

[Encouraging Word]

invitation

or those who have gone on a short-term mission trip, returning home to "life as we know it" often involves deep consideration of the challenges God has given us. When we travel beyond the comfort zone of life to serve God, He has a powerful opportunity to shape our hearts.

In those times when God opens our eyes to needs around us, He gives us a peek into His heart for missions. It is then that God fuels our hearts with a passion to join Him where He is working.

As I consider the faith challenges God has placed before me, I realize how necessary it is to daily live in step with His call to join Him in missions. It is one thing to see God at work, be personally challenged in my faith walk, and be changed in the process. However, it is quite another thing to daily live out the changes He has made in my life. Perhaps you can identify with me.

Regardless of who we are, where we live and what we do. He has called us to join Him in mission work! The real question is, "How will we respond to God's invitation?" Here are three ways to personalize the Great Commission.

First, it is necessary to seek God's passion in mission work, that the world may know the good news of His Son, Jesus Christ. This good news is the true joy that has yet to reach every nation. When we think of "Joy to the World" this Christmas, let's sing from the perspective of the Great Commission. He desires that every heart — and that includes every tribe, tongue and nation — prepare Him room.

Second, God has intended for each of His children to be ambassadors for His Kingdom. We have good news to share! As ambassadors of His good news, God has called each of us to share in the great and glorious task of sharing His joy with the nations!

Third, it is vital to examine God's call on our hearts. I challenge you to ask yourself, "What is my role in the Great Commission?" God has created us with special gifts and talents to use in Kingdom work. Consider these four roles and how you can personalize the Great Commission in your daily life.

PRAY: Will you pray for the nations, for missionaries around the world and commit yourself to serve as a prayer warrior?

SEND: Will you serve God through your finances, giving of yourself and your resources in order to be a blessing to the body of Christ?

GO: Will you answer the call to go by reaching the nations for Christ? Hundreds of people groups are waiting to hear the gospel!

MOBILIZE: The mobilizer serves to fan the flame of missions, sharing the passion and vision for the Great Commission in the local church in America. Will you answer the call to mobilize your congregation for maximizing its potential as a mission-minded church?

Whether at home or abroad, there are many opportunities to share in the Great Commission. God is daily calling us to take up our crosses and follow Him. May you be blessed as you personalize the Great Commission in your daily life.

> — Monica Coyle East European Missions Network

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[Sound Bites]

If we could condense all the truths of Christmas into only three words, these would be the words: "God with us."

— John F. MacArthur, Jr.

If New Testament Christianity is to reappear today with its power and joy and courage, men must recapture the basic conviction that this is a visited planet. ... God became one of us.

— J.B. Phillips

All we could ever imagine, could ever hope for, He is. He is the wise royal Counselor who fills us with wonder ... He is the God of might ... He is the Prince of Peace ... All this. and infinitely more, alive in an impoverished baby in a barn.

> — Michael Card The Promise

He does not simply say, Christ is born, but to you he is born, neither does he say, I bring glad tidings, but to you I bring glad tidings of great joy. Furthermore, this joy was not to remain in Christ, but it shall be to all the people.

> — Martin Luther Christmas Day sermon



By Pastor Jerry Holmaas

hat does hearing the phrase, "Christmas is coming," do to your stress level? What does it do to your blood pressure? What does it do to your soul?

"Christmas is coming!" Oh no — I have baking to do, gifts to buy, the house needs a good cleaning, there are programs and concerts to attend, extra services and gatherings at church. And I almost forgot about the family picture that must be taken for our Christmas cards, and then there are the poor who need to be remembered, the Christmas caroling at the nursing home and Aunt Sally's order for my "secret-recipe-never-fail" fudge and ... and ... and ...

"Christmas is coming!" Oh no — what can I buy for my wife this year? That vacuum cleaner I gave her last year just didn't seem to be right. I suppose I could look for a new sweater, but I have no idea what she would like! Do I have to go to the school program and the Sunday school program and the office party and the shopping for the kids? I can't wait to get all this chaos over with so I can actually watch a football game in peace once more.

"Christmas is coming!" Oh no — it doesn't look like I'm getting anything that was on my list. I know the car needed that new transmission last month, but still ... I want that new PlayStation, I want those new CDs, I want ... I want ... I want ... I want ...

"Christmas is coming!" Do you need to slow down and regroup? Do you need to step back, take a deep breath, and ask, "Is all this what Christmas is really about?" For the next moments, I urge you to sit down in a comfortable chair with a fresh cup of coffee or hot cocoa, put your feet up, and ask God for a renewed focus and sense of joyful wonder as you contemplate the simple phrase, "Christmas is coming!"

Come with me to 8th century B.C. Judah and hear the prophet Isaiah as he joyfully proclaims what the season of Advent and Christmas is truly about. Allow his utterly confident words, inspired by God the Holy Spirit,

translators have a hard time knowing exactly how to express it, for we know it was all future for Isaiah some of his glorious prophecies awaited the Messiah's first coming, some of these joyful realities await their full consummation in Messiah's second coming! Some of our Bibles use the past tense in this passage, some use the future tense; the Hebrew that Isaiah used was the

to lift the anxiety of the season from your heart and replace it with overwhelming wonder, joy, and praise. Here is what the prophet said to God's people some 700 years before the first Christmas:

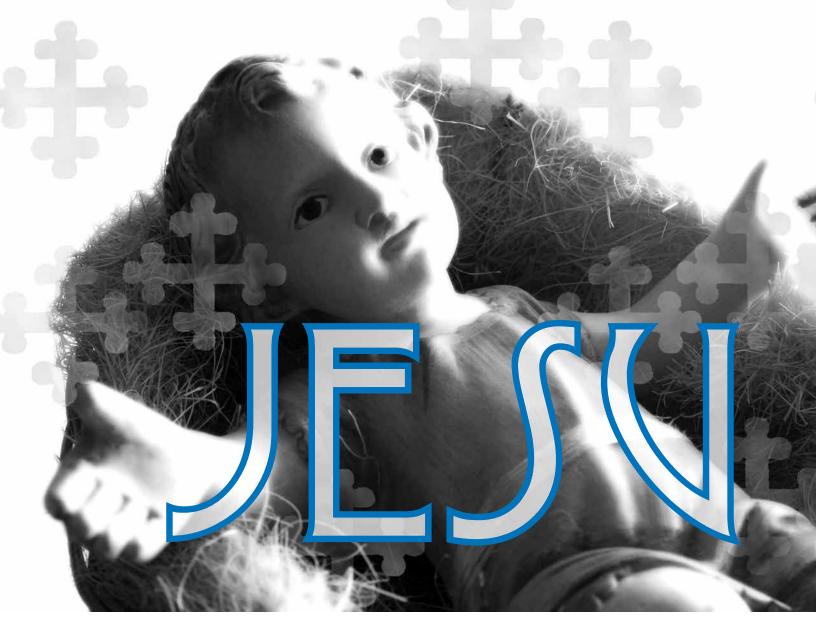
"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined. You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. For the voke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this" (Isaiah 9:2-7, English Standard Version).

