

THE LUTHERAN 

DECEMBER 2008

AMBASSADOR



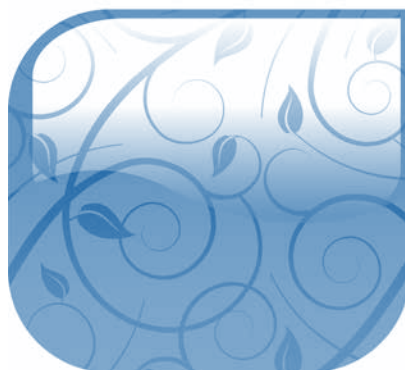
Where?

“... I will put my spirit on
him and he will proclaim
justice to the nations.”

Matthew 12:18

PACTOP
KEN THORESON

Vine &



branches

BY AMY ANDRESEN

During recess duty last week, I strolled over to the grassy knoll on the south side of the playground. It's a delightful little place created by an excavator that scooped out the soil for the basement of the school. Grass seed was sown, and on this particular day it literally shone with a bright, shiny, rich green color. However, I found myself stepping on miniature tree stumps with tough little branches extending out from them. Thanks to the recent rains, the children and I easily pulled the weeds and found each one boasted a long tap root. These weeds were remnants of a Russian thistle, also known as tumbleweed, whose top had been cut off by the lawn mower. Left on its own, we all know what happens to tumbleweeds. Their heads blow away.

For a few days last week I felt like *my* head was blowing away. I was worried about what others were thinking, saying and doing (and wanting me to do). I wanted to know what God wanted me to think, say, and do.

Jesus never worried about Judas, Pilate, or the Jewish priests and what they wanted Him to do. Jesus knew He was important to God and worthwhile. He put his trust in Him and was obedient. Jesus was concerned, however, about the hearts of people. He showed them how deeply He loved them, forgave them, and encouraged them to sin no more. He is the one to whom I need to be connected.

The Apostle Paul talked about growing *into* Christ. In the

book *In the Secret of His Presence*, Rev. G. H. Knight says, "It is more than growing into the likeness of Christ. It is growing into increasing closeness of personal union to Christ. The whole Christian life is a growing *out* of Christ as the branch grows out of the stem: but that outward growth is conditioned by, and proportioned to, an inward growth."

Knight goes on to say that the farther out the branch grows, "it grows also farther in, its fibers taking ever a firmer hold of the stem. There is a *deepening of their insertion*, as well as an extension of their spread. But this constant deepening of connection with Christ, who is our life, is a secret thing, a process unseen by any eye except God's."

A friend to our school told me the very same thing about a month ago. He encouraged us teachers to "really press into the Lord ... lean into Him."

Difficulties will come into our lives, but we can keep a level head. Keep sinking those roots deeper and deeper. He will give us peace and blessing as we do.

James 1:2-4 says, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

Andresen is a member of Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Madison, S.D.

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The mystery of Christ, that He sunk Himself into our flesh, is beyond all human understanding.

— Martin Luther

[Carols stir us. Holy words inspire us. The golden glow from the manger warms us. A little religion at Christmas is fine. But that glow in the manger comes from the Light of the world. It exposes evil and either redeems it or destroys it. The babe in the manger is far more than an object for sentimental sighs. He is the Son of God who must be accepted as ruler—or confronted as rival.

— John G. Stackhouse, Jr.]

The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God.

— C.S. Lewis

Nowhere is salvation conceived of as a flight from history as in Greek thought; it is always the coming of God to man in history. Man does not ascend to God; God descends to man.

— George Eldon Ladd
The Last Things

Bethlehem

BETHLEHEM

The manger speaks to us of God's provision & the humility of Christ

By Clara Gunderson

I RECENTLY ASKED MY FATHER WHERE I WAS BORN. "IN THE SOO," HE SAID (SAULT SAINT MARIE, MICH.). "YOU KNOW THAT." "NO, NO," I PRESSED. "WHERE AND WHAT KIND OF BED OR CRADLE DID I HAVE?" HE REMINDED ME THAT IT WAS 1934 AND I WAS MY PARENT'S THIRD CHILD. HE AND MY GRANDFATHER HAD BUILT A ONE-ROOM LOG HOUSE FOR OUR FAMILY AND THAT IS WHERE I WAS BORN, WITH MRS. MILLER, A NEIGHBOR, AS MIDWIFE.

