

# [Encouraging Word]

# Courage to go on

— Karina Green Faith Free Lutheran Minneapolis, Minn.

A focus on the truth of Christ's free righteousness for the needy human sinner raises our hopes.

hroughout the process of writing these articles God has graciously worked in me. He has forced me to examine my current spiritual state and clearly shown me there is no salvation and hope without the death and resurrection of Jesus. In those truths I find the death of my self, the fruitlessness of my own efforts, and the perfect, ever-sufficient Jesus.

In writing these final segments I have thought about the different causes of spiritual discouragement that could exist for others and myself. Maybe it starts with a certain life event that is extremely disturbing or discouraging. Maybe it is a neglect of God's Word. Or, maybe you are feeling discouraged and can't even think of why. This has led me to ask two questions: What discourages? What encourages?

To discourage is defined: "To sap or to take away courage of; to lessen enthusiasm for and so restrict." A focus on one's self for righteousness will discourage the Christian. What do I see when I focus on my feelings, my endeavors, even my failings? I see a hopeless situation. I am sapped. My enthusiasm is, to say the least, lessened. I am paralyzed. I have no courage in my spiritual life or confidence in my relationship with God. I am fearful. This fear may lead me to put my trust in something other than God and, ultimately, to spiritual death. The enemy tries very hard to get the discouraged Christian to end up living with his or her own self-righteousness.

To encourage is defined: "To raise the hopes of, or, to give courage or confidence to." Ultimately, God, through His Word, encourages the Christian. A focus on the truth of Christ's free righteousness for the needy human sinner raises our hopes. When this truth comes to us we realize that our human strivings for righteousness before God are not what God is after. What a joyful relief! We trust in the perfect, already completed, nothing-to-be-added-to-it work of Jesus; a work that God the Father is totally satisfied with. This gives us confidence in our relationship with God and courage to go on. "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus ... let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience ... let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:19, 22-23).

As I look back, I view my recent discouragement as a deep valley in my spiritual life. God held on to me the whole time. I begged Him not to leave me and He did not leave. He continues to show me what I need to learn again about Him and about me. I am left thinking about the last verses of a favorite hymn of mine:

"I look not inward, that would make me wretched, for I have naught on which to stay my trust. Nothing I see save failures and shortcomings, and weak endeavors, crumbling into dust.

"But I look up into the face of Jesus, for there my heart can rest, my fears are stilled; and there is joy, and love, and light for darkness, and perfect peace, and every hope fulfilled" ("I Look Not Back," Ambassador Hymnal, no.400).

December 2004 Volume 42, Number 12



# **LUTHERANAMBASSADOR**

Editor

Pastor Craig Johnson craigi@teleport.com

**Managing Editor** 

Ruth Gunderson ruthg@aflc.org

**Editorial Board** 

Pastor John Mundfrom Oryen Benrud Pastor Jerry Moan Pastor James L. Johnson

The Lutheran Ambassador (USPS 588-620 ISSN 0746-3413) is published monthly by the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations. AFLC headquarters and publications office is at 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Plymouth, MN 55441. Phone: (763) 545-5631; fax: 763-545-0079.

For subscription changes and information:

The Lutheran Ambassador, 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, MN 55441. 763-545-5631 or e-mail at luthamb@aflc.org

**Subscriptions rates:** 

\$15 a year, Group Rate, U. S.

\$16 a year, Individual, U. S.

\$18 a year, International

Periodicals postage paid at Minneapolis, MN, and additional mailing office.

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

# [Sound Bites]

A sign shall be given A virgin will conceive A human baby bearing **Undiminished Deity** 

> - Michael Card "Immanuel"

And the glory, the glory, the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

— Handel's "Messiah"

And so I love each Christmas Eve, And I love Jesus, too; And that He loves me in return, I know so well is true

— Marie Wexelsen "I Am So Glad Each Christmas Eve"

> Come, Thou long-expected Jesus, Born to set Thy people free; From our fears and sins release us; Let us find our rest in Thee.

> > — Charles Wesley

"Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus"



n an unusual moment of quiet in my busy day, I find some time to ponder on "Silent night ... all is calm." As a mother of three busy children, ages 6, 2 and 1, I seldom *feel* calmness in my life. Reflecting on the Christmas hymn, I am reminded of the miracle that occurred that night.

# Silent night ...

When I think back on the births of each of my children, I am reminded of the flood of emotions that accompanied each birth. I remember when I saw them for the first time. A sense of calm, peace and joy came over me after the anticipation and intense moments of their births. Time seemed to stand still as I looked at and held the miracle of new life. At that moment there seemed to be nothing else happening in the world. I wonder if that's how Mary felt the night Jesus was born.

# Holy night ...

This was the holiest of nights; the night our Savior Jesus Christ was born. He came into this world as a baby, dependent on His parents to care for Him. The ironic twist is that His parents and the whole world are dependent on Him. He had, and still has, the ability to save each of us from our own sin. We need Him for our salvation.

# All is calm ...

Christmas carols fill my house and van as I go about my day. It seems like the weeks and days before Christmas are spent preparing for all of the festivities that occur. Baking goodies, decorating the house, wrapping presents, and preparing to travel home keep me busier than usual. Sometimes I get so busy

"doing" that I don't take time to pause for my own spiritual refreshing. In these moments when I feel like I am out of control Psalm 46:10 reminds me to "Be still and know that" He is God.