This well-known Advent text is nothing less than a prophecy of Jesus' coming, recorded by Isaiah some 700 years before that first Christmas in Bethlehem. What is profoundly astounding is that the Holy Spirit-inspired prophet wrote of this — the great light, the overwhelming joy and rejoicing, the end of war, the birth of a boy child — as if it was already accomplished! English Bible perfect tense — i.e. the action described by almost every verb in this passage is regarded by Isaiah as completed, as done, as accomplished!

Hebrew grammarians call this the prophetic perfect or the perfect of certitude, of certainty - Isaiah knew (of course he knew!) that the boy child hadn't been born yet. But, by God-given faith, he wrote of his birth as an accomplished reality! He wrote of the blessed results of our Lord's coming to earth and becoming one of us, yet without sin, as fulfilled realities which ought to cause us no end of rejoicing and wonder! Isaiah would desire that we believe the good news and that, rather than becoming frazzled and frustrated in the holy seasons of Advent and Christmas, we would be lost in wonder at the astounding boy child whose coming this joyful celebration is all about!

"Christmas is coming!" Don't worry about all the baking ... and cleaning ... and shopping ... and greeting cards ... and programs ... and concerts ... and decorating ... and ... and ... Rather, pray for God-given joyful wonder at the reality of it all: "To us a child is born, to us a son is given." Rejoice in the incredible names He bears: Wonderful Counselor — never will he give you wrong guidance or advice, for He is God! Mighty God — absolutely nothing is impossible for Him! *Everlasting Father* — never will He leave you, never will He forsake you. He is no less than the eternal God! Prince of Peace — and yes, His peace is available even in this troubled world, even in the busyness of Advent.

Holmaas is a professor of Old Testament at AFLBS and AFLTS.



By Clara Gunderson

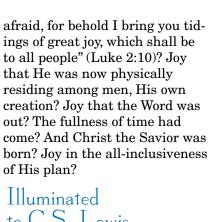
t was my privilege a few months ago to view an illuminated Bible on display at the Minneapolis Institute of Art. I was not aware of what "illuminated" meant in relation to the Bible, but it was an outing with my sisters and daughter, so I was eager to have an afternoon with them. While waiting our turn to enter the gallery we talked about what this was, and read the information offered. I learned that in this context, "illuminated" means the use of silver and gold leaf, along with other brilliant colors, illustrating the Scriptures, bringing them to light.

As we progressed from one station to the next, each page was beautifully done — from creation, through the Garden of Eden, the giving of the law, the victory at Jericho, the building of the temple, John the Baptist in the desert — suddenly I came

face to face with the artist's depiction of John 1:1-5. I caught my breath and tears came to my eyes as I beheld Jesus, the Word, become flesh. There was a keyhole in one corner, Jesus being the key that opens the Word ... the union of divinity with humanity. The use of silver and gold showed Him as the Light of the world, which no darkness can overcome. I thought I was discovering this truth for the first time. I felt wonder! I felt joy! Viewing these illuminated paintings was as if "tidings of great joy" were being proclaimed to me.

Illuminated to the shepherds

My thoughts went to God Himself. What was He, the Father, feeling at the moment the angel appeared to the shepherds proclaiming, "Do not be



to C.S. Lewis

C.S. Lewis, in his book, "Surprised By Joy," wrote that in his early childhood he often found himself with a very great, unsatnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. I gave in and admitted that God was God and knelt in prayer."

Lewis goes on to say that this was not a conversion to Christianity, but to theism, acknowledging God's existence. "I knew nothing yet," he says, "about the incarnation."

He did not yet connect his longings for joy with his belief in God. Acting in obedience to a sense of honor that one should "fly one's flag," he started attending church on Sundays and a college chapel on weekdays. He was ready to hear more of God from any source. What others considered the myths of the Gospels, his own experience in literary criticism told him they were facts: the Word became flesh, God became man.

As he drew near to the conclusion that Jesus is indeed the Son of God, God incarnate, he felt a resis-

isfied desire. He didn't know what the object of the desire was. He later wrote that he sensed it was a longing for joy, but he didn't know what that meant, either. During his first years at boarding school, he became a believer while being taken to

church and hearing the doctrines of Christianity, reaffirming what he already believed. As he grew up and went on to higher education, he lost this belief, becoming fascinated with the occult, slipping into atheism, becoming engrossed with Norse mythology.

