingdom.

Only one adjective is used in Scripture concerning the character of Joseph. That adjective is found in our text, "a righteous man." What is it that caused the Author of Scripture to label him as a righteous man? What is it in the character of Joseph that caused him to act in the manner we see in Matthew 1?

The word "righteous" describes an uprightness of character. In Joseph's day, it was often used to describe those who went to great lengths to display their religiosity. Jesus used the word in both these positive and negative senses. In order to understand how this term applies to Joseph, we need to see what his righteousness caused him to do.

When Joseph found that this woman to whom he was betrothed was with child, he had every right to publicly humiliate her and to have her punished. That he did not indicates that one of the traits of a "righteous" man is that he is not primarily concerned with revenge. He might

have received some satisfaction in punishing this woman who had proved unfaithful to him, but he chose a different course of action.

Another trait of a "righteous" Joseph we see is that he was concerned for the welfare of others. He considered what was best for Mary and thus placed himself in a position to be criticized if his actions had become known. His was a righteousness that did not place personal reputation above acting mercifully. If only God's people would realize how much damage has been done "in the name of righteousness" by those who are concerned with their reputation or that of their church, rather than with God's reputation as a God of mercy and love.

His righteousness did demand, however, that he not leave this situation unattended. His was a righteousness of action. He dealt with this situation by doing what he saw as best for Mary. He did not sit passively, hoping that the situation would correct itself. Thus when God's angel appeared, Joseph finds no apology necessary. He responded to the Lord's announcement in the way which was consistent with his righteous character, he obeyed.

We would do well to seek that same uprightness for our own lives. Joseph shows us that selflessness and a concern for God's reputation above our own is the mark of a truly righteous man. May this Christmas be a season where that love and concern for others becomes more and more a part of your character and mine.

—Rev. Brian Davidson

# An Obedient Woman: Mary, The Mother of Jesus

*But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart (Luke 2:19).*

**T**he young, unknown Mary had given natural birth to the holy baby Jesus, a privilege every Jewish woman had prayed and hoped for. She was the Mother of the Messiah! Mary had to be relieved that the baby was finally born; she was no longer pregnant. She was also relaxed knowing that her baby was healthy; there were not any complications for the mother and baby. Can you imagine her joy holding her first baby? What a treasure! The baby she had been dreaming about throughout her nine months of pregnancy was finally here. She remembered how God's hand of provision was in this special pregnancy.

May could have easily been stoned for being with child before getting married. She was engaged to be married to Joseph when she became pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit. How could Joseph, being an honorable man, marry his fiancée who was in this shameful condition? However, God protected Mary and revealed to Joseph in a dream his purpose in using Mary as the Mother of the Messiah.

The Heavenly Father had chosen a safe place for the birth of the Savior. If there was room in the inn, Mary would have given birth in a very busy inn filled with many different people traveling because of the census. It may not have been a safe place to deliver a baby. But God had chosen the stable to be the safe place away from the mob of people.

The stable was also a tranquil spot where only animals were resting. The natural sounds of animals had to have been relaxing for Mary. She had to be happy not to be in a noisy place like the inn. The safety and peace surrounding the birth was a comfort to Mary at her time of delivery.

The stable was not only a safe and peaceful place but a humble birth spot for the Savior of the world. After all, Mary had been visited by an angel of the Lord explaining her pregnancy. The angel, Gabriel, said, "You have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a Son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of David and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end," (Luke 2:30b-33).

If she was to give birth to someone so great and mighty, someone who would reign over the house of Jacob, surely her delivery would be in a great cathedral or palace ornamented with gold and scented with rich fragrances. It would be so easy for Mary to expect a grand, comfortable place to deliver this baby. But she kept her servant attitude, recorded for us in Luke 2:38: "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered, "May it be to me as you have said."

Mary, indeed, was a servant of the Lord. She was obedient to the law and to her husband to travel to Bethlehem for the census, even if it meant traveling in her ninth and final month. She had no idea if her baby would come quickly or what delivery would be like. There is a bit of fear in not knowing what to expect, the fear of the unknown. Mothers giving birth for the first time experience a fear and anticipation in the delivery.

But Mary knew the Lord was with her. She knew God through the Scriptures. She had seen God's mighty power working through the Jewish people in history. God had used certain individuals who had faith in Yahweh and were willing to be servants. It didn't matter if these people were well known or well respected, rich or talented. God worked through people, like Mary, who were obedient.

Each one of us go through our own pilgrimage sometimes not knowing what the future holds. We want to be used by God yet we are fearful. Many times we decide to do things our own way. But God desires for us to be faithful and obedient to the Lord, just as Mary was. To go where He wants us to go may not be the easy way or the comfortable way. But it is the best way because we are in God's perfect will for our lives. And when we have reached our destiny in our pilgrimage we can look back to see God's provisional hand working in our lives. He gives us the strength and pulls us through to fulfill His will. And just as Mary did we can treasure up all these things and ponder them in our heart.

Mary's pilgrimage was not easy or comfortable. However, she completely surrendered herself and obeyed God. Because Mary was obedient, God's way of salvation was fulfilled in the birth of our Savior. May we ponder the truth of Christmas in our hearts. And may we ponder God's provisional hand in our daily lives of walking as servants for Christ.

— by Sharon Olson



Our first impression of Christmas in Mexico was that Mexicans really know how to celebrate Christmas! There are many special traditions and it would be impossible to even list them all in a short article. It would take a book.

Perhaps the most significant tradition for many families is the midnight meal on Christmas Eve. Usually each family celebrates together with their uncles and cousins at the paternal grandmother's house. The father's sisters and families are likely to be at the home of their mother-in-law, as Mexican society tends to be matriarchal. The meal begins at midnight so there is time for visiting at other relatives' homes before the meal begins. The family does not gather until after 11 o'clock. Our first Christmas in Aguascalientes, we invited a young single man, a new Christian, over for dinner on Christmas Eve. We finally gave up waiting for him and went to bed at 10 o'clock. You guessed it! The doorbell rang at eleven. "Merry Christmas! Feliz Navidad!"

The homes here in Mexico are decorated with enormous and elaborate manger scenes, nacimientos. Though they may use miniature figures, there is so much detail that a whole room is often filled. usually missing from the manger scene is the figure of the Baby Jesus, called in Spanish, el Nino Dios. That final figure is not placed in the manger until midnight of Christmas Eve, or Nochebuena. When the figure is finally placed in the manger, it becomes quite a ceremony. The little statue, often a life-sized doll, is brought out and passed around the room. Each person present is expected to kiss the doll before it is placed in the manger. This ceremony becomes a problem for families where some members have become Christians. Because of the on going problem of idolatry or saint worship, most Christians consider kissing the figure of "Baby God" an act of idolatry.