# All is bright ...

I pray that every day, and especially during this Christmas season, I will pause as Mary did in Luke 2:19: "But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart." I need to not only stop and remind myself of Jesus and His gift to me, but also stop and enjoy each moment of motherhood. I want to reflect on and grow from the moments that try me and those that give me joy. This Christmas I plan to focus my attention, and that of my family, on the real meaning of Christmas — the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

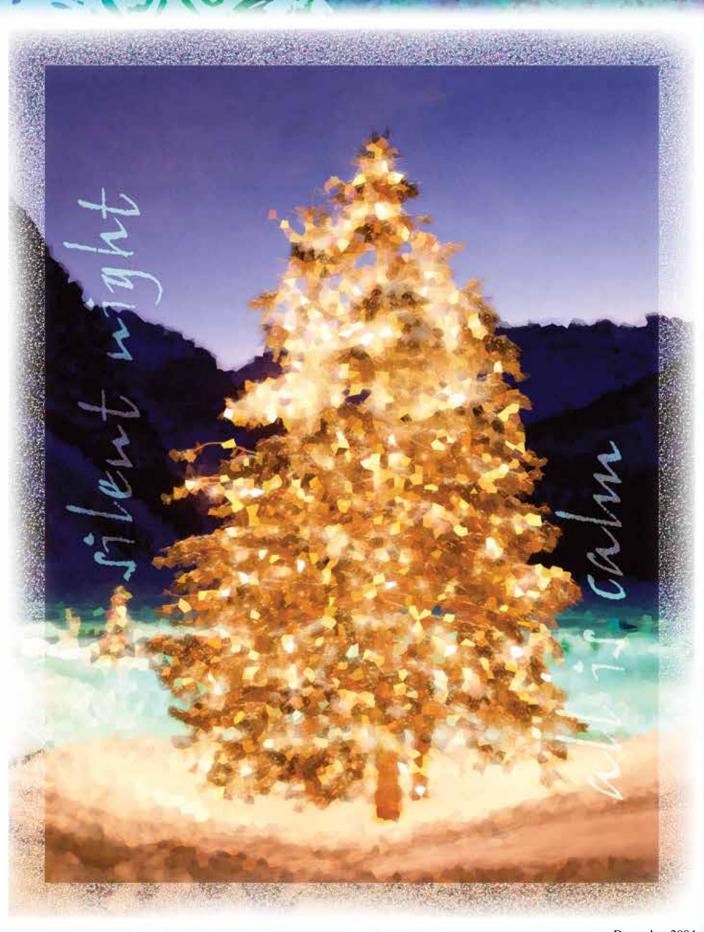
How will I find calmness this Christmas season? What can I do to pause my worldly views of life and focus on Jesus?

First, be in God's Word. I not only need to schedule a time daily to spend in Scripture, but commit myself to that schedule.

Second, pray. I need to give everything to God in prayer, even what I might consider small or insignificant. God wants submission of my will and He wants my burdens, too. For me to truly pause, focus, and be calm in spirit, I must give *everything* to God.

Last, focus on Jesus. Jesus needs to be the focus and reason for all the celebrations at Christmas. The gift of Jesus is for anyone who asks. He is the only gift that keeps on giving every day.

Bauder is a member of Living Word Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D.



# There is a Corlo Corlo Corcaig Johnson







hen Isaac Watts was a teenager he didn't care much for the church music of his day. It was the late 1600s. The Church of England, in the area of music, had largely adopted the philosophy of John Calvin, who was in favor of congregational singing. However, Calvin insisted that only the Scriptures, and primarily the Psalms, were suitable for Christians to sing. The singing was to be in unison and unaccompanied. These restrictions usually led to music that was ponderous and lacking in joy.

After listening to frequent complaints about the music at church, Watts' father challenged his 18-year-old son: if he didn't like the music being sung at church, he ought to write something bet-

ter. Watts proceeded to do just that. He became a prolific hymn writer and came to be regarded as the father of English hymnody.

At first Watts wasn't held in such high regard. He was seen as a radical. The words of his hymns are biblical in spirit and teaching. Still, it was seen as scandalous to have people sing in church words that were not direct quotes from Scripture. Watts persisted, however, and the style and content of his writing brought a sense of freedom and joy to the church of

his day that continues to have an effect today. Joy and freedom is possible because Jesus

has come. That great truth is powerfully expressed in the Christmas carol Watts wrote: "Joy to the World! The Lord is Come!" The carol is a paraphrase of Psalm 98, in particular verses 4 and 7-9: "Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music; ... Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy; let them sing before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity."

Such a scene acted out in our churches today

might be called wild and out-of-hand. Shouting for joy and bursting into jubilant song isn't the kind of thing we often encourage. And yet the Bible makes clear that what God has done in Christ is worthy of a celebration.

This past October the Boston Red Sox won baseball's World Series. It had been 86 years since their last victory. They had felt cursed. But now they are the champions. And, oh, how they celebrated. Celebrating like the Red Sox might not be the right thing for a church service although some occasional smiles, laughter and expressions of joy wouldn't be a bad idea.

Our spirit of joy, though, should be even greater than some team celebrating a victory. The Lord has come. We can receive our King. The Savior reigns, for now and all eternity. A new

Shouting for joy and

bursting into jubilant

song isn't the kind

of thing we often

encourage. And yet the

Bible makes clear that

what God has done in

Christ is worthy

of a celebration.

"champion" will not be crowned next year or any year. Jesus rules, now and forever.

"No more let sin and sorrow grow, ... He comes to make His blessings flow. Far as the curse is found," wrote Watts. The curse of sin is far worse than any other curse. But the curse has been broken in Christ. Those who have repented of sin and are trusting in Jesus have reason to rejoice. Sin has been paid for at the cross. We're set free. "Therefore,

there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:1-2).

"Joy to the World!" is an example of the freedom Watts brought to church music of his day, freeing it from many of the rigid rules and traditions to which it had been bound. It also is a beautiful declaration of the freedom and joy that can be ours because Christ has come. That joy grows as we contemplate what Watts writes about: "And wonders of His love."





# What child is this?

By Pastor Oliver Olson

Picture this: A Christmas scene in a make-believe barn, with little children dressed in costume to replicate the first Christmas. There is an innocent Joseph standing by a seated angelic-faced Mary, overlooking a small crib (make that "manger"). Youthful shepherds are adoringly looking on, and in the near distance are cardboard figures of a cow, a donkey, a lamb or lambs. And, of course, three "wise men" are kneeling in reverence before the Holy Babe, offering their exquisite gifts, while singing, "We Three Kings of Orient Are."





Sound familiar? Yes, and it makes for a meaningful Christmas observance in a Sunday school program setting.

Yet, the harsh reality of what really happened that first Christmas is often lost in the warm glow of nostalgia and tradition.

Our blessed Lord Jesus Christ was born into a very hostile world. Galatians 4:4-5 says: "In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that He might redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive adoption as sons."

But how God did it was absolutely amazing, stranger than the fiction that often surrounds this event.

It all began with the visitation by the angel Gabriel to Mary that wonderful day of announcement. The greatest announcement of all time came to Mary, a young adolescent of perhaps 15 years of age, from a traced heritage but with little or no social standing or political clout.