Still, I wanted to know more. "Where did Mom put me after I was born?"

Dad answered. "Why, you just slept with Mother."

I pictured that in my mind and it satisfied, making me feel loved.

I thought back to the birth of my own firstborn and the preparations that had been made. As was the custom in our church for brand new mothers, I was honored with a shower, receiving both necessary and fluffy gifts. We were given a bassinet and I had made a lovely white, lacy skirt for it. The doctor and the hospital knew the approximate date the baby was

due. In hindsight, the ten days allowed in the hospital for recovery seems over-pampering compared to the one to two days moms are given these days.

Preparations. Yes, we are people who want to be prepared, ready for whatever lies ahead. Though times and cultures have changed, I like to think that Mary, the mother of Jesus, made some preparations for her babe, also. The swaddling cloths that she wrapped Jesus in were, perhaps, packed in Nazareth before leaving for Bethlehem. An expectant mother knows the physical signs of her baby's imminent birth.

Luke records that while they were in Bethlehem "the days were completed for

her to give birth." The town was crowded. Dismay may have shown on Joseph's face as he was denied a room in one inn after another. But God had gone before them, making His own perfect preparations. You know the story—a stable, a manger—and you question my words, "His own perfect preparations."

For His own purposes it was important that God's very own Son be born in Bethlehem. And the manger? To me it was God's perfect gift at just the right time to receive this child. God's timing is always perfect. The swaddling cloths and the manger were the signs given to the shepherds by the angel when they were sent to go and find this "Savior, Christ the Lord."

Oh the excitement in God's heart that night when the fullness of time had arrived! God Himself chose His Son's name: Jesus, Immanuel, Son of the Most High, Savior, Christ the Lord.

Though my husband and I have rejoiced greatly at the birth of each of our children,



the rejoicing in heaven at the birth of God's Son supersedes all other celebrations. The angels and the hosts of heaven sang! His birth was such that a glorious star proclaimed it. The manger, a humble feeding trough, is a beautiful depiction of Jesus' very own words in John 6:35: "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."

Yes, the manger speaks to us of God's provision and also of the great humility and weakness that any newborn experiences, needing sustenance, love, and warmth. Martin Luther portrays this tender pastoral scene in his children's hymn, "Away in a Manger." The second stanza says, "The cattle are lowing, the poor baby wakes, but little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes ..." Though the peaceful cattle lowing may not have awakened the Child, I'm sure a cry or two was heard as Jesus, born in the likeness of man, needed to suckle, needed His mother's warmth.

How nostalgic that picture is to us. As Christmas approaches, our hearts warm to the artists' conceptions of Jesus' birth, bringing to mind a sweet baby, His mother and father adoring Him; shepherds and animals worshiping; precious gifts placed nearby. Scripture says that it was a glorious night. The Father's plan for redemption had begun.

Nostalgia is swept away, however, and reality enters as the story continues. This young life is immediately in danger as a fearful and jealous king plans His death. The sweet baby Jesus became the youth who startled His elders with His knowledge and wisdom. Later, having begun His intended ministry, He separated Himself from His childhood home and family, and told an eager follower-to-be that "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Matthew 8:20).

The babe of that manger would become the Man of Sorrows, acquainted with

grief and rejection, as we read in Isaiah 53.

John Barclay writes, "The only place there was room for Him was on a cross. He sought an entry to the over-crowded hearts of men. He could not find it; and still His search and rejection go on."

I cannot embrace Jesus as a baby, nor be amazed at His wisdom as a youth and not make room for Him in my mind, nor surrender to Him my will, nor open my heart as He calls and makes room for me in His house. John 14:2-3 tells us about that house with many dwellings which Jesus is preparing for us. Zion is its name. Psalm 87 describes its beauty and declares that God will record, as He registers the people: "This one was born there."

Where were you born? In the end, where makes no difference. What matters is where you will be living in eternity. As always, He calls, and awaits your answer.