Another interesting custom many families and neighborhoods keep is called Las Posadas. A posada is an inn or hotel. In years past, every house on a street (usually the only street in a

small rural town) was set up as an inn. A group of people playing the part of Mary and Joseph would go from door to door, asking in song for a place to stay. At each home they are turned away, the refusal also set to singing. Finally they arrive at the designated home, where the central manger scene of the village was set up, and there they would be received with open arms. The whole town, which had followed them from door to door, would be invited in for refreshments.

Unfortunately, this custom has degenerated over the years. The acceptance of the "Holy Family" generally ends with a Rosary, which is a long series of prayers in worship of the Virgin Mary. These prayers and having declared Mary the Co-Redeemer, the Hope of Sinners, the Bright Morning Star, Wife of the Holy Spirit, and so on. Since most of these names belong only to Jesus, they amount to blasphemy when applied to another person, no matter how good or important. Also the modern day refreshments are no longer hot chocolate and tamales, but alcoholic beverages. Too often a dance follows with continued drinking and numerous problems arise. The celebration is anything but a reminder of the Savior.

The story of Santa Claus climbing down the chimney to leave gifts of Christmas is culturally absurd, but has become more popular in Mexico, as in everything American. Traditionally, gift giving is the filling of the shoes of the children with candies and nuts on

Christmas morning. Children are told this is a gift from el Nino Dios. On Epiphany, January 6, children receive a larger, more expensive gift from the Reyes Magos, or the Wisemen. Today there is increasing confusion as to which tradition is correct.

In our own congregations, we like to emphasize Advent as a way to focus on the coming Jesus, the promised Savior. This is our way of combating

# CHRISTMAS IN MEXICO

*FELIZ NAVIDAD!*





the destructive emphasis on materialism, or "what we are getting for Christmas." We also provide an alternative that is fun and promotes good things instead of drunkenness and idolatry. In León, Pastor Flore's church has two weeks of Noches Invernales, or Winter Nights, beginning about December 15 and ending on Christmas Day. We do something similar here, though not every night! We serve a lot of Mexican Christmas tamales, hot chocolate (a Mexican invention often spiced with cinnamon) and delicious fruit "ponche" along with the singing of carols and a prayer and testimony time around a campfire in the church patio.

Our family thoroughly enjoys Christmas time in Mexico! Mexicans who know Jesus really know how to celebrate Christmas!

If you were to visit our home, especially at Christmas, you may be surprised to find yourself entering "Little Sweden." The Advent wreath dominates the coffee table, the smell of Julekaka baking always permeates the air and traditional Swedish Christmas carols usually are playing in the background. My wife's efforts to put a real homemade potato sausage on the table each Christmas Eve would fill another page! It is not easily accomplished here. We even plan to "lute" our own codfish some year!

The best part of Christmas for our family, whether we are living high in the Andes mountains, in snowy Minnesota, or in colorful, vibrant Mexico, has always been our family time each evening around the Advent wreath. As we light the Advent candle, read the Old Testament prophecies of the promised Savior and sing our Christmas hymns together, we are filled with a sense of the awe and wonder that is Christmas.

Christmas in Ecuador, Christmas in Scandinavian American Midwest, Christmas in Mexico, Christmas is in our living room and in our hearts! Light the Advent candles. Decorate your home with cheer and wonder. Jesus is coming! Merry Christmas! Feliz Navidad!

—Rev. Dan Giles



## Reaching Out At Christmas

**W**hen the world pauses to hear the angelic choirs proclaim their message of "glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace good will toward men," we again experience the greatest love gift, Jesus Christ, who is God's love reaching down to earth.

I recall one Christmas morning when I was a teenager, Mother and I arrived early for the 6 o'clock "Julotta" Service at our church. The grey-haired pastor father-in-law of our own pastor walked into the church. In his quiet way he said: "Your pastor won't be here this morning. His young wife passed away suddenly." Mom and I looked at each other and exclaimed: "Pastor, that's your daughter that has just gone home to heaven!"

I shall never forget his steadfast, immovable expression of deep faith as he answered: "I know, but you need a pastor for your Christmas morning service." In a way that I have never witnessed since, I saw that man, in spite of his own bleeding heart, reach out to serve others. Never have the strains of "When Christmas Morn Is Dawning," meant so much.

I ask myself again this Christmas: "Who needs my love, help and friendship; where is that heart candle that needs the spark of encouragement to make Christmas brighter? Where do I need to reach out in Jesus' Name that someone may enter into John 10:10b. 'I am come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly?'"

"It's in loving, praying, caring, sharing,  
Our heart's are truly blessed,  
Giving all to Jesus who gave His all  
We find perfect peace and rest."

As each of us, through the Savior reach out this Christmas to the needs of those around us, perhaps to lonely and longing hearts, we will experience that giving makes Christmas joyous and love makes Christmas complete.

—Laurel Johnson



Word of the  
Father,  
now in  
flesh  
appearing



O come,  
let us  
adore Him,  
Christ,  
the Lord

Calligraphy by Rosalie Paulson



# A Season for All The Seasons of Life

**T**—It was a star of trust. Trusting the star the wisemen came and learned to trust the Savior's name. Funny thing about that Sunday School Christmas piece I learned in first grade — it's the only one I can still remember, and it was the only one I never got to say. That year I spent Christmas in bed due to a bout of pneumonia.

Oh, I have many wonderful Christmas memories: setting up Grandma's nativity scene each year; spending Christmas Eve at our log cabin in the woods; eating rice, lefse, and julekage; putting on a little program for our parents every Christmas Eve, complete with bulletins, re-enactment of the Christmas Story; and song request time. There was always good food, a warm kitchen, the coziness of upholding the same family traditions every year ... and absolutely no responsibility for making it all work out!

In recent years, something very sad has happened to change the atmosphere of the Christmas festivities for me — I've become an adult. This may not sound overly devastating; however, the fact that I am married to a pastor means we will be spending most holidays in our own home. Therefore, instead of waking up to the smell of muffins and the sound of Christmas music playing, I am startled out of bed by the cries of a child ready to start the day, and I trudge into a cold, dark kitchen trying to decide what to fix for breakfast. Our holiday meals require budgeting, recipe hunting, and much preparation. The full responsibility for creating atmosphere and memories falls to my husband and me.