"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God; and, behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His Kingdom will have no end" (Luke 1:30-33).

What a fantastic, awesome announcement! For 4,000 years, every godly woman secretly hoped that somehow she might be the mother of the seed of the woman that would crush the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15), as promised to our first mother, Eve, back in the Garden of Eden.

What would any of us have done had we been the one to receive such an announcement? Surely we would have shared the news with any listening ear. But Mary kept all this to herself and meditated on it in her heart. Not even Joseph knew. For the Scripture tells us: "Her husband Joseph, being a just man, and not willing to disgrace her, desired to put her away secretly" (Matthew 1:19).

All Joseph knew was that his beloved Mary was with a child who was not his. An angel appeared to Joseph to reveal the situation to him. The angel told him, "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" (Matthew 1:20-21).

As the pregnancy drew close to the end, Mary

and Joseph, knowing that the child (the Messiah) was to be born in Bethlehem, waited in Nazareth until God put it in the mind of Caesar Augustus to activate the journey to Bethlehem for the purpose of taxation enrollment. What trusting character on the part of both Mary and Joseph to wait for God's perfect timing! They were an amazing young couple! How unlike the way we might have handled the situation.

Even the journey itself was fraught with peril—no soft cushion for Mary riding sidesaddle on a gentle donkey. They probably walked the 70-80 miles to Bethlehem. As the story from Luke 2:6-7 states: "While they were there, the time came for her to be delivered, and she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped Him in swaddling bands, and laid Him in a manger."

"What child is this?"

The announcement of His birth was not given to the heads of state or to the local media, but to humble shepherds "out in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night" (Luke 2:8). And what an announcement that was by the angel! "Behold, I bring you good news of great joy for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11).

"What child is this?" The shepherds must have wondered. The confirmation came from an angel of the Lord, no less, to give the greatest legitimacy to the truth of the event. The whole heavenly host joined the angel in praising God, for now they, too, understood what child this was.

Later in the temple, where Mary and Joseph took the baby Jesus at the age of 8 days, for the purpose of the circumcision dedication, it was old Simeon and Anna who confirmed that "this, this is Christ the King, the babe the son of Mary," as noted in the familiar Christmas carol.

So what do these awesome events mean to us, who live this side of the familiar story? We, who often reflect only the tradition and the sweetness of the Christmas story? For the harsh reality of the Babe of Bethlehem became — in a few years — the One on the cross of Calvary. Then, considering this, we are prompted to say with Pilate, "Behold the Man!" (John 19:5).

What child is this? Yes the Babe in Bethlehem, but also, the One on the cross that led, shortly, to the empty tomb. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Olson lives in Spring Valley, Calif.





# Go, tell it non the by Dwight Kiefert



o, tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere, go, tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born." I can't help thinking about how this first verse of John W. Work Jr.'s Negro folksong parallels the Great Commission to spread the good news that Jesus Christ is born.

In the last verse of the song we sing, "God sent us salvation, that blessed Christmas morn." Only a true believer can understand this and appreciate what Jesus has done for us. What about the nonbeliever? What does Christ's birth mean to them?

You may have seen someone holding a sign bearing John 3:16 at a football game or public event. But have you ever wondered if it made any sense to the nonbeliever?

People need to realize their lost condition before the message of salvation will make any sense to them. They need to realize they are sick before the cure can be effective.

For example, let's say I have good news; I have something I want to give you. It's called the New Life Pill. I want you to have it because I care about you and it will give you life. Sounds a bit far-fetched, doesn't it?

Now, let's approach it in a different way. We are at a supper banquet and have just finished eating when we notice the police arresting the head chef. Someone comes to the microphone and asks for our attention. He says he has a very important announcement and explains that the chef, who has prepared our meal, turned out to be an international terrorist. He has

confessed to lacing our supper with a deadly poison that will surely kill us all by morning. But wait, he has good news: there is an antidote. It's called the New Life Pill. If we take it, it will counteract the poison and we will live. Now everyone will accept the New Life Pill because they see their predicament:

without it they will all surely perish.

To the lost, Jesus seems a bit like a far-fetched fairy tale. They can't understand their need for His cure (grace) because they do not see their sickness (sin).

Realize how important it is to share your faith with the lost, especially family members. Without hearing the gospel, they won't have a chance to go to heaven.

Begin with prayer. Pray for the ones you intend to witness to. Remember that how you live your life will have a big impact on others. We can't live for Jesus on Sunday and for the world the rest of the week.

People need to see they are lost. You can use the Ten Commandments to accomplish this. Simply ask them how many of the Ten Commandments they know. Then ask them if they have broken any of them.





This can be convicting, and they may challenge your right to judge them. Respond by saying that Jesus is the one who judges. Some may accuse you of being self-righteous. You can reply by saying that you are not better than anyone, but are trusting in who Jesus is and what He has done to make you perfect in God's eyes.

It's important that they understand that breaking the Ten Commandments is referred to as sin. Ask them if you could show them what God wants them to know. Have them read Romans 3:23 out loud, and simply ask, "What is God

saying to you?" They need to realize that all people sin.

Next, have them read Romans 6:23 out loud, and ask them, "What is God saying to you?" They should start to see their predicament. Now the words of grace from John 3:16 will have meaning for them.

You can break the ice with your family members or friends by telling them you are learning how to share your faith at church. Ask them if they could help you practice. This will give them the feeling they are helping you. Just simply ask them what Jesus' birth means to them. Ask them if you can tell

them what Jesus' birth means to you.

The Evangelism Department has many tools to to help you share your faith with the lost. Urge your pastor to have a member of the Evangelism Commission come to your church and teach you how to use the many sharing tools we have.

Kiefert is a member of the Commission of Evangelism. Contact him at dwightkiefert@hotmail.com





By Sverre Seim. Translated from Norwegian by Pastor Raynard Huglen

THE LOUDSPEAKER WAS on ... quite high. The café was filled to overflowing with tired shoppers shortly before Christmas. The noise of cups and talk at the many small tables did their best to drown out the sounds, the music and announcements over the loudspeaker. Yes, the business was both obvious and audible in the large gathering.