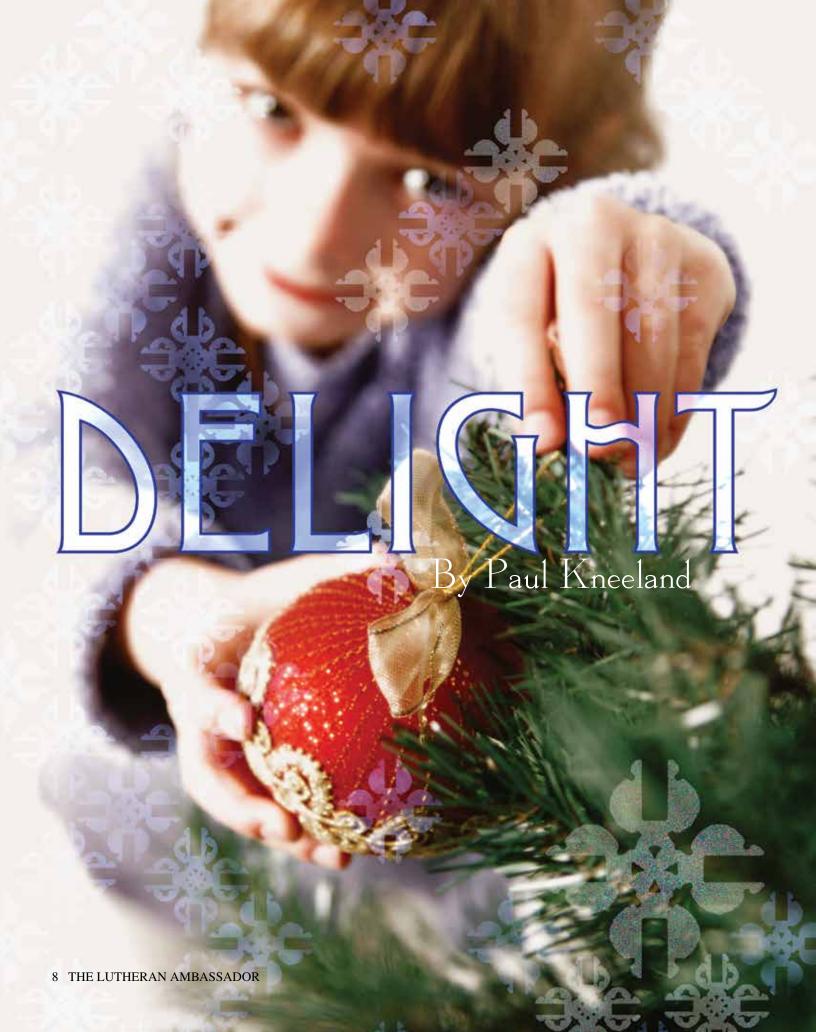
Rarely now did he have "stabs of joy," and he found himself starving for it, thinking that perhaps all pleasures are substitutes for joy. Years went by in which he, a voracious reader, examined logic, rationalism, idealism, theism and philosophy, casting aside what he could not accept. Always searching for more and hoping to find "the truth apart from Christianity." However, his fellow scholars and good friends were Christians and daily he had to deal with his present position. What he dreaded most about Christianity was the opening up entirely of himself. He wanted no interference and had put up a "no admittance" sign in the very depths of his soul.

Then, alone in his room one night, he felt "the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so eartance almost as strong as his previous resistance to admitting that God indeed exists and is the great I Am. This was short-lived. "To accept the incarnation was a further step in the same direction; it brings God nearer in a new way." Lewis describes the old desires for joy to be pointers to the source of all joy — God incarnate, Jesus Christ.

Illuminated to all mankind

This is the same good news the angel of the Lord announced to the shepherds — pointing them to Bethlehem where the Babe lay. This is the same joy Elizabeth felt, which caused her babe to leap in her womb upon being in the presence of Jesus, still in Mary's womb (Luke 1:41). This is the same joy the Ethiopian eunuch experienced as he went on his way rejoicing after Philip proclaimed Jesus to him. Yes, the good news of Jesus was meant for him, too (Acts 8:26-39). This is the same joy Martha lacked as she watched her sister Mary sit at Jesus' feet — a joy Mary seemed to have and that Jesus wouldn't deny her. This is the same joy that causes the angels to sing in heaven when one sinner repents (Luke 15:10).

Gunderson is a member of Sunnyside Free Lutheran, Stacy, Minn.



hristmastime seems to stir up a great deal of energy in our children, doesn't it? A flurry of excitement accompanies this time of year, and our kids seem to generate most of the whirlwind. Have you seen the storefront sign that says, "Unattended children will be given an espresso and a free puppy?" There's something about that visual that seems synonymous with Christmas in most homes.

Erma Bombeck once said, "There's nothing sadder in this world than to awake Christmas morning and not be a child." How old were you when you stopped peeking under your mom and dad's bed for Christmas presents, or when you quit sorting through the gifts under the tree to find the ones with your name on it? As kids, we so looked forward to the gift, didn't we?

Now, as we've gotten older, I suppose we've learned how it's better to give than to receive. Besides, we're busy thinking about Christmas cookies and other treats such as yulegrit, lefse, and, of course, the mouthwatering lutefisk. And as waves of colorful wrapping paper wash over the living room floor with ribbons and bows left in its wake, we

into town to make an Imodium run (pardon the pun) and gather additional rations for grilled cheese sandwiches, tomato soup and extra blankets, since the "off peak" electric heat system was keeping the Fort very cold. As I said, it was a miserable time.

When Christmas finally arrived, most of us were hardly in a delightful mood. The only joy we witnessed was in the lives of my two young nieces (they never did get sick). Despite the unpleasant circumstances, they delighted us all with their excitement as each gift was opened. They looked forward to each one! What an example for us! Those young girls made us realize that no matter what the crisis or occasion, God has given us gifts worthy of our greatest delight.

A strange word picture indeed, but one from which we can learn. You see, the gift has come. The real gift of Christmas and the greatest gift of all came in the person of Jesus Christ. John 1:14a tells us, "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us." He brings us many gifts. It is through faith in this Jesus Christ that we receive such gifts as the forgiveness of sins, salvation

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like to sit back and watch the delight radiate from our children's faces. They still look forward to the gift!

I received a great gift recently. It was a book entitled, "I Fought With Custer," by Sergeant Windolph, the last survivor of the Battle of the Little Big Horn. It reminded me about the Christmas of '89 when we barely survived the Battle of the Little Big Flu-Bug.

I had gathered my troops together and began an expedition to the prairies of North Dakota. There we joined up with our entire family regiment at Fort In-laws along the Sheyenne River. We were to have a relaxing respite for a few days and then celebrate Christmas together. Unfortunately, we encountered a surprise attack when the chronic fatigue and immune dysfunction syndrome laid siege to our household. We were heavily outnumbered as the assault came from all sides. We tried to advance against the enemy and set up skirmish lines only to be driven back in retreat to a line for the restroom.

It was a miserable time. My Father-In-Law was hit hard. With our General down, we turned to Major Brother-In-Law, who was also heading south in a hurry. After consulting the Captains of the other troops, he scribbled a note for me. Since I was the only healthy adult left of the command force, I was summoned to ride my truck

and eternal \bigcirc life with Him in heaven.

Romans 3:23-24 says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast."

Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

And how about the gift of God's Word? Psalm 1:2 says, "But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night."

Do you still look forward to these gifts, regardless of what is happening around you? Jeremiah 15:16a says, "When your words came I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight." The gift has come. May we recapture the joy and delight we had as kids and continue to look forward to the many gifts God gives us this Christmas and all throughout the year.

Kneeland serves as youth director at Abiding Savior, Sioux Falls, S.D.



e speak much of joy at Christmas time in the midst of parties and presents and programs, but real joy only becomes a reality in our lives as we learn the art of hospitality. Christian hospitality begins as we prepare room for Jesus, inviting Him to come into our hearts, to sup with us, to share in the everyday experiences of our lives.