Oh, sure, the surface things have changed, but the deep down, true meaning of Christmas has not. Sometimes as we grow older we let the familiar become common place. In all our hustling and fussing over preparations we often do not even take the time to re-read the Christmas Story. After all, we can probably almost recite it by heart having heard it so many times. Yet, the Biblical account of Christ's birth is more than

folklore passed on from generation to generation. It is part of the living and powerful Word of God that changes lives. What new comfort and hope can you draw out of Luke, chapter two this Christmas? Instead of being delighted simply by the story itself, as children often are, the true wonder and beauty, as well as the world wide impact, of the event can become more personal to us as we read and reread with adult eyes.

No matter what stage of life we are in or how many changes we have seen, we are never too old to realize again what truly makes Christmas a holiday worth celebrating: that God sent us the most precious gift we could ever receive, His Son, in order that we may have eternal life!

—by Hope Unverzagt

## Now that's A Reason to Celebrate!

*As with gladness men of old  
Did the guiding star behold,  
As with joy they hailed its light,  
Leading onward, beaming bright.  
So, most gracious Lord, may we  
Evermore be let to Thee.*

*Holy Jesus every day  
Keep us in the narrow way  
And when earthly things are past,  
Bring our ransomed souls at last  
Where they need no star to guide  
Where no clouds Thy glory hide.*

William C. Dix  
Verses 1, 4

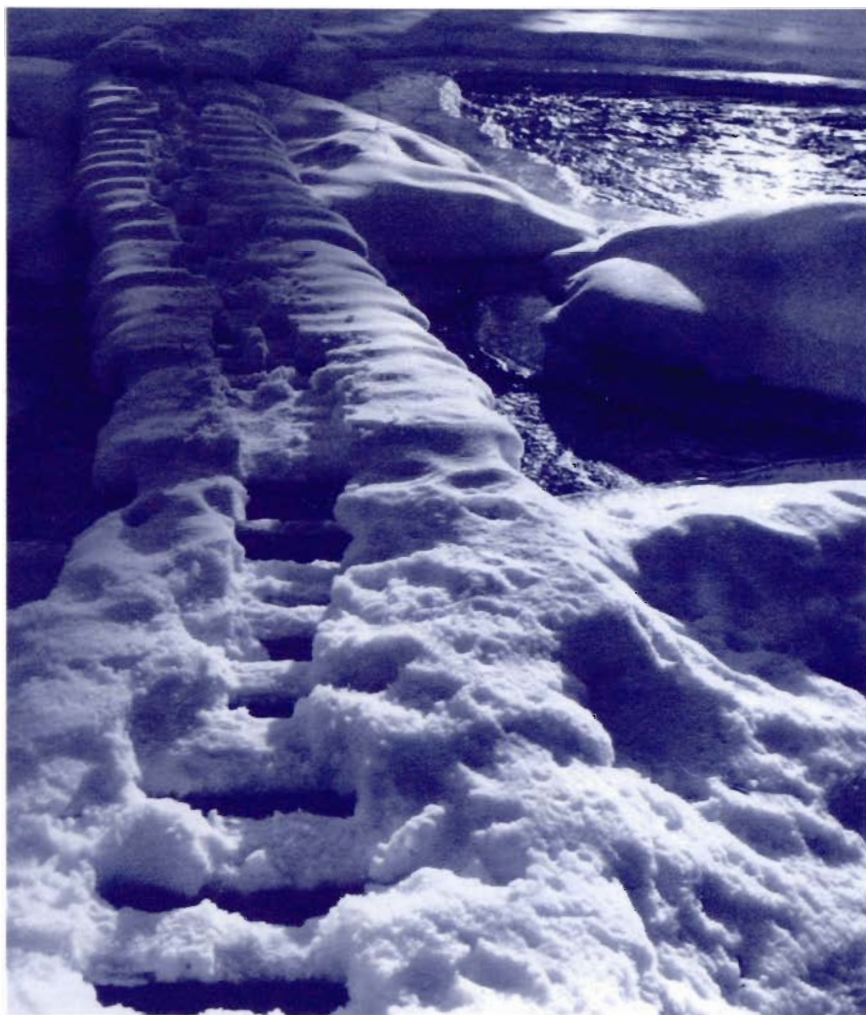


Photo by Roger C. Huebner, D. D. S.



# A Christmas Of Suspense

— by Eivind Berggrav

*Dr. Eivind Berggrav was the head of the Church of Norway (Lutheran) as Bishop of Oslo during World War II. His strong, courageous faith in Christ rallied his countrymen during the dark days of Nazi occupation. Bishop Berggrav was imprisoned for two weeks and then interned for three years at his cottage in Asker, cut off from all contact with the outside world. Some guards befriended him, however, so his isolation was not complete. Through his book, "Conflict — Captivity — Release," Bishop Berggrav tells about Christmas in confinement. (Translator)*

The background for the tragic Christmas of 1944 is the fact that I had developed a special relationship with one of my chief guards. I first met Bustenskjold on October 15, 1943, the day that he and his men arrived at my cabin. Only two days earlier, a guard revealed to me that I would be getting totally new replacements. Quisling had ordered this after a news item in some Swedish newspapers was brought to his attention. The article was entitled, "Berggrav Converts All His Guards." This was written by well meaning Swedes, but was unwisely put into print. As a result, I lost my steadfast chief guard, Naermo, plus the whole company of faithful and trustworthy constables.

The new chief guard had a poor reputation. Though his nickname was Bustenskjold, here at the cabin we shortened it to Busten. His first day went exactly as we expected, for he lived up to his reputation. When Naermo turned over the chief guard's room to him, Busten discovered an old camera belonging to one of the boys. "We

have to report this at once!" he exclaimed. (All photography was strictly forbidden.) Then Naermo threw cold water on him and the camera by saying, "First try to use it. The whole thing is broken."

The next evening the guards were on the balcony as usual. I climbed out through a window to walk with them back and forth. One of the guards commented, "Busten keeps prowling around the house. He must think that he is going to find something. Suspicious old fish!"

Busten was lean and gaunt, and had a melancholy (some thought sour) expression. He could be quite biting in what he said. Little did I know that in time it would be Busten who would become the most courageous and warm-hearted of all the chief guards here!

Our relationship began to change in 1943 during our only Christmas together, which was to be his last Christmas in this life.

Exactly as I had done the year before, I began arranging for a special Christmas Eve gathering in the fire-side room for all the guards. It had been difficult in 1942 to get the chief guard (Naermo had not yet arrived) to agree with my plans for a group Christmas festival. He was afraid of a surprise inspection, but I answered, "We'll take the risk! If they surprise us during the program, the chief guard need only say that the Norwegian people are a Christian people. Then see what they dare to do!"