"Now we send out some Christmas songs," said the announcer suddenly. Then there followed one familiar and beloved carol and melody after the other. The hubbub in the café lessened.

In the corner, beside me, sat a slightly older man. He gave the impressions of loneliness and wear and tear. He looked to be very tired both in body and spirit. He ate, read his paper and smoked. He did all of these, so to speak, at the same time. He gave the appearance of being very busy. When the songs of Christmas began to sound forth, he glanced over at the loudspeaker with an irritated look on his face. But music can calm. The man laid the paper aside. Knife and fork almost fell from his hands. At once his pipe was forgotten. He put his head in his hands. He stared forward, lost in thought, as if he saw and heard something far away. Suddenly he covered his face entirely in his hands. I couldn't help but notice him. And so the large, busy man sat hidden behind his own hands and sobbed like a child. It had become quieter in the café. Easily heard over the loudspeaker were the words, "Oh, would I could sing like that, then Jesus would be glad ..."

A little while later the man gathered his things up and went out quietly. But inside me there was a voice, which said, "These songs — about sins' forgiveness, about joy and peace are exactly for us poor human beings who hide our faces and cry in lonely suffering." Yes, they bring something of that great first Christmas night's song to fearful and anxious hearts.

Some days later, on the day before Christmas Eve, I stopped at the sound of a song in the middle of one of Oslo's most busy streets. What was it? There was no open-air meeting, no



loudspeaker or choir. But in front of a really beautiful department store window a little boy stood and gazed on the festive scene in the window, while he sang in full throat, "How glad I am each Christmas Eve, the night of Jesus' birth ..."

People hurried to him and gathered around the little singer. Was the boy hired by the store to hold a little Christmas concert and that way to draw in customers? No. He obviously sang of his own volition. No one made light of it. The festival spirit lay in the air, so to speak. It was the simple and clear song from a child's mouth that halted us, restrained us and attuned our minds to devotion.

The words of Psalm 8 came to my mind as I went on further: "By the mouth of babes and infants Thou has founded a bulwark because of Thy foes, to still the enemy and the avenger." The boy sang the Christmas song to the end, almost as in a trance. When he had sung the whole song, he noticed all the listeners and spectators. The boy moved on with his small packages. He was no doubt on his way home, but he had gotten to hold a little song service as he passed by. Heaven seemed so near and the old song so wonderfully new and dear.

The big lounge in one of our very largest hospitals was beautifully decorated, as beautiful as only hospital deaconesses can decorate. A girls' choir came and sang. It was necessary for me to be both organist and preacher. Songbooks were passed out. The patient who lay in the bed nearest the organ, a man, also got a book. But he laid it aside indifferently. After a couple of verses, I saw that the young man reached for the discarded songbook and looked for the song that just then was being sung. At first he followed along with the stanzas

without joining in, and then began carefully to hum, and soon was singing in full voice with eyes shining. When the young girls a little later that evening sang, "Once I lived for the world, and found its light and joy empty." It was as though the man became completely overcome. The song and the message in it was used by God to awaken one who had a sick and lost soul in a sick body.

At a meeting a woman came — born and raised in another land — to sit near the organ. As people found their places, I ventured to lead in a song, "Oh, think of that land over there." At once the woman began to sing, not in Norwegian, but in English. When all the stanzas had been sung, she began to weep loudly and said in poor Norwegian, "My mother taught me that song! O, Mother, thank you!" Truly that lady could truthfully say, "I have known that since I was little." Fortunate is every mother who imprints such music and songs in her children's hearts. One day it is sure that these songs will be dear and near.

It was a New Year's evening before the last war (WWII). There was a festive gathering in a place that people at that time called a "warming room." There was assembled a group of 90 men, homeless, under the influence and wretched, ranging in age

from 16 to 70. It was, in truth, a cross-section of humanity and, likewise, a hodgepodge program. In the midst of all this I was to conduct a devotional time a little before 12 o'clock. Assuredly, it wasn't a festively clad audience in a beautiful cathedral. "King Alcohol" had dressed these men in the clothes they had, both for body and soul. Some of them had become new creatures and witnessed to their earlier comrades. "If I had the power I wish I had, I would have driven liquor out of the country," said one of them.

But what should we sing? Did they know anything by heart? Yes, and actually they knew quite a bit. One Christmas song after another was sung better than they sing in most of the churches. It can be said that all these homeless men had received a treasure from home, from school and from Sunday school. For a while they forgot their shame and their deep hurt and sang like children. Yes, it was a flock of homeless children who sang of the Savior and the heav-

enly home in spite of their great poverty and homelessness.

There was a pastor in Oslo many years ago who was known as the "pastor who sings." It happened that people would lock the door on him. And so it is told that he would be standing outside the closed door and would sing. Children would say, "Oh, let him in! He sings so beautifully!" So, the key would be turned and the door opened. Then the bearer of the gospel message came in with song as the means



of unlocking the door.

The Israelites of old sang much. They had their songs of complaint, their prayer songs, songs of strife, pilgrim songs and hymns of praise. Constantly the Lord's people in the Old Covenant were exhorted to sing: "O sing to the Lord a new song" (Psalm 96:1). They loved to sing the Lord's praise, but they knew the difficulties of doing that, not least in the captivity (Psalm 137:3). In the whole Old Testament, there is a strong undertone of praise songs. And so also in the New Testament. When Mary came to know that she was to be the mother of the Savior, she sang a song of praise to God (Luke 1:46). When the Savior was born the song of praise sounded in the night: "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased" (Luke 2:13-14). That was the first and greatest praise that had been heard on our earth. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem, He was greeted with the glad song of jubilee (Luke 19:37-38). The last song of rejoicing He had with Him before He traveled the way of suffering was the song of the happy children in the Jerusalem temple (Matthew 21:15-16). And even Jesus went singing to the place of sacrifice (Matthew 26:30).