The Scriptures make it clear that God wants us to experience the fullness of joy. Jesus taught the disciples that true joy comes from abiding in Him (John 15:1-11) and He in us. Jesus has come and He stands at the door and knocks. Have you opened your heart to Him? He desires to bring you joy and to teach you how to open your heart and home to bring joy to others.

Knowing Jesus has brought real joy to my life, and I praise Him for the way He gently teaches me how to be more like Him. I learned to love people growing up in a pastor's family. Our home was always open to others. I remember with joy our Christmas Eve celebrations. Since our relatives all lived far from us, my parents decided to invite other guests to share our special evening. They chose people who probably would feel very alone on Christmas — widows or widowers, college students far from home, someone without family or friends. We would help my mom choose and wrap a gift for each one. We also helped with the cleaning, decorating and cooking in preparation for the special night. Those we invited were our guests of honor. We tried to make Christmas special for them, and in so doing, Christmas became even more special for us.

Years later I found myself on the mission field, far from family and familiarity. My husband, Paul, and I decided to follow my family's example. One of the best ways we have found to share Christ with people is by opening our home to them.

A definition of Christian hospitality might be, "Shar-

Holy Spirit given to us to minister, to impart to each person who enters our home something of the presence of Christ. Hospitality is not an end in itself; rather, it is a means to an end — the end of building good relationships and sharing Jesus. An organized house, a nicely set table, a well-planned menu might be means by which we meet these goals, but they should not be ends in themselves.

The Bible says in Romans 12:13 that Christians should practice hospitality. Christmas is a great time to put this into practice. Whether elegant or simple, may our hospitality be to the glory of God, remembering that it is not about me and what people will think of my house or my food or my company. Hospitality is about giving to others, being interested in individuals and being willing to share that which God has first given to us. It really boils down to one simple little word — *love*. Love is a decision, a decision to open our hearts and to open our homes to others around us. In so doing, we will experience the joy of God's blessing.

Our lives can be a light in a dark world. Our homes can be set as a city on a hill for all to see the light of Jesus shining through us. The home of a Christian is a tool for ministry. Hospitality is a gift to be nurtured. In this inhospitable world a Christian home is a miracle to be shared. "Above all, love each other deeply ... offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering the grace of God in its various forms ... so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ" (I Peter 4:8-11).

A children's chorus states it well — "Jesus and Others and You, what a wonderful way to spell JOY! 'J' is for Jesus for He takes first place. 'O' is for others we meet face to face. 'Y' is for you and in all that you do, put Jesus first and spell JOY." May you have a wonderful,

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ing ourselves with others for Christ's sake." This includes sharing our time, our thoughts, our home, our family, our possessions. Hospitality implies having an attitude of openness, helping another feel at ease in our presence.

Many people confuse hospitality with entertainment. Entertainment seeks to impress. In contrast, Christian hospitality seeks to serve. It is a marvelous gift of the

joy-filled Christmas as you open your heart to Jesus and as you open your home to share His love and joy with others!

Becky and her husband, Paul, serve as AFLC missionaries in Brazil.



By Pastor Mike Klenner

his is my favorite time of year. In South
Dakota the growing season has ended, the
harvest is complete and all of God's creation
reveals its beauty as it prepares to rest. The
calendar dates of Thanksgiving just past, and
Advent and Christmas keep us mindful of His provision for us as a nation and the gift of salvation in
His Son.

The Advent season we are currently in is a time to rejoice in the truth of God's Word. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten, from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Christmas will soon arrive, with His angels revealing the everlasting truth for all hearts. "And she will bear a Son; and you

shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

In recent years the phrase "Jesus is the reason for the season" has often been printed on items from napkins to framed art work, and Christians in conversation often express these very words. But God didn't intend His good news to be a seasonal event, for we are told by His heavenly hosts, "I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people" (Luke 2:10).

As a young boy I always felt the nearness and presence of God and that His hand was always upon me. Today and each day I marvel at the thought of being forgiven of my sin, that Jesus is my Savior and soon heaven will be my home. In Luke 2:19 it is writ-



ten, "But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart."

I, too, give daily thought to the Christmas message — I have been bought with a price and He loves me. The happiness it gives to me as a husband, father, friend, and pastor is the basis for my joy when the months are far from the Christmas season. Throughout the year it is a privilege to live and serve Him on this side of eternity. God gives joy to each person who knows Jesus.

I also receive happiness from having fellowship with believers and hearing of answered prayer and testimonies of God's saving

fawn and thousands of monarch butterflies beginning their migration — the list is endless! I am also blessed with a good wife, having been present at the birth of my four sons and the privilege of raising them in the Lord, which adds to my happiness.

God also has given me many memories to reflect on. One such memory was telling our oldest son, Ryan, at bedtime about God's creation. When I finished, he asked, "Dad, does God have lots of tools?" What joy from the mouths of others expressing their love and awe of God!

As a pastor, praying with and for others and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ is always a blessing. It is a privilege to worship Him and serve Him in Word and sacraments. And when asked for the hope that lives within I am happy to say, "Jesus."

A man in Cheshire, England, wrote: "Several years ago on Christmas Eve, my wife had tucked our 10-year-old twins in their beds and had settled down for a quiet time with the Lord by the fire in the liv-

Iulness

grace. I remember a man who, after receiving Christ, said, "God plucked me out of a burning barrel." What makes my day complete is that on any given day, "There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner, who repents, than over ninety-nine persons

who need no repentance" (Luke 15:7). To see individuals and families who walk the walk of faith and grow in His Word is heartwarming. While we may never see all the fruits of our labors, there is joy in knowing our labor is never in vain.

Yes, to see others practice Christian love, to have a compassionate heart and rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep stirs my heart. It's amazing to see His Holy Spirit work in the lives of His own. Jean Sibelius wrote in his hymn, "A Christian Home," of families "where Christ is Head and Counselor and Guide, and every child is taught His love and favor and gives his heart Christ, the crucified." That makes my joy complete. Praise God for those who know the Lord!

Within myself I find joy in daily thanking Him for His creation. I have seen a red fox chase a squirrel in the fields of North Dakota, a doe nursing her

ing room. Suddenly she was startled by the sound of music just outside our front door, followed almost immediately by the excited voice of our daughter Carol crying, 'Mommy, Mommy, Jesus is here!' The youngster came rushing down the stairs in her nightgown, her face bright with expectation as she waited the joyous moment of meeting the Savior. My wife kissed her and gently ushered her back to bed, explaining that the clear, sweet notes she had heard were not made by the 'trump of God' (I Thessalonians 4:16). Rather, they were part of a stirring horn fanfare being sounded out by the Salvation Army band as they came to play Christmas carols for us. What a lesson that moment of excitement provided for us! To see the glowing face of our child eagerly looking for her Lord to come."