He was not very enthusiastic about giving such an answer to his hand-boiled superiors. But when I assured him that it was unlikely that anyone would travel out from Oslo on Christ-

mas Eve, he felt more at ease. So we had our Christmas festival. We sang a lot, as I had enough copies of Seip's songbooks in my cottage, and I also conducted a devotional service.

That was Christmas 1942. Now December was here again, and I had to convince Busten. He reluctantly approved only because we had done it the previous year.

I waded through deep snow in the forest on "lille julaften" (the day before Christmas Eve) and found a Christmas tree. After decorating the spruce, I put the phonograph behind it with all of our traditional Christmas records. I lit the candles in the room and put a little incense powder on the stove.





Now I was ready for our gathering. Waiting until I heard the sound of the key in the outside lock I started a record playing. They marched into the room in their uniforms, Busten at the head. My guests were standing as though hypnotized, and Busten looked like he was somewhere between joy and tears. A friend of my wife had secured pork chops for all, and I had cooked a big kettle of rice porridge. Afterwards we enjoyed real coffee. The rest of the evening included singing, a Gospel message, and even a march around the tree.

The next morning, Christmas Day, Busten came to take me out for my hour in the fresh air. Immediately I knew that something was different. As

he expressed it, he had been overcome by the "most remarkable Christmas Eve of his life." He even phoned my wife, Kathrine, from the guards' office and invited her to be at the gate on a certain day and time. "You must watch for the guards," he said to me, "and I will bring your wife in the back way."

He showed himself to be a man of his word. I made coffee and invited Busten to be with us. My wife was surprised and uncertain, but she, too, soon became his good friend. In the months ahead, the three of us had more times of good conversation over a cup of coffee, and Busten acted as though he was thirsting for human fellowship.

By the next Christmas, I had prepared two small packages for Busten's two daughters. They were delivered to him on December 20, and he was visibly moved. The next day he was to be relieved of his duties to return home for the holidays. His own big surprise for his little daughters was to be a bottle of milk which he planned to purchase from my neighbor, Royse, on the Drengsrud farm. He left at 10 o'clock in the morning on the 20th with great anticipation.

He never returned. One of my good guards came to me while I was cutting wood for Christmas, and told me that Busten had been shot by Gestapo agents on his way back from the Drengsrud farm. The agents explained later that they were lying in the snow watching for a suspect when Busten came by in his uniform greatcoat. He apparently became nervous and reached for his revolver under the cloak, but was shot down before he was able to draw his gun. There Busten lay in the snow with a bottle of milk under his arm.

I had grown truly fond of my chief guard. I remember him at my Easter service in the spring of 1944, singing those hymns like he had encountered something unlike anything he had ever known in his life.

The next day, the 21st, another message arrived which was connected with the tragedy at the Drengsrud farm. One of my former guards who had befriended me was arrested the previous night under terribly brutal circum-

stances. I heard many reports of his fiendish torture, but no one seemed to know why, and not knowing increased my grief and fear.

On Christmas Eve the bells of Asker Church rang out at 5 o'clock and the guards left me. I could not do anything, and was moody and restless. I could not even seem to pray, and when I tried it was as though I was mocked: "You know that it doesn't do any good. They are torturing the boy all the same." When I should have met my loving heavenly Father, it was as though I was met by a mocking face. I had never experienced anything like it. Perhaps this was what Luther called "to contend with God."

The torture of my soul was intensified because this was happening on Christmas Eve. Alone in the house, the electric power gone, I had only a candle burning on the table. I was the world's most miserable Christian man.

Then I remembered something I had heard about Luther. In his times of greatest need, he would pray loudly alone in his room. I recalled what I had preached to others; to be obedient in spite of any terrible feelings. I picked up my New Testament and made a fool of myself. I read the Christmas story loudly for myself there in the candlelight, and when I finished I decided to lie down on my bed for a while.

The next thing I knew it was morning. I had slept through the night. I began the day with a prayer of thanks to God without really knowing why, starting to realize that everything was different from what it had been for the past three days even though the situation remained the same. The difference was with me! Now I wanted to and was compelled to thank God.

The days did not clear up. In fact, a thick heavy fog rolled in. I continued to wonder about my young and faithful guard who had been tortured and imprisoned. But my outlook was no longer shadowed by a mocking spirit; the worst had been lifted from me.

—from "Familiens Jul,"  
translated by Rev. Raynard Huglen





**A**ngels floating in the heavens and singing "Silent Night, Holy Night," caused several little voices to ask, "What's **that**?"

I had turned on a children's Christmas sing-a-long video in my day care and everyone had joined in on various little ditties such as "Rudolph," "Here Comes Santa Claus," and "Up on the Housetop." But when the "church song" began, I realized how ignorant — no, I decided, how **untaught** they were to even ask the question.

I was delighted to explain that Christmas is Jesus' birthday and that the angels were singing about his birth! What a beautiful night it was. Quite unexpectedly one of the little ones turned away from me and with shining eyes said to the others, "Jesus' birthday! Isn't that **neat**?"

He knows something about Jesus because we **talk** about Him, **read** about Him and **pray** to Him every day. And that is the most important step in teaching children all about Jesus. When I shared this story with Jacob's mother she said, "He's becoming so aware of things right now. Yesterday he said to me, 'Look at the beautiful tree! God made it!'" At a very receptive, awakening time in his life I had been able to teach him something about God the Creator and now, something about God's Son, Jesus.

As I witnessed Jacob's uninhibited response to my story I reminded myself that this is the same boy who is famous for wanting each and everything advertised on TV. Isn't that exactly what we as parents struggle with as the holiday season approaches? The tug between the commercial and the spiritual emphasis?

## Teaching

How well I remember my own frustration and yes, embarrassment, when the children showed unthankful, disappointed or greedy attitudes as the gifts accumulated under the tree; attitudes that couldn't be changed by shaming, scolding or cajoling them.

What then, did make difference? For one thing, **time made a difference**. Childhood and youth have always been recognized as selfish years — they just are! I felt it helped me to acknowledge this fact: not to excuse the children but to understand them and so relieve my own anxieties and stop comparing them to others. And I know that time helps because my children are grown now, some having been away from home several years and I see in them the desire to pass on the story of the birth of Jesus, and I see in each of them a spirit of generosity.