How does one learn the new song? Scarcely at a music conservatory. It isn't learned in the worldly "religious workplaces." The new song, the song of praise to our God, is learned by anyone who permits himself to be drawn "up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog" (Psalm 40:2). The new song is found in heart and mouth. "He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God" (Psalm 40:3). And when such a rescued person comes to see into all that God has done for him in Christ, the song of joy rings out: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits" (Psalm 103). Yes, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. By His great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (I Peter 1:3). And so the soul's deep sigh is transformed into song. "When the heart is most downhearted, then the harp of joy is tuned so that it can better play." A child of God can often be tempted to "hang his harp on the willows" (Psalm 137:2). Like when one finds himself in the "land of the enemy" and "sin presses hard." But then one needs only to sing with "tearful voice," as the older used to say. And so comes the word from God: "Take up the harp!" (Isaiah 23:16) ...

And so I, as many others, learned the new song from my mother in my home. That may sound strange coming from one who is no solo singer. The first two years of my life I remember I sang for my younger sister at night. I asked for nothing for myself, but I got those two years as an encouragement. Later in life I have well understood that Mother had a deeper purpose with that than I probably understood at the time. And many of the hymns and songs that we used in those days I have never forgotten. One of the hymns I learned best was this one: "Thy name, O Jesus, I call upon that I may travel cheerfully." There was a time, to be sure, when the new song disappeared almost entirely from my life. But then by the grace of God I grasped it again. [As the hymn says]: "I learned the music to that song when the way became hard and long for me. And the name became my heart's treasure when the day became a pitch-dark night. The song and the name is Jesus." Since then that song has been infinitely precious, yes, more precious for each year that has passed by.

So let us then be along — as much as it depends on us — to hold forth the Christian song and hymn of praise both in home and assembly.

The Christian life begins with a, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered" (Psalm 32:1). That is in truth a blessed beginning.

And then that blessed life continues in the pilgrim journey, through tears and rejoicing, onward to the great hymn of jubilation, onward to the eternal and glorious "Hallelujah!" "Let everything that breathes praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!" (Psalm 150:6).

It is blessed to sing God's new song of triumph here. But most blessed shall it be in the great hallelujah: "And they sing a new song before the throne" (Revelation 14:3).

Truly, "that song is dear to me which brings heaven near."



The article, "Christmas Songs," appeared in "Juleboken." The article has been shortened to fit in the space. Huglen lives in Newfolden, Minn.





ngels from the realms of glory, wing your flight o'er all the earth." We sing these words year after year. It's a beautiful vision — angels over *all* the earth. We acknowledge their proclamation of Christ's birth, and sing, "Come and worship Christ. Come and worship the newborn King!" As the stanzas unfold, we see the shepherds, the sages, the saints each receiving the news in their own unique way.

The shepherds are watching their flocks. We conjure up the memory from our childhood of placid hills with stars shining on a perfect night. We imagine peaceful sheep. In truth the shepherds may have been very busy keeping up with those flocks by night. It's pretty dangerous to leave them alone. But on hearing the news, the shepherds couldn't wait! They hurried to Bethlehem because the message was so compelling they had to see the miracle as soon as possible.

The sages, venerated for their wisdom, thought to be all-knowing, were suddenly given such news that they were willing to travel to a destination by following a star! We must stop and wonder how something could be so powerful that these wise men dropped everything, just as the shepherds had, and traveled the great distance to seek the great desire of nations — to worship the newborn King.

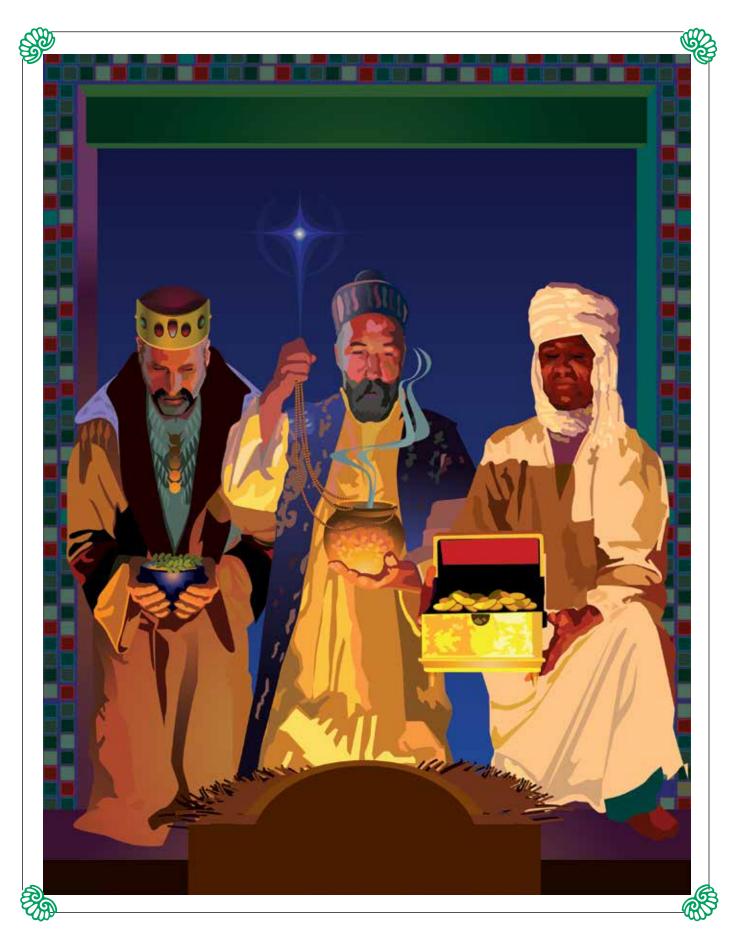
The saints watch in hope and fear before their altar. But perhaps they are also complacent and need to be surprised, for suddenly there is the Lord!

So, who are we? Can we identify with the shepherds, the sages, the saints? I think perhaps we are

all of these. Our sheep need tending. We have so much to do that many times we can't possibly think there is time to "come and worship the newborn King." The tragedy is that we are probably far more frantic during this holy season when we should be like the shepherds and hurry off to our respective Bethlehems to worship. And, unlike the wise men, we are often so self-assured that we forget our intense need to "come and worship the newborn King" even if it means traveling a long way in terms of our energy and effort. If we are the saints of today, then indeed there are times when we need to be startled in the realization that the Lord has descended and continues to do so. He makes Himself known to us everyday.

Advent is here. We will sing of angels, stars, shepherds, wise men, Mary and Joseph, the manger — the list is endless. May we this year think about what we sing. May we this year think about the message of God's love in all our singing. May we this year make our journey to Bethlehem as did the angels, shepherds and wise men. May we this year pause in our busy lives to bow our heads and knees to "come and worship! Come and worship! Worship Christ the newborn King." And may the urge to be at the manger carry us throughout the New Year.