Happiness in the best sense is found by those who, because they are right with God, do not seek outside influences but seek Him and His promises. Jesus is coming again!

Klenner serves Salem Free Lutheran, Freeman, S.D., and Immanuel Free Lutheran, Centerville, S.D.

[World Missions]

Lift high the NOSS



tral Mexican Lutheran Church (CMLC) celebrated its 25th year on Reformation Sunday, Oct. 30. The event was one of great joy and great sadness as

ith gratitude to God, the Cen-

Leticia Flores, one of the church's most beloved members and servants, died suddenly just days before the anniversary. Flores, who had been the English speaking mediary between the CMLC and the AFLC for many years, was on the program to lead a session on Christian education.

The anniversary started on Friday evening in the relatively small chapel of the Leon, Mexico, congregation. The service was lead by Milton Flores, who also brought the message. As other congregations began to arrive Saturday morning, the meetings were moved outside to the courtyard to provide space. Members of CMLC were challenged by those who have been instrumental in the founding and life of the body over the years: Pastor Nehemias Diaz Mazariegos, Pastor Eugene Enderlein, Dr. Roberto Hoeferkamp and myself.

Central Mexican Lutheran Church celebrates 25 years

At the closing service on Sunday, Dr. Hoeferkamp challenged CMLC churches to continue to build on the foundation of Jesus. Dr. Hoeferkamp read I Corinthians 1:18, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." As he explained the verse, a burst of wind reminiscent of the day of Pentecost began to shake the heavy cloth backdrop behind the altar. The large cross on the altar was tipped by the cloth and fell forward toward the floor. Pastor Raul Hernandez, a second generation pastor in the CMLC who was leading the service, reached out and caught it. He then lifted it back into its rightful place. Two teenage boys rushed to the front and held the curtain so that it could not blow and take down the cross. We were all reminded of Aaron and Hur who held up the arms of Moses as Joshua led troops to take new territory for the Lord.

Twenty-five years have passed since the CMLC was started. Time marches on, people we depend on like Leticia go home to be with the Lord and the rest of us grow weaker with age. But there is a new generation. We must constantly be sharing Jesus with them, teaching them to be leaders and even pastors in our churches. It will be a great joy for us to observe them as they lift high the cross and promote the cause of Christ. This is the work of missions. Thank you for your partnership in the gospel.

> Pastor Del Palmer **AFLC World Missions Director**

Comfort His people

By Pastor Craig Johnson

arolyn Dyrud, who passed away on Sept. 24, served with her husband, Connely, for 35 years as an Association of Free Lutheran Congregations missionary to Brazil. Serving that long in another part of the world means adapting to a different culture. It's not an easy task, but Carolyn was able to do it.

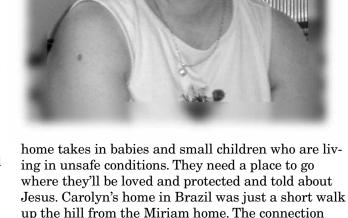
Carolyn became fluent in the Portuguese language. Brazilians would comment on how impressed they were with her language skills.

She became comfortable living in Brazil. When her family arrived there in the late 1960s, it was very much a developing country. Conditions were not like Minnesota's Twin Cities, where Carolyn grew up. Constantly dealing with a different culture than the one in which you were raised can be tiring. But Carolyn handled it with grace — grace she received from Christ.

Carolyn always seemed to me to be comfortable and secure with who she was in the Lord. She wasn't striving to be the perfect missionary wife in the eyes of others. She was just striving to be the person God had called her to be. She was comfortable with the talents and personality, the calling and the mission God had given her. I never got a sense she was putting on an act to impress anybody. She was just being who the Lord had made her to be — a special creation of God.

During the times I have been in Brazil, I spent much time at the Dyrud home. I've been in few homes that were as welcoming and enjoyable to visit. That wasn't due so much to the layout of the home or the furniture. It was far more due to Carolyn's kind, genuine and gentle personality. I'm deeply saddened that those visits will be no more in this life. But I look forward to enjoying the visits in a richer and fuller way when all God's children are home with Jesus.

Carolyn had a heart of compassion for those who were in need of comfort. During the Dyruds' time in Brazil, the Miriam Infant Home ministry began. The



she had with the children was even closer.

The poor and the hurting of the world are sometimes not pleasant to be around. They can be dirty.

They can act inappropriately. They have a lot of struggles. Still, Carolyn was comfortable around them and helped them to find comfort in Jesus.

Where can you find comfort when cancer attacks the body of a friend or a loved one? When they leave this life far sooner than you were hoping? We turn to "the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles" (II Corinthians 1:3-4). We look to the One who has said, "Comfort, comfort my people says your God" (Isaiah 40:1).

Comfort is found because sin has been paid for at the cross. It is found because Jesus faced death and defeated it. In Him the goodbyes are temporary and life is eternal.

In spite of the pain, Carolyn's spirit found comfort as she faced death. As the end approached, she told her family of the assurance she had in Christ and the confidence she had that she would soon be meeting her Savior. Three days before she died she told them, "I want to go home to be with Jesus." She was looking forward to what was to come. Because of Jesus she could say, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). That sure hope is what gives comfort to those of us who are still waiting to go home.

CHRISTIAAS By Bjarne Berget

The straps of the peat basket on his back pressed tightly on his shoulders. There had been many trips now just before Christmas. Black frost made it necessary.

The bogs and hill were equally difficult to cross.

Remarkable in itself how such a little-desired job becomes pure sport. One rejoices, in fact, over getting a stack of fuel as high as possible. This was the last and heaviest load. One had better take more time to rest. The grownups were glad to have a fellow out of the way. It was, after all, Christmas Eve and much to get ready.

From the resting place there is a good lookout over the farm and sea. It is really still but the waves are high. The rows of shoals and rocks on the horizon looked like a row of teeth. It is thundering in the mountains to the west. On such a day one will hardly hear the bells ring in the holiday. The ocean rings more loudly and is nearer. Here on the resting place, no doubt, many ancestors have sat before. One could see the pathway and gate. The ocean beyond had become the last resting place for far too many of them.

The community isn't large. The channel separates mainland and island and has given shelter for the most important in life's work. The boat lies safely here and the island, "the Angel," shuts out the ocean's power.