# Children the Meaning of Christmas

This spirit of generosity comes from two sources. First of all it comes from the example of others giving generously to them. Second, this spirit is from the working of the Holy Spirit in their hearts to give in return. That is the way I learned how to give good gifts to my children!

I remember my first year out of high school, earning "big money." Seeing the shop windows full of beautiful items large and small. I can still feel the stars in my eyes reflecting the beauty of the displays and the longing in my heart to give Mom and Dad something very, very special that year. After thinking about it for two to three trips of window shopping, I went into a jewelry store and bought a 12-place setting of silverware. I could hardly wait for Christmas! And their overwhelming surprise and joy upon opening this gift is still a part of my longing each year to find everyone just the perfect gift.

But what about now, when the children are young and acting like young children? Realizing that selfishness is such a part of childhood and youth, let's seek out some of the positive traits displayed during these years and take advantage of them.

For instance, **imitation**. Surround your children with your own generous spirit. Pray that each of them would respond to the Holy Spirit's prompting in this area and you have a great basis. Add to this your own positive approach in preparing for Christmas. For me, Christmas music seems to set just the right scene in my home. I have it on even early in the morning as the others are rising to begin the day ... and I have it on early in the year — maybe even earlier than the stores! For two or three years we used our daughter's doll cradle, having each member of the family put in a handful of straw when they could think of something kind to do for someone else ... making another's bed, polishing shoes, hanging up someone's coat, etc. **Competition** soon set in, another childhood trait to be developed!

A child's natural **eagerness to learn** can be taken advantage of as you guide them into investigating the history of Christmas carols and traditions. **Repetition**, a necessary tool in teaching brings about the establishing of selected traditions that each child will take into his own home later. We have used the same homemade burlap and felt Advent calendar for more than 20 years. This well worn hanging is highly treasured in our family.



Probably the greatest tool we have, as parents, in teaching our children what Christmas really means is the childhood **capacity to love** — and that, unconditionally. Yes, they are selfish. But the paradox is that they also love warmly and long for love to be returned to them. And isn't that exactly what the angels were singing about that night so many years ago: "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy what will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."

—by Clara Gunderson



*Men ought always to pray and not faint (lose heart).* — Luke 18:1

**W**hy? It is because "God is good and ready to forgive and abundant in loving kindness to all who call upon Him," (Psalm 86:5) and, "the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much," (James 5:16b).

Why should we always pray? An honest evaluation of our surroundings tells us that we greatly need the effects of God's goodness, forgiveness and lovingkindness in: our personal walk of faith, our marriage, our home, our family, our friendships, our congregation, our community, our nation and our world.

Believers should take special regard of the Scripture's instruction that there is something we are **always** to do. How much of the Bible's teaching on prayer do we know and practice? The 1993 WMF Study is an overview of these areas: What is prayer? How should we pray? What are the kinds of prayers we find in God's Word? How is Paul an example for us in prayer? What were the prayers of the Lord Jesus Christ?

The "who, what, how, where, when and why" of prayer is scattered from Genesis to Revelation. In your personal Bible reading, take note of who spoke to God, how and what they prayed about and God's answers to their requests. Use their prayers as models for your own. Let the abundant promises and praises of Scripture energize your own conversations with God. As a point of personal application, most of the lessons leave space for writing your own prayer, utilizing the Bible references in that lesson.

**Martin Luther said: "As a shoemaker makes a shoe, and a tailor makes a coat, so ought a Christian to pray. Prayer is the daily business of a Christian."**

# Lord, Teach Us to Pray

## 1993 WMF Bible Studies Introduction

Dedicate yourself to this vital discipline of time and place for spiritual concerns. To pray is to enter the spiritual battle for the side of Truth. To pray is to be a channel of blessing to all you meet or hear about. To pray is to strengthen the hearts and hands of fellow Christians to carry out God's will. To pray is to honor God's name by calling on Him with praise and thanksgiving.

**To live a life of prayer is to walk in the path of "no regrets."**

— Miss Rosalie Paulson

### *About our Bible Study writer:*

*Rosalie Paulson has lived in Fosston, a small northwestern Minnesota town most of her life. She received a Certificate in Bible from Northwestern College, Roseville, Minnesota, in 1975. She joined Calvary Free Lutheran Church in Fosston in 1986 and has been active there as Sunday School teacher and superintendent, secretary, librarian and numerous other ministries. She does art work and sign painting from her home and works part time as a teacher's aide at the local elementary school. She is working with the AFLC Parish Ed Department in writing curriculum. The elderly people around Fosston know her best as the lady who comes to sing and play her guitar for them.*

### Suggested Weekly Prayer Calendar

- |                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| <b>Sunday</b> —    | Pray for your pastor and his family.<br>Your congregation and its spiritual life.<br>AFLC president, officers, Co-ordinating Committee. |
| <b>Monday</b> —    | Pray for your children's schools and teachers.<br>Parish Board of Education and Christian Academic Board.                               |
| <b>Tuesday</b> —   | Local and national leaders, courts.<br>Home Missions<br>Your community and Commission on Evangelism.                                    |
| <b>Wednesday</b> — | World Missions (Brazil, India, Mexico).<br>Stewardship and Pension Boards.  |
| <b>Thursday</b> —  | Youth Board of AFLC.<br>Luther League/Advisors.<br>Military chaplains.  |
| <b>Friday</b> —    | AFLC Bible School and Seminary.<br>Students, faculty and staff.   |
| <b>Saturday</b> —  | WMF/ARC   |



Prayer is a temporary occupation for the Christian. One day its opportunity will come to an end when we meet the Lord face to face.

"This robe of flesh I'll drop and rise  
To seize the everlasting prize  
And shout while passing through the air  
'Farewell, farewell sweet hour of prayer.'  
— W. Walford

7. What is the last recorded prayer in Scripture? Revelation 22:20, 21

8. What must we believe as we come to God in prayer? Hebrews 11:6

#### Our Father in Heaven,

You have invited us, You created people, to come to You in prayer. Help us to accept that invitation daily and experience the new and living way You have made for us in Christ. Help us to call on Your name with hearts cleansed from sin and filled with faith. May we grow in the knowledge of Your will and rest in the confidence of the care of a loving Father. Cause us to desire to seek Your blessing for every area in our lives. We thank You for Your many gracious and merciful gifts to us. In the name of Jesus Christ, our High Priest, Faithful and True, we pray, Amen.