Chard is the director of music and organist at First Lutheran, Oklahoma City, Okla.



# [World Missions]

Our Purpose?



escue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. If you say, 'But we knew nothing about this,' does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done?" (Proverbs 24:11-12).

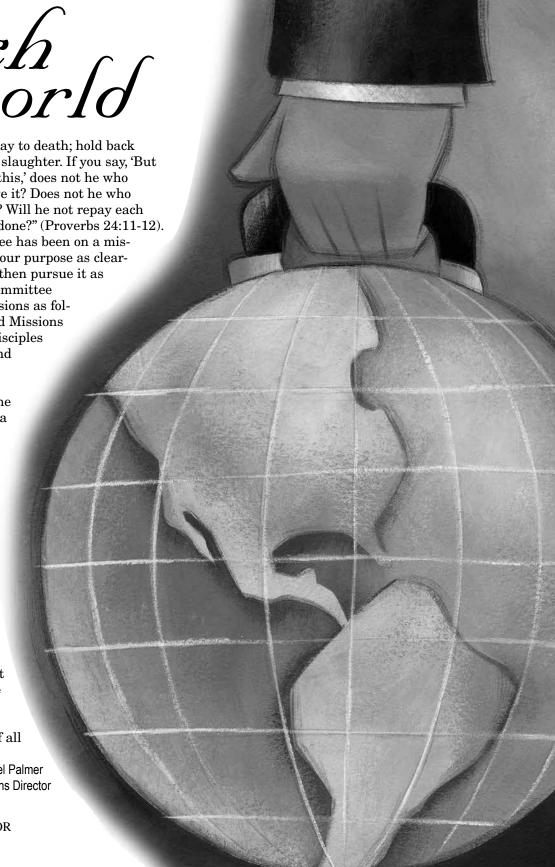
The World Missions Committee has been on a mission. Our goal has been to define our purpose as clearly and succinctly as possible and then pursue it as though lives depend on it. The Committee defined the purpose of World Missions as follows: "The purpose of AFLC World Missions is, by the grace of God, to make disciples of all nations through teaching and evangelism."

This purpose will be used to guide and evaluate our work in the future. It will be implemented in a wide range of ways: evangelism, planting churches, training pastors and discipling individuals. The purpose statement will help us evaluate our effectiveness in making disciples. We will use it to ask ourselves if we are making a difference in lives as we go about your work. Through World Missions we have a desire to rescue as many as we can in the short time we have been given. Jesus reminds us that the time is limited, "As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work" (John 9:4).

Let us lock arms and go out hand in hand to make disciples of all nations.

Pastor Del Palmer
 World Missions Director





# [Stewardship]

# Are you willing?

ask you, are you willing? Will you serve? Will you respond? Will you act? Will you pray?

I expect you're likely wondering what you reading this for. Before you stop, let me explain that I'm writing about the many facets of stewardship. God calls us to service no matter what our talents, circumstances or who we are. He calls all of His children to be good stewards of the time He gives us. The Bible is full of messages on the topic of stewardship. I believe God made us the way He did for a purpose, His purpose, and we are to be obedient to do what He asks, when He asks and how He asks.

God is all knowing and He has created in each of us something special, unique to the whole world, for the purpose of glorifying His name. He desires a personal relationship with each of us. As our Creator, He knows everything about us. He has placed a willing spirit in each of us, and we need to let it come forth for the purpose of serving Him. We need to be willing to serve, respond, give, and pray for whatever He lays on our hearts.

Members of the Stewardship Board are working to make you aware of some of the needs of the various corporations and departments in the AFLC. It is not only our goal to make you more aware of these specific needs, but to call you to action.

One of the current areas of need is the ministry of Parish Education.

Over the past several years, assessed overhead expenses have risen dramatically, and the budgeted gifts do not cover the cost of developing new Sunday school curriculum and maintaining inventory. Several Sunday school books and confirmation materials are currently in need of reprinting in order to maintain an adequate inventory to

supply the needs of our growing association. It is not good use of the gifts God has given if we reprint only a few books at a time since the cost per item becomes very high. As of Oct. 31, approximately \$20,000 is still needed to reprint these resources. There are many other needs, and the members of the Stewardship Board encourage you to contact Marian Christopherson directly at the Parish Education office to obtain further information.

We also welcome your suggestions and comments. Please contact us directly.

So I ask, are you willing? Will you respond? Will you act? Will you pray? I encourage you to pray and respond to God's calling in the way He moves you.

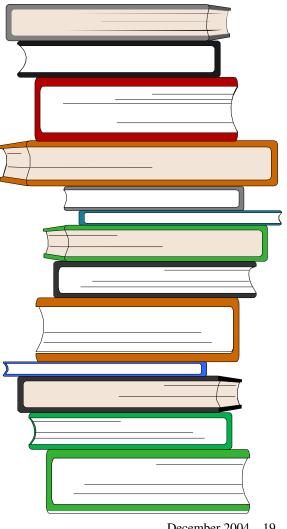
> David Bjornson Chairman, Stewardship Board

# Stewardship Board

David Bjornson (701) 845-2894 LaVerne Thompson (218) 736-6858 Arnold Johnson (701) 343-2370 Pastor Donald Norr (218) 741-9003 Pastor Mark Antal (701) 284-6886

# **Parish Education**

Marian Christopherson (763) 545-5631



# OUR PRESIDENT WRITES ONG in the air

WELL, OF COURSE there's a song in the air! It's Christmas time, and we could hardly miss the combination of sacred and secular music that is played on the radio and even over the loud-



**Robert Lee** 

speakers in stores. The children are practicing their music, too, for the annual Sunday school Christmas program, and perhaps you've already had an opportunity to hear one of the great holi-

day concerts that are usually available in abundance.

What are the songs of your Christmas? This issue of "The Lutheran Ambassador" focuses on some of the most familiar ones, and maybe you'll find your favorite ones here. Or perhaps there is another one, or several, that seem to be at the heart of the season for you.