It is comforting to know that today there were none from the community out beyond the ferocious row of rocks. No one stares with anxious eyes looking for a man, father or brother. A single freight steamship breaks the waves as it moves forward. Today the men do their errands, carrying water and shopping. The boat will remain in the boathouse and the sheaf of grain on the barn floor. That's what Grandpa and Mother's brother are doing over there to the west where my home lies.

Home, yes! The home that Father had completed before he died and where Mother and my three siblings are. Just west of it are the land with the cow barn and the old pig house; beyond, the boathouse and the sea. ...

So the peat is piled up and the door is hooked. Yes, look, the sheaf of grain is in its place. A pale blue jumper reveals that Grandpa is by the barn wall nailing the Christmas tree to the stand. It arrived by steamboat yesterday from relatives up the fjord where the prevailing climate is more favorable for such growth.

And so Christmas arrives. In front of the door lie small juniper twigs on the newly scoured flagstone. It is better not to go out on the doorstep today. One time a year a person takes them in his hand and carries them quietly to the place in the house. It is





Christmas Eve. Wonderful odors of cooking food make one hungry. While one must wait, one has the chance to think about how this year the Christmas tree is prettier than before. Perhaps Auntie had brought paper in gold and other colors from the capital? With our own hands we made chains and baskets. Yes, Christmas was to be home at Mother's in the new home, and after the Christmas meal a bath in the wooden tub on the kitchen floor by all of us. The bath water stood all ready to be put on the stove with a large sprig of juniper in it.

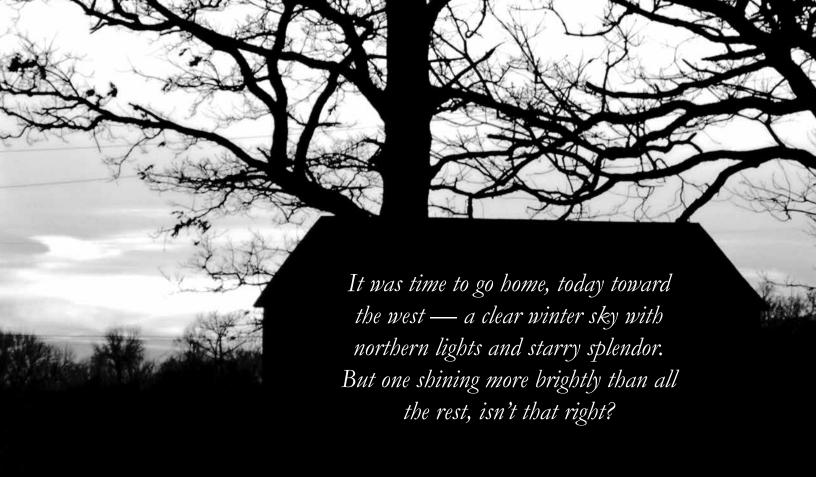
Uncle was the song leader around the glittering Christmas tree. It was easy to follow the clear tenor. We had to learn the songs in the fall evenings while the men folks mended nets and the women carded wool or spun. Grandmother, as a rule, sang one song. Her back was quite crooked and the day had been busy. So it was good that the songs weren't many. The presents waited, also those [the] boy was to give. Three whole crowns (about 14 cents each) were earned during a several-day job carrying stones out of an old fireplace at a neighboring farm. There was something for all, with a little help from Grandpa, of course.

It was time to go home, today toward the west a clear winter sky with northern lights and starry

splendor. But one shining more brightly than all the rest, isn't that right? The last ray showed on the long bench. I [the boy] sat right opposite Grandpa. He sang and the melody was such as I have never heard since. With hands folded over his forehead, he read the Christmas story and also the prayer book. The picture of his head and hands cannot be erased. A poor tattooed "N" is evident on one hand. These same hands often held the tiller when he, as a captain, steered the boat with the nets for cod toward land with the catch and crew. Grandpa always made it to land. Now the toil-worn, wrinkled hands are testimony that another and stronger Captain must guide both him and his dear ones into harbor. It wasn't easy for [me] to tear [myself] away from that impression there on the long bench in [my] grandparents' kitchen. It wasn't something that would leave [me].

On the second day of Christmas it was usual to go to church. It was easiest to row in the still weather, but it was not so this year. It was necessary to walk the half-mile (literally three and one-half miles), partly over bog, partly over hills. Later on there was a both a road and automobiles, but these good things weren't a part of Christmas in my childhood. But it didn't prevent there being a full church.

We gathered at the church entrance until the



pastor came, then we went in; there the great chandelier was lighted with a wreath of light encircling it. Also on the pulpit and on the altar there were lights. On the hymn board were small oil lamps. Grandpa didn't have a good place for a small boy — his was right below the pulpit. After the pastor entered the pulpit, I only saw his fingers, restlessly busy with several tassels along the edges. So one had to look higher. As a result one got a new view at the upper part of the altar from 1777. There was a triangle encompassed by gold rays, and in the triangle an eye, a large eye. What did that mean? Yes, that was clear. You are seen from above. You — little boy from a fishing village — are seen by God. That sermon has never been forgotten.

Grandpa, as usual, greeted the klokker (sexton) and pastor, and I also had the opportunity to do so. The pastor had been in our home, had been in the parlor where my little piggy bank stood. Hadn't he even stroked my hair and placed the smallest two shining kroner (crowns) in the bank? I peeked afterward through the crack. I would use that money when I got big. I [liked] the pastor for what he had done and dreamed one time that I myself was a pastor and stood before the altar with the large eye. I will never forget, either, that the pastor prayed that

that eye would be the "widow's defender and the father of the fatherless."

On the third day (of Christmas) there was a mission day with an auction. There we must go for everyone would be there. Grandma had bought several things to be sold, and some things she had made, such as stockings. Grandpa got orders to buy these last again. The other things she arranged to keep by right of ownership. Most people did it that way, yes, for the mission day. Anders was the auctioneer, followed by Tore, [who] was the leader for the boys' society. And so the aprons, stockings and I don't know what else went under the hammer, with humorous repartee. And the day went along.

But the concern for the mission, which was revealed by the third day of Christmas and the auction, became a heritage in modern childhood years, which I came to possess. A great heritage from a childhood that gave rich thoughts for traveling through life.

Translated from Norwegian by Pastor Raynard Huglen, Newfolden, Minn.