## Lord, Teach Us To Pray

**Prayer:**  
An Open Door

### Key Verses:

"Come now, and let us reason together," says the Lord." (Isaiah 1:18)

"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

"Prayer is a great mystery ... prayer is none other than an act of the believer working together with God. Prayer is the union of the believer's thought with the will of God." — Watchman Nee, *Prayer*, p.3

"To pray is to let Jesus come into our hearts ... Prayer is the breath of the soul, the organ by which we receive Christ into our parched and withered hearts." — O. Hallesby, *Prayer*, pp. 11, 12

1. How is prayer defined in your dictionary or Bible dictionary?

2. Look up Genesis 4:26. What words describe this first mention of prayer in Scripture?

"Prayer is possible because the triune God is personal, and has so revealed Himself that men and women, made in His image, may address Him by name." — *New Dictionary of Theology*, Inter Varsity Press, p. 526



Luther's Small Catechism states: *What is prayer? Prayer is the child-like communion of our hearts with God, in which we tell Him all our needs, and earnestly seek some gift from Him (Question #265).*

3. Turn to Matthew 7:7, 8.

a. What three words does Jesus use to describe prayer? (Verse 7)

b. What three words describe the results of prayer? (Verse 8)

There are many different circumstances which cause us to ask or seek something from the Lord. Through this year we will be looking at prayer in these aspects: God's Invitation, Our Relationship to God, Confession, A Cry for Help, Thanksgiving, Interceding, Spiritual Warfare, Asking for Myself, Guidance, Prayers of Paul and Prayers of Jesus.

From the fall of man into sin until the time of Christ, people often approached God through ritual sacrifices and human mediators (prophets and priests) who were specially designated by God. Jesus' sacrifice of Himself as our Great High Priest opened the way for mankind to experience a restored relationship.

4. See Hebrews 10:19, 20. Where do we enter by the blood of Jesus?

5. Take note of the following references in the teaching of Scripture concerning some general guidelines for prayer. (Each of these verses would be good to memorize as we add to our knowledge on prayer.)

a. Whom do we address? Matthew 6:6

b. In whose name do we ask? John 16:24

c. Whose will should we desire? 1 John 5:14

d. What should be the attitude of our hearts? Matthew 21:22

e. What will hinder our prayers? Psalm 66:18

From our key verses we see that prayer is possible because God invites us to come to Him. Daily we may accept or decline this invitation and opportunity to fellowship. Psalm 65:2, says, "O Thou who dost hear prayer, to Thee all men come."

In the song, "Sweet Hour of Prayer," W. Walford writes: "And since He bids me seek His face, Believe His word and trust His grace, I'll cast on Him my ev'ry care, And wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer."

6. What are some of the benefits of prayer described in the following Scriptures?

a. 1 John 1:9

b. Psalm 119:18

c. Philippians 4:6, 7

d. Matthew 7:11

e. Psalm 138:3

f. Proverbs 3:6





# God Bless The Apple Tree

Eric listened intently and then said, "Grandma, remember the year when the apples looked so good, and you had them all boxed in the basement? Then one day you discovered that they were spoiled on the inside. Were you disappointed that God didn't answer your prayer to bless the apple tree?"

I sighed deeply and answered, "No Eric, it was really my fault, God answered my prayer. I just didn't do my part in following the spraying instructions. I always had some excuse and soon it was too late."

"You know, Eric, the tree reminds me of ourselves. Sometimes we can be like the apples, nice looking on the outside, but with invisible sins like jealousy, anger, lust, and greed in the heart and soul. We, too, must follow the directions given to us in God's holy and inerrant Word because through it we are shown the way to salvation and a holy life. It is easy to start right with God, but unless we walk with God every day in every

way, we can fall off prematurely, just as those spoiled apples can fall to the ground too early."

"One time I picked some green apples off the ground and put them in the refrigerator thinking that they just might ripen. But they shriveled into nothing. So it is with the young Christian. We need the daily nourishment of God's Word to keep growing."

As Eric put his coat on, he said, "That tree will be okay again next year. You will spray it and God will bless it."

As he headed to the living room, he saw the Christmas tree and stopped. Turning to me he commented, "That old apple tree is lucky. It still has a chance. Look at this Christmas tree; it has already sacrificed its life."

He closed the front door and left for home, but I sat at the table with his last remark ringing in my ears. My heart filled with thanksgiving for Jesus Christ who gave His life so that I could live with Him in eternity.

— by Lydia McCarlson

The kitchen felt cozy after my return from a trip to the mailbox. The crisp winter air and the fresh snow indicated that Christmas was not far away. The cards and greetings were arriving in increasing numbers each day. I smiled as I thought of the coming blessed season.

Later in the day our grandson, Eric, stopped by after school. He pulled up a chair at the kitchen table where I was peeling apples. He watched me for a while and then said, "Grandma, did you raise these apples in your backyard? They are so nice and red."

"Yes, Eric, we picked them last fall, but this year our apple tree had problems. Let me tell you about it."

Over a year ago we discovered red spots on the leaves, so I sent a sample to the state agriculture department. They diagnosed the disease, and described the treatment for us to do if we wanted to save our tree. Grandpa and I carefully followed the instructions, and these lovely apples are the result!"

Eric thought about what I said, and then asked, "But didn't Grandpa want to cut the tree down? The tree is old and the trunk is cracked."

"Oh, sure," I answered, "but I persuaded him to give it one more chance. After all, it is the first apple tree we ever owned and was here when we moved in eight years ago. Remember the many bushels we used to pick from it every fall? Besides, I made it a habit to say, 'God bless the apple tree' every time I walked past it."

Keeping Christmas  
is good,  
but sharing it with others  
is much better.