Professor Gracia Grindal asks several questions about hymnody in a recent issue of a newsletter called "Network News," and one of them is this: "What hymns do you need to have for Christmas?" How would you answer this question, and how many hymns would you include?

Probably such standards as "Silent Night" and "Joy to the World" would top the list, togeth-

er with "O Come All Ye Faithful," "Hark the Herald Angels Sing," and "O Little Town of Bethlehem." Perhaps there are some family favorites, or heritage hymns such as "I Am So Glad Each Christmas Eve." The congregation to which I belong looks forward each Christmas Eve to Dr. Francis Monseth's solo, "O Holy Night," and I remember one of the pastors during my childhood years requesting "The Birthday of a King," which still is special to me. There may be some newer Christmas anthems, too, like the contemporary version of "Jesu Bambino," that have earned a place in your heart.

The song in the air becomes the song in our hearts when we come to know the Christ of Christmas as our Savior and Lord. How tragic it would be if we missed the message of these wonderful carols, merely filing them away as sentimental favorites to be unpacked every holiday season like the decorations for our Christmas trees. Jesus Christ is the theme of our song, and the celebration of His birth is the heart of the holiday.

May Jesus become dearer to you and yours this year as He is worshiped and praised in harmony with the heavenly host from that first Christmas concert: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14).



# Interterm classes announced, missions week scheduled

The Association Free Lutheran Theological Seminary will host Interterm classes Jan. 3-14 at the AFLTS classroom in Plymouth, Minn.

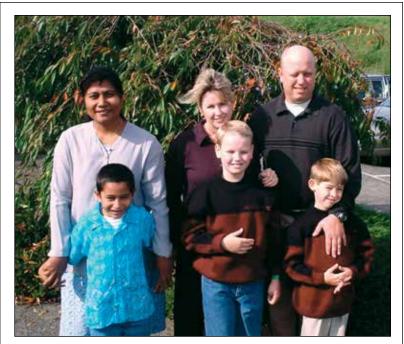
Dr. John Eidsmoe will teach "Christian Apologetics" Jan. 3-7. Pastor Robert Lee, AFLC president, will teach "History and Aims of the AFLC" Jan. 10-14.

The AFLBS/AFLTS missions conference, scheduled for Jan. 9-11 and Jan. 13, includes a discussion hour from 6:30-7:30 p.m. followed by evening services with Pastor Mike Brandt.

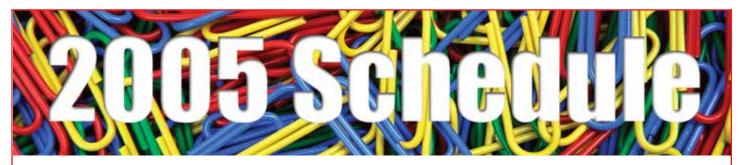
For class registration information, contact AFLTS at (763) 544-9501.

# **Schools plan Christmas concerts**

Three concerts are planned for the Christmas season at the AFLC schools campus in Plymouth. Mark your calendars for 7 p.m. Dec. 11. The choirs will also present concerts at both 2 and 4:30 p.m. Dec. 12.



New members were received at Triumph Lutheran, Ferndale, Wash. Pictured left to right are: Teemaria Kinnebrew and son Otto, Kathy and Kip Robinson and sons Sawyer and Kyle.



Issue Date January February March April May June July August September October November	Deadline November 29 January 3 January 31 February 28 March 28 April 25 May 30 June 27 July 25 August 29 September 26	Issue theme Life Issues Evangelism Easter/Lent AFLC Schools Missions Apologetics Christian Education Conference Review Youth/Convention God and the Law Reform./Thanksgiving	Back page ARC Building the base Something to share ARC	Column Stewardship Chaplains FLY Stewardship Chaplains Youth Stewardship Chaplains FLY Stewardship Chaplains FLY Stewardship Youth
December	October 31	Advent/Christmas	Something to share	none

Please submit items of upcoming events at least two months prior to issue date and submit noteworthy church happenings (i.e. outreach activities) no longer than one month after event occurs.

# WMF seeks new executive secretary

The Women's Missionary Federation is seeking an executive secretary to the National Board. A commitment to Christian women's ministries is desirable. Preference will be given for competent secretarial and computer skills with layout and design abilities. This is a half-time salaried position with the possibility of additional hours added in the future. For more information, contact WMF President Cheryl Skordahl at 223 Cherrywood Ave. N.W., St. Michael, MN 55376 or skordahl@charter.net or 763-497-5863. Please apply before Dec. 27.

# [ABCDEFG]

# What does it mean?

AFLC: The Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, a fellowship of independent congregations, who have chosen to be interdependent for the purpose of accomplishing service in the Kingdom of God that cannot best be done alone. Founded in 1962 with headquarters at Plymouth, Minn.

**AFLBS:** The Association Free Lutheran Bible School, a two-year Bible school founded in 1966 by the AFLC with campus located in Plymouth, Minn.

**AFLTS:** The Association Free Lutheran Theological Seminary sometimes called the Free Lutheran Seminary (FLS). Founded in 1964, shares campus with AFLBS in Plymouth, Minn.

**WMF:** The Women's Missionary Federation was organized in 1962 and supports AFLC missionary endeavors.

**ARC:** The Association Retreat Center, located in Osceola, Wis., was purchased in the late 1970s to be used as a retreat/camp.

# **AFLC** memorials — October

# **AFLTS**

Mike Chamberlain, Louise Hogstad

# **Parish Education**

LaVerne Jorgenson

Vision 2004

Richard Hoiland

## **AFLBS**

Loretta Holub, Orrin Nyhus

Evelyn Cook, Bill Picek Jr.

**Home Missions** 

Herbert Ridinger, Elmer Boutiette

# **People and Places**

**Wayne Hanson**, who has served as licensed pastor of King of Glory, Eden Prairie, Minn., for the past three years, announced his retirement for early 2005. He and his wife, Jan, plan to move to the Phoenix, Ariz., area.

Sharon Borg has resigned as executive secretary of the national Women's Missionary Federation. WMF President Cheryl Skordahl will be handling the executive secretary's work until a replacement is found. You may forward any requests or questions to her at (763) 497-5863,

email skordahl@charter.net or write to 223 Cherrywood Av. N.W., St. Michael, MN 55376.