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

*God chose
an isolated,
unimportant
spot to reveal
His gift of grace*



THE FIELDS

Where

AS A NATURALLY CURIOUS PERSON I CAN SPEND HOURS JUST THINKING AND WONDERING ABOUT THINGS. RECENTLY I WAS READING THE CHRISTMAS STORY IN THE BOOK OF LUKE AND ONE ASPECT OF IT HAD ME REALLY PUZZLED. WHY DID GOD SEND HIS ANGELS TO THE FIELDS OUTSIDE OF BETHLEHEM TO ANNOUNCE THE NEWS OF CHRIST'S BIRTH? WHY DID HE CHOOSE A FEW

shepherds to be the first hearers? Wouldn't it have made more sense for the angels to appear in the Temple in Jerusalem? Shouldn't the priests who prayed daily for the coming of the Messiah be first to learn that He had arrived?

Or why didn't God tell the angels to go to the Magi in the east? These men were so wise and so learned, they had figured out on their own that a great king was about to be born. Didn't they deserve this heavenly confirmation of their theory? Even the courts of King Herod would be a plausible choice. Herod was not a good man, but he certainly was powerful. The sudden appearance of a "great company of the heavenly host" might well have persuaded him to fall in with God's plans and spread the news of this miraculous birth far and wide.

I thought and thought. I read some commentaries and the notes in my big study Bible. Then finally I prayed (which I should have done first and saved myself some time). Immediately this verse from I Corinthians popped into my mind: "God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him."

The Christmas story is not about what we can do for God. It's about God's gift of grace to us. God purposefully chose to come to the "nobodies" living in the "no-places" so that there could be no doubt—the power, the action, the results are all His.

There is an analogy about God's grace that goes something like this: we poor sinners are like swimmers drowning in a pool of sin, and we can only be saved by the life preserver of God's grace that He throws out for us to grab onto. My husband, a pastor, likes to take that example a step further. He maintains that we should not fool ourselves—we are not swimmers, we are drowned corpses lying on the bottom of the pool. We are unable to lift a finger to help ourselves. We are saved by grace alone. As Lutherans we hear it over and over again, but we still need to be reminded. "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" (Ephesians 2:8).

The baby Jesus was the ultimate gift of grace. God chose an isolated, unimportant spot to reveal this plan. He chose the shepherds, some of the most marginalized people in society, to witness His glory. They had nothing to boast about. They were not rich, or intelligent or particularly religious. They had no resources for spreading the

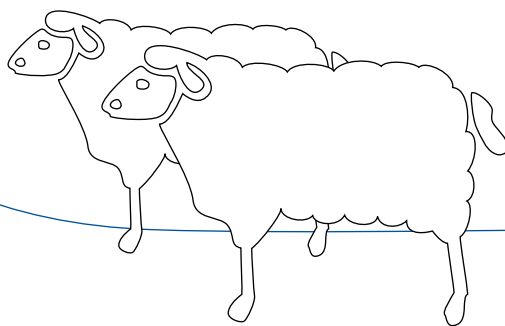
word. They weren't the kind of folks people would listen to. But God was not looking for the most deserving or the most influential to experience His grace. He was looking for the most needy.

The joyous message of the angels was "for all the people" (Luke 2:10). It still is. The angels appeared to the shepherds in a cold, lonely place, in the midst of their daily lives. They appeared during the night, when the shepherds were tired and dawn seemed far away. Into this darkness the glory of the Lord and the fulfillment of His promise to mankind shone out like a flare at the scene of an accident.

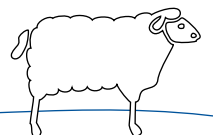
Most of us sometimes feel like the shepherds: forgotten, unimportant, worn down. The glitter and bustle of the secular Christmas season may depress us if we are alone, grieving or without the resources to celebrate in a worldly way. At these times we need to remember what the shepherds learned that night: God is with us wherever we are. He breaks into our messy lives when we least expect it with a promise of hope and peace. Jesus says, "Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

This Christmas season, and throughout the year, take time to remember the shepherds.