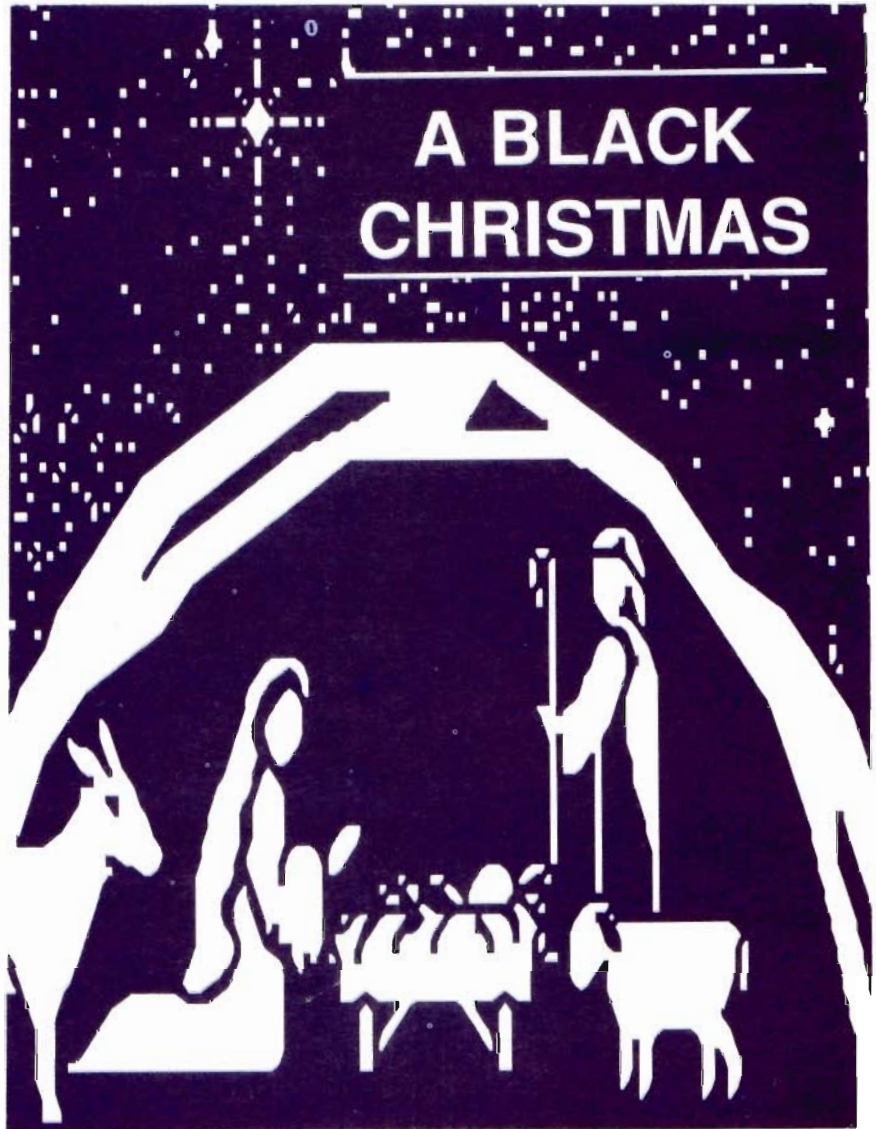
Today almost 90% of Black people live in urban areas in this country and Christmas celebrations appear more standardized and commercialized with every passing year. But in the 1920s about 90% of the Black population lived in the rural areas of the deep South. At that time, there was still what could be called a traditional Black Christmas.

Christmas on those old plantations was a time of great celebrations. The houses were decorated with a cedar tree from the woods nearby. The children always went into the woods and got the materials for the decorations. The ladies planned and made the decorations such as roping for the Christmas tree made from popcorn strung together, crepe paper with cutout dolls painted on it, cotton on the Christmas tree to represent the snow ...

Christmas meant decorations, especially a cedar tree from the woods nearby. The children were responsible for entering the woods and gathering the material. Branches from a holly tree with their beautiful green leaves and red berries were woven on a vine to make a wreath. Mistletoe growing on the old trees nearby was hung about the house.

During the morning, between fireworks and decorations, there would be roasted sweet potatoes and nuts in the ashes of the fireplace. Everyone would watch for the approach of a neighbor (if one were not approaching him!). There was a rule that if a person could say to you "Christmas gift" before you could say it to him, you owed him a gift. Many and ingenious were the ways in which people crept up to a house, to burst in to say, "Christmas Gift!" Everyone would laugh and then share some Christmas feasting.

As today, Christmas meant a feast — but not necessarily a turkey. Wild turkeys are very cunning, and obviously aware of the holiday season. No one saw a turkey from Thanksgiving to Christmas. Instead a hog was butchered about a week before Christmas. The hams were cured for later



use, while the shoulders were cooked as ham for the Christmas feast. The smell of fresh meal was everywhere, especially of chitterlings cooking. There were wild meats of all kinds, rabbit, squirrel, opossum, raccoon, etc. The tables groaned under the weight. There were vegetables from the garden and pies and cakes in the oven. After the big family meal, the food was left out to share with visitors, or was sent to needy families in the community.

If the weather was good, the children would play outside. If the weather was cold and wet, the family would stay inside around the fire in the big fireplace and make their own entertainment.

Christmas Eve meant a Christmas

Program for all the children. Every child had a recitation to give. Especially precious were the preschoolers with their mis-remembered and either softly or very loudly spoken Bible verse or wise saying.

That night sleep would come to a tired family, whose celebration had brought them closer to each other, to their community, and to the Christ Child.

—The Rev. Dr.

Richard C. Dickinson

Executive Director of the Commission on Black Ministry for The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod.

*Historical Footnotes*

Concordia Historical Institute  
St. Louis, Missouri



**C**ome, Thou long-expected Jesus,  
 Born to set Thy people free;  
 From our fears and sins release us,  
 Let us find our rest in thee.  
 Israel's strength and consolation,  
 Hope of all the earth Thou art;  
 Dear desire of every nation,  
 Joy of every longing heart.



**B**orn Thy people to deliver;  
 Born a child, and yet a king;  
 Born to reign in us forever,  
 Now Thy gracious kingdom bring,  
 By Thine own eternal spirit,  
 Rule Thou in our hearts alone;  
 By Thine all-sufficient merit,  
 Raise us to Thy glorious throne.

— Charles Wesley

## Christmas Day Song

Hark! The angels in the skies  
 Shout the good news  
 Your sorrows lose  
 The Son of God in manger lies.

Lo! Today He has appeared  
 Sing forth your praise  
 Your voices raise  
 The lowly Babe to hearts endeared.

Wake! Dress your hearts with gladness  
 Ring joyful bells  
 End mournful knells  
 Christ is come to end all sadness.

— Carol Sorkness Burckhardt



## Our Writers For Christmas '92

**Carol Sorkness Burckhardt**, Portland, Oregon, who is one of our Christmas poets this year, is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Eldor Sorkness, Sand Creek, Wisconsin.

**Brian Davidson**, serves the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Rice Lake, Wisconsin, and continues to work on the new AFLC hymnal project. He is the author of the article about Joseph.

**Dan Giles**, AFLC missionary in Mexico, returned with his family to the city of Aguascalientes earlier in 1992, after a one-year furlough, and writes of Christmas in Mexico from a first-hand perspective.

**Clara Bouchard Gunderson**, author of "Teaching Children the Meaning of Christmas," is married to Rev. Richard Gunderson, pastor of Elim Lutheran Church, Lake Stevens, Washington, and previously served with him as missionaries to Bolivia and Mexico.