Members of the Coordinating Committee approved a resolution of affiliation from **West Prairie Lutheran**, rural Kindred, N.D. The congregation recently voted to leave the ELCA.

Bethany Lutheran, Parkbeg, Saskatchewan, voted to withdraw from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) and has affiliated with the AFLC-Canada.

# **Association of Free Lutheran Congregations**

3110 East Medicine Lake Boulevard Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

AFLC Benevolences (10 months) - January 1 - October 30, 2004

FUND	TOTAL Subsidy	REC'D IN OCTOBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% TOTAL
General Fund	\$288,771	\$21,131	\$251,184	87
Youth Ministries	54.024	2,156	45,072	83
Parish Education	82,062	9,497	71,893	88
Seminary	154,195	10,967	155,813	101
Bible School	264,089	21,997	265,125	100
Home Missions	287,115	22,839	221,994	77
Church Extension	24,576	433	12,280	50
World Missions	256,326	18,324	170,386	66
Personal Support	328,311	26,444	289,753	88
TOTALS	\$1,739,469	\$133,788	\$1,483,500	<b>85</b>
TOTALS 2003	\$1,740,325	\$164,038	\$1,311,858	<b>75</b>
Goal 83%	. , ,	, ,	. , ,	

The Evangelism Department received \$5,380 in October.

The office of director of Development received \$25 in October.

\*The AFLC's year-end appeal letter will include financial updates from each department, including current needs beyond approved budgets.

\*The monthly financial summary will be updated in future issues of the *Ambassador*, as requested by the 2004 Annual Conference.

# God With us

lonely Christmas was on the horizon. It would be the first Christmas after my brother died. He had been the last living member of my immediate family, besides myself.

A couple of months earlier I had left the church I had served for nine years to be involved in the



**Craig Johnson** 

planting of a new congregation. The new work was just barely getting going. For me that meant Christmas wasn't going to include any family activities and there wouldn't be many church activities, either, I was not looking

forward to the season.

During that time I went to a concert put on by Michael Card, a Christian musician. He sang a song he had written called "Immanuel."

"Immanuel. Our God is with us, And if God is with us, Who could stand against us, Our God is with us. Immanuel."

"Our God is with us." Those were words I needed to hear. I was feeling a little bit like nobody was with me. But God is with me and that's enough. No matter who or what has been lost, God will provide. No matter how big the challenge that might be faced, God is bigger still. No matter what the future may hold, God will keep His hold on me.

It is sad that so many feel so alone at Christmas time. The message of Christmas is a message for the lonely. "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son,

and they will call him Immanuel - which means 'God with us" (Matthew 1:22, NIV). "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). The Lord has actually chosen to come and take up residence here with

Music is a powerful tool that God often uses to teach us and bring comfort and encouragement. The Christmas carol, "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," is another beautiful song of the season. In it the statement is made, "Pleased as man with man to dwell: Jesus, our Immanuel." Whenever I'm in a group and singing that I'm almost tempted to say, "Let's stop the music and think about what we just sang."

It is an amazing truth that the Son of God would be pleased to dwell with us. He wasn't forced to do it. He didn't get unlucky and somehow get stuck with the assignment. He willingly chose to come here, to this sinful, messedup world.

He didn't just stop by for a cup of coffee. He took up residence here. He took off His coat — His coat of glory — and He stayed awhile. He made this world His home.

I visited with a man recently who is sleeping under a bridge in town. He could stay at the local mission but he has chosen not to. As I sleep in my dry, warm house I think of him out there. Would I be willing to sleep under the bridge if that would help him come to the Lord? I don't think it would help, and I sure wouldn't be pleased to do it. But Jesus was pleased to do something far more impressive than me sleeping under a bridge. He left His home in heaven to be

It is an amazing truth that the Son of God would be pleased to dwell with us.

with us so that we can be with Him for all eternity.

Coming to be with us required more than just a change of location. "Pleased as *man* with man to dwell." "The Word became flesh." He took off the coat of glory and put on a coat of human flesh. He became One who could experience hunger and thirst; One who could be bruised and bleed. What He did was drastic, dramatic and necessary. We needed a Savior who would shed blood that was both human and divine so that we could be right with God. He was pleased to do it because He so loves us and wants us in His family.

No matter who is able to be with you or is pleased to be with you this Christmas, rejoice in the wonderful truth that Jesus wants to be with you. He has made an incredible sacrifice so it can happen. We have reason to sing because "Our God is with us, Immanuel."

## THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd. Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

# [Something to Share] Seasons of time

Daniel 2:20: "He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; he reveals deep and mysterious things; he knows what is in the darkness and the light dwells with him."

# He changes times and seasons

As we prepare to celebrate several upcoming holiday seasons, I have been considering the "seasons" of my own life. Having just celebrated a middle adulthood birthday, I now look at time and the world differently than I did at earlier stages of my life. As you consider what stage of life you may be in, it is comforting to know that God is the one who works in us both physically and spiritually in our growth as we work toward the goal of being changed into His likeness from one degree of glory to another (II Corinthians 3:18) and we can have a joy and peace in getting older!

# He removes kings and sets up kings

For Christians it is a comfort to know that God is in control through changes of leadership. What an

appropriate part of Scripture to consider having just completed an election process in our nation. How thankful we can be that we have the freedom and privilege to vote for leaders who believe in God's righteousness and moral commandments. Through the seasons of time, He promises to exalt a nation that follows His commands. "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34).

# He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; He reveals deep and mysterious things:

Moving through the different seasons of our lives it's appropriate to ask the following questions, Who am I? What has God created me to

do? What work can I do that will bring meaning to my life and the lives of others? How can I glorify God with my skills and talents? With any of these questions, we need to acknowledge the one who gives direction and wisdom for our lives. In Proverbs 3:6 God promises that if we acknowledge Him in all our ways He will direct our paths. Isn't it exciting to con-

sider that He will not only give us this wisdom and knowledge but will reveal "deep and mysterious things" to us when we follow and acknowledge Him?

# He knows what is in the darkness and the light dwells with Him

Living in a sinful world, it is easy to get discouraged. But what a comfort and encouragement to know that our great God knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with Him. If He is living in us, we have the power of that light! "Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (I John 4). That's good news!

> - Karen Floan Grace Free Lutheran Maple Grove, Minn.