Dalton hosts FaithSearch

Apologetics presentation draws many from outside parish

Dalton Free Lutheran Parish hosted FaithSearch presentations with Pastor Denny McKeever on Oct. 16-17. McKeever is an evangelist and director of International Ministry for Faith Studies International, which was founded by Dr. Don Bierle (author of "Surprised by Faith"). The theme verse was I Peter 1:15: "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." Prayers were answered as God strengthened the faith of many, and also called people to faith in Jesus!

The FaithSearch presentations are apologetic in nature and focus on: Origin and purpose for human life, archeological

discoveries from Biblical times, manuscript discoveries of Scripture, evidence for the resurrection of Christ, and the cumulative objective evidence for faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord as presented in the Bible.

Pastor Steve Carlson, who serves the three-point Dalton, Minn., parish, noted that attendance was very strong and the presentations drew many people from outside the parish. On their response cards, many people indicated that the evidences presented helped to increase their trust in God's Word and encouraged them to be bolder in their witness to others.

McKeever also spoke at several area schools and shared with the district pastors about the resources that Faith Studies offers to churches.

Library seeks copies of AFLC Annual Reports

The AFLTS library archives, housed in Heritage Hall on the AFLC Schools campus in Plymouth, Minn., is looking for Annual Reports from several recent Annual Conferences.

If you have copies to donate from 1989, 1990, 1992, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, and 2001, please contact librarian Larry Walker at (763) 544-9501 or email him at library@aflc.org.

Pastor Greg Schram, Northwood, N.D., has accepted a call to serve Our Saviour's Lutheran Church, Thief River Falls, Minn., and Reiner Lutheran, Goodridge, Minn. Schram, who currently serves Ebenezer Lutheran, Northwood, will begin his ministry in Thief River Falls in January.

Pastor Larry Severson, Roseau, Minn., has resigned as pastor of Rose Lutheran Church and Spruce Lutheran Church, both in Roseau. He continues to reside in the Roseau community, where he serves as a hospice chaplain. Rose and Spruce congregations are currently served during the interim by Jon Dryburgh, a Grafton, N.D., public school teacher.

Pastor Greg Lenz, Eden Prairie, Minn., has accepted a call to serve Faith Free Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, Minn. Approved for call in the AFLC by the Coordinating Committee, Lenz was formerly on the roster of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. **Eric Christenson** has accepted a call to serve as the youth and Christian education director at Amery Free Lutheran Church, Amery, Wis. He began his ministry there in November.

Pastor Lynn Wilson, Roslyn, S.D., has resigned as pastor of the Lake Region Parish (Tabor, Saron, and Buffalo Lake) to accept a call to full-time National Guard chaplaincy position. Wilson and his wife, Tracy, have moved to Rapid City, S.D., where he will be headquartered.

John Smithies has accepted a call to serve as the youth director at Our Redeemer Free Lutheran, Kirkland, Wash. Smithies has a Bachelor of Arts from Multnomah Bible College and a Master's of Divinity from Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia.

Naomi Andrews, a 2004 graduate of AFLBS and a 2005 graduate of MTI, has accepted the receptionist position at the AFLC headquarters building in Plymouth, Minn. Andrews will also work part-time

with AFLC Youth Ministries.

Kayla Russum has accepted a call to serve as the youth director of Elim Free Lutheran, Lake Stevens, Wash. Russum is a 2004 graduate of AFLBS.

Pastor Terry Olson was installed at Trinity Free Lutheran, Grand Forks, N.D., on Sept. 11. Pastor Brian Davidson, AFLC secretary, officiated at the service.

Ron Brubakken, a middler student at AFLTS, has accepted a position as interim parish worker at Solid Rock Free Lutheran, Anoka, Minn.

Richard Ramsbacher, who is finishing up his last senior semester at AFLTS, has been assigned an internship at Bethel Community Church, Culbertson, Mont. Under the supervision of Pastor Jon Wellumson, Williston, N.D., Ramsbacher will begin his internship in January.

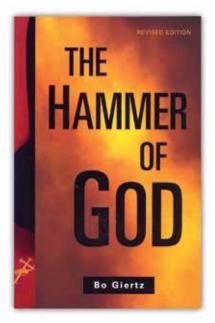
Bo Giertz remembered

Named most influential Swedish churchman

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of Bo Harald Giertz, who was recently named the most influential Swedish churchman of the 20th century through a survey of "Kyrkans Tidning," the Church of Sweden's official newspaper. As a 36-year-old associate pastor in rural Småland, Sweden, Giertz (1905-1998) wrote in a span of six weeks his bestselling novel, "The Hammer of God."

In this book, three pastors learn the necessity of relying on God's grace as they fall short of their pastoral duties through public humiliation, self-doubt, inability to accept God's promises in their own lives, and divisions and quarreling among their parishioners. Through these stories, Giertz shows that a true pastor is a believer himself, stands firm on the Word of God, rightly divides law and gospel, and is equipped to care for souls. "The Hammer of God" has been called the best law/gospel narrative ever written. The recently revised edition includes a final chapter never before published in English and additional historical and theological background.

An internationally respected clergyman, Giertz wrote several books and articles on doctrine and the Christian life. Though most of his writings are not available in English, Concordia will commemorate the centennial by publishing several of his works, including a daily devotional "To Believe in



Christ" and "Preach the Word: A Preacher's Allegiance to the Holy Scripture."

"The Hammer of God" (\$15) is available from AFLC Parish Education. Call (763) 545-5631 or email parished@aflc.org.

2006 Scheduffe

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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.

Youth Workers Retreat and Federation Council set for weekend in January

District representatives needed for input on 2007 FLY convention

The 2006 Youth Workers Retreat/Federation Council has been scheduled for Jan. 13-15 at the Association Retreat Center, Osceola, Wis. It is important to have a representative from each district at the Federation Council meeting to give input for the next Free Lutheran Youth Convention scheduled for 2007.

Tiger McLuen, a national youth worker trainer with 30 years of ministry experience, will speak on "Changing Perspectives in Youth Ministry."

Registration is \$79 before Jan. 1 for the first registrant from a church, and \$59 for each additional registrant from the same church. Costs raise \$20 per person after Jan. 1.

For more information, call AFLC Youth Ministries at (763) 545-5631. A brochure is also available at www.aflconline.org/youth/-FINAL_06_ywr.pdf.

Ambassador's policy on news submissions

The type of news the Ambassador is looking for and eager to print are news items that are unique — things that are not happening in most congregations on a regular basis. We are also interested in those events and stories that other congregations and individuals can learn from and apply in their congregation.

Examples of this kind of story would be unique outreach events; something new a congregation is attempting to do to promote fellowship; a way of training leadership or youths that a congregation is finding effective; or a new ministry that has begun. Individual news stories are appreciated as well—stories of how God has been working in a person's life; how someone came to know Christ or has been used by God; or how God has helped a family through a trial.