**Raynard Huglen**, Newfolden, Minnesota, is a retired pastor who serves the Telemarken Lutheran Church, Goodridge, Minnesota. Former editor of *The Lutheran Ambassador*, his translations of Norwegian stories have become a Christmas tradition for our readers.

**Laurel Erickson Johnson**, author of "Reaching Out At Christmas," is married to Rev. Wendell Johnson, pastor of Green Lake Lutheran Church, Spicer, Minnesota. She is also a former president of the National WMF.

**Lydia McCarlson**, Langford, South Dakota, again writes the children's Christmas story. She resides with her husband, Arnold, on their farm. They are active members of Tabor Lutheran Church, rural Webster.

**Sharon Swengel Olson**, Pipestone, Minnesota, is the busy mother of three boys and wife of AFLC Pastor Todd Olson. A vocal music major from Concordia College, Moorhead, she is the author of our Mary article, and writes for the first time in our publication.

**Del Palmer**, pastor of Our Saviour's Lutheran Church and Rainer Lutheran Church, Thief River Falls,

## Christmas A Time to Share ...

At Christmas time we like to share  
Our gifts with those we love,  
But how much more we ought to share  
God's Gift sent from above.

Christ did not come for us alone,  
Or for a privileged few;  
He came to give His life for all,  
That men might be made new.

'Tis strange how we can think so much  
Of gifts and Christmas trees,  
And think so little of the lost  
In lands across the seas.

For us to squander all our store  
On those who have no need,  
And fail to share God's Christmas Gift  
Is very wrong indeed.

For God so loved the world He gave,  
So we must learn to give  
Our money, effort, and our prayers,  
That dying souls might live.

Since Christmas is a time to share,  
Let's give ourselves anew,  
That heathen souls in lands afar  
May hear the gospel, too.

—by Fred D. Jarvis  
*Trinity Free Lutheran Newsletter*  
Grand Forks, North Dakota

Minnesota, is the author of our Christmas sermon this year.

**Rosalie Paulson**, Fosston, Minnesota, is the 1993 writer for the WMF Bible Studies. A complete introduction is included elsewhere in this issue.

**Larry V. Severson**, Roseau, Minnesota, serves the Rose and Spruce congregations. He is the writer of our "Light on the Way" series.

**Roger L. Tappert**, our second Christmas poet, is the pastor of St. Mark's Church, Indianapolis, Indiana, as

well as an accomplished hymn writer.

**Kenneth K. Thoreson**, the cover artist for this Christmas issue, is the pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, Janesville, and Bethany Lutheran Church, Brodhead, Wisconsin.

**Hope Dyrud Unverzagt**, Stanhope, Iowa, introduces herself in the article entitled, "A Season for All the Seasons of Life," as an active pastor's wife and mother. Her husband, Jonathan, is the newly ordained pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, rural Jewell, Iowa.



## THE CHRISTMAS TREE AUCTION

*"Do I hear five dollars? Going once, going twice ... sold, for five dollars!"*

The sounds of Christmas? Hardly! Yet the call of an auctioneer will always remind me of a holiday season long ago when Grandma Lee took me to the Salvation Army Christmas Tree Auction at the old citadel in Escanaba, Michigan.

In spite of any impression that the title might convey, a Christmas Tree Auction was not a project for the purpose of selling Christmas trees. Rather, the object was to obtain bids on mysterious little packages tied to the branches of a large evergreen tree in the center of the crowded auditorium.

It was a wondrous adventure of sight and sound for a small boy who had never seen such an incredible Christmas tree nor heard an auctioneer's inviting pleas.

*"Come on now, what are you waiting for? Let's have a bid on this little box with the red bow. Who'll give me one dollar? Remember, it's for a good cause."*

One by one the auctioneer removed the packages from the branches and offered them to the highest bidder. One by one people throughout the auditorium called out their bids until a buyer was secured.

*"Going once, going twice ... sold to the man in the back row for five dollars!"*

The time passed quickly, and soon only a few packages remained to be sold. Eagerly I tried to get Grandma's attention, wondering why she wasn't bidding and worrying that there wouldn't be anything left for us to buy. But she shook her head and shushed me with a finger to her lips. Incredible as it seemed, I was suddenly brought face to face with the real possibility that she was going to let this wonderful opportunity slip by.

*"Here's another present waiting for someone," the auctioneer cried. "I Wonder what's inside? Do I hear*

*fifty cents? Yes, thank you, and now one dollar? Do I hear two dollars? Three dollars? Going once, going twice ..."*

I could contain myself no longer. **Five cents!**

For a moment there was a hush, and then the crowd burst into laughter. I couldn't comprehend why they were laughing, for in my mind the nickel bid was no different from theirs. Yet it was painfully clear that I was the object of their laughter, the center of attention, and I shrank closer to Grandma's side, wishing that there was some way to disappear from sight forever.

My memory of the Christmas Tree Auction has a happy ending, however, as all good stories should. The person who bought the little box presented it to me after the program had ended, and I tore off the wrappings and discovered a colorful collection of Scripture memory cards which is still treasured today.

The lesson of the Christmas Tree Auction, however, is one that I am still learning.

How pitiful when we offer the small coins of our own efforts in exchange for the priceless gift of Christmas! Would we be so foolish as to try and purchase a new house with pennies? Would we dare to offer our nickels and dimes for an automobile? Of course not! Yet so many are deceived to believe that we are able to pay even in some small part to gain the greatest gift of all.

The message of the Christmas Tree Auction is an invitation: "Ho! Every one who is thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. come buy wine and milk without money and without cost," (Isaiah 55:1).

"Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift," (II Corinthians 9:15).



**A Blessed Christmas to One and All  
from the editors  
and staff  
of The Lutheran Ambassador**





## The Prince of Peace

His signature was "Peace." His music came  
Echoing down the wave lengths of the earth  
That far-off winter night. His given name  
Was "Peace." He was the Prince of Peace from birth,  
And dying, He left this priceless legacy:  
"My peace I leave with you ..." O blessed Lord,  
How we have failed Thee, how we have slighted  
Thee, How often we forget Thy gracious Word!

We turn to Thee, a world confused with strife;  
We seek a way that we have lost, somehow;  
We need the wisdom that Thy birth, Thy life,  
Thy death should teach us, Lord, we need it now.  
Within our hearts may stress and clamor die;  
Among the nations may the tumult cease;  
May righteousness prevail, all storms pass by;  
Speak peace again, O blessed Prince of Peace.

— Author Unknown.