We appreciate those pictures that capture people in action, doing something for the Lord.

AFLC memorials — October

AFLBS

Bruce Thompson, Daren Grubb, Ken Johnson, Mildred Weers, Don Rodvold, Neil Rudebusch

AFLTS

Bruce Thompson, Jules Orabka

FLAPS

Pastor Mike Crowell

General Fund

Bruce Thompson

Home Missions

Vivian Hausauer, Kenneth Johnson, Bruce Thompson

Miriam Infant Home

Carolyn Dyrud (2)

Parish Education

Steve Dethman, Marlene Deist, Don Rodvold, Carolyn Dyrud

Vision

LaVanche Peterson Neil Rudebusch

WMF

Diane Locken, Carolyn Dyrud (9), Lester Mickelson, Ervin Tvinnereim

World Missions

Carolyn Dyrud, Bruce Thompson, Janice Wirtzfeld

... in honor of

AFLTS

Pastor Dale Finstrom

ARC Board/Corp. elections announced

ARC Corporation members elected Roger Timm, Wilson, Wis., to the ARC Board of Directors by mail-in vote after not reaching a quorum at the Annual Conference.

Also elected to five-year terms on the ARC Corporation were Lee Schierkolk, Prairie Farm, Wis.; Pastor Tim Carlson, Grafton, N.D.; Rodney Kjersten, Roseau, Minn.; Pastor Tonnes Pollestad, Andover, Minn.; Dennis Parsley, Pipestone, Minn.; Pastor Jason Holt, Fergus Falls, Minn.; Roger Quanbeck, Grand Forks, N.D.; Pastor John Rieth, Grand Forks, N.D.; Oryen Benrud, Goodhue, Minn; Ken Lehman, Milford, Ill.

Association of Free Lutheran Congregations

3110 East Medicine Lake Boulevard Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

AFLC Benevolences (10 months) - January 1 - October 31, 2005

FUND	TOTAL Subsidy	REC'D IN OCTOBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% TOTAL
General Fund*	\$387,377	\$34,618	\$349,912	90
Youth Ministries	56,062	5,942	60,565	
Parish Education	81,988	14,516	81,959	100
Seminary	156,804	13,204	164,860	105
Bible School	269,308	18,594	274,055	102
Home Missions	277,870	19,569	206,736	74
World Missions	262,377	21,073	181,369	69
Personal Support	368,688	29,137	303,360	82
TOTALS	\$1,860,474	\$137,084	\$1,416,079	76
TOTALS 2004	\$1,739,460	\$133,788	\$1,483,500	85
Cool 99%				

The Evangelism Department received \$6,338 in October.

These are the Annual Conference-approved budgets but do not reflect all the financial needs of the departments. Contact the individual departments for further information.

^{*} Includes Evangelism totals

happy to get a lift

y sister was a fun person to give gifts to. She got all the "excitable genes" in

the family. When she would receive a package with her name on it, she'd open it up with eager anticipation. She'd thank the person who gave it to her and express how happy she was to get it.



Craig Johnson

On some occasions she had no idea what it was she had just received. She had no clue what she would do with it. She would admit it if you asked her, but she was still sincerely happy. She was simply pleased somebody

cared enough to give her something.

In his book, "It's Not About Me," Max Lucado tells a story about when Martin Luther was having his Bible printed. The daughter of the printer, who was doing the work, was in her father's shop picking up paper that had fallen to the floor. She had never been told about Jesus. The only emotion she felt toward God was fear. She picked up a piece of paper that had the words from John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave ..." The rest of the verse hadn't been printed yet. Still, what she read was enough to move her heart and change her attitude from fear to joy.

Her mother noticed the change and asked what was the cause. The daughter showed her the crumpled piece of partial verse. The mother asked, "What did He give?" The daughter's reply was, "I do not know. But if He loved us well enough to give us anything, we should not be afraid of Him."

"For God so loved the world that he gave ..." That really should be enough. That God would give us anything is amazing. We have rebelled against His law. We have rejected His

That God

would give us

anything is

amazing.

gracious rule over our lives. And yet God gave.

Like my sister upon simply receiving a present, even if she didn't understand fully what it was, we should be thankful to receive anything from God. He remem-

bered us. He thought about us. In spite of our sinfulness, He kept our name on His gift list. We should rejoice over the smallest gift, the littlest remembrance from Him.

It would be gracious if He gave us anything, but He did more. "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son." He gave His best. He gave what cost Him the most. He gave what was most precious to Him.

A number of families in our congregation have recently been blessed with newborn babies. They've let those they trust hold their babies for a brief time. They certainly have

not turned their babies over to ones who have rejected good gifts from them for many years. They haven't put their babies into situations where they know over time they will be mocked, mistreated, abused and eventually killed. We would be shocked if any of these families did anything close to that.

And yet God gave His Son, knowing full well what was going to happen. While the shepherds saw the baby in

Bethlehem, the Father in heaven saw the cross on Calvary. But He also saw our need. He knew there was no other way. Only one gift could pay for our sin. Only one gift could bring reconciliation between a rebellious people and a holy God. Only one gift could do all that was needed. So He gave His Son.

Many people are disappointed the day after Christmas. What they received wasn't exactly

what they wanted. They didn't get what they had on their list.

We don't receive everything we want from God. He meets our needs but says, "no" to some of our wants. Instead of being filled with disappointment because of that, we should rejoice that we receive anything.

Even the list with the biggest requests wouldn't come close to asking God the Father to give His Son. And yet that is what He did. For even the smallest gift from our gracious God we give thanks. Because of His greatest gift, we give Him our lives.

May God bless you with a wonderful Christmas!

Something to Share

Maranatha

By Jessica Hillstrom

Some days I want to cry Maranatha not to summon a second coming but to summon your presence to the middle of our pain.

And if I muster a faint *Where are you, God?* please know that I don't lack the knowledge — I simply lack the faith.

For we know in part and we live in a mystery that calls us, above all, to love with our hearts.

But my heart cannot hold all the hearts that are breaking. My spirit cannot rejoice when sadness shadows the faces I see.

So we wait and we pray and we find the faith to believe

you will come again, Lord Jesus. You will come

in your glory, in your power, in a gentle whisper that calls us to believe.

So come heal the broken, come dance with the lame, come feed the hungry, come in all your fullness, all your joy, once again.

Come again, Lord Jesus. Come again.