Culler is a member of St. Paul's Lutheran, Leitersburg, Md.



By Joan Culler





EGYPT

*The heart of darkness, the land of bondage
becomes a hiding place for the Son of God*

By Larry Walker

IN SCRIPTURE, EGYPT IS OFTEN A SYMBOL FOR SIN AND WORLDLINESS. WHEN THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL BECAME HUNGRY IN THE DESERT, THEY LONGED FOR THE “FLESHPOTS” OF EGYPT—SLAVES’ FARE, BUT A DEPENDABLE ENTITLEMENT. IT’S A PICTURE OF BACKSLIDING, THE NATURAL IMPULSE OF FALLEN MAN—EVEN WHEN REDEEMED—TO YEARN NOW AND THEN FOR THE SUPPOSEDLY EASY TIMES OF SIN, EVEN THOUGH SIN MEANS SLAVERY.

So for those who like to look for symbols everywhere in Scripture, it appears odd that God would command Joseph to take his wife and his sinless stepson into the heart of darkness, the land of bondage, the home of magic and sorcery—ancient, mysterious Egypt.

But that command was hardly less strange than God’s decision to be born into our world at all. There are no clean places on our fallen planet. Israel itself, God’s Holy Land, was filled with sin and desperately in need of its Redeemer. The very temple had become “a den of thieves” (Matthew 21:13). In Jerusalem or Alexandria, Jesus the Lord was a stranger, an alien, the one healthy Man in a world full of disease and contagion. If Egypt is the land of sin, then Jesus spent His entire earthly life in Egypt.

This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I have called My Son” (Matthew 2:15).

The author of Hebrews emphasizes that we have a High Priest (Jesus) who sympathizes with our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15).

Part of His redeeming work was to experience the whole human story. He even retraced Israel’s journey into and out of Egypt, reenacting the drama of captivity and exodus. “He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth ...” (Ephesians 4:9). Only the highest of all could descend to the lowest place of all. It was because He was too good for this world that He was able to become sin for us (II Corinthians 5:21) and destroy sin.

Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night ... (Matthew 2:14).

By the time you read this, it will be nearing the darkest part of winter. Like me, you may go to work in the dark and come home in the dark. Light is precious at this time of year. Warmth and good company mean more to us. This is the time when it’s especially comforting to turn that last corner and see the lights of home glowing in the windows.

Jesus is the Light in the darkness. Someday we’ll behold Him in glory, in His

eternal Kingdom. But for now we live in a dark world, in a winter that goes on and on. When we light up our houses for the holiday it is (for those of us who believe) a reminder that a Light from outside our world has broken in: “So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (II Peter 1:19). It’s the contrast that makes the vision so compelling. “The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it” (John 1:5).

When Jesus came to us, He didn’t come to “nice” places. He came to the darkest places of all—Egypt, Galilee (Matthew 4:15-16), the cross, the grave and hell itself (I Peter 3:19). As He had once delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, He delivered all peoples from the greater Egypt of sin.

No one of us has fallen so deeply into sin, or fled so far into Egypt, that Jesus has not come to rescue us. “The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them” (Isaiah 9:2).

Walker is librarian/bookstore manager for the AFLC Schools in Plymouth, Minn. He attends Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn.



*Called from afar to a
faraway place, three
men follow God's
sign—a star.*

Or

ONE OF THE LONGEST TRIPS I EVER MADE WAS BACK IN 1995 WHEN I TRAVELED TO SCOTLAND AND IRELAND. WHY DID I GO? WHAT WOULD CAUSE ME TO SPEND EIGHT HOURS FLYING OVER THE ATLANTIC? WHAT WAS I SEARCHING FOR? GOLF COURSES! MORE SPECIFICALLY ... ST. ANDREWS.

I ended up spending two weeks traversing the countryside, playing various courses in hopes of one day receiving a tee time that would allow me to chase a little white ball around The Old Course.

I didn't exactly follow a star, but I eventually found my way to the east coast of Scotland, bringing gifts of Titleists, Pinnacles and Top Flights to leave on St. Andrew's hallowed grounds. And when I returned to my own country, I couldn't stop talking about the adventure. I would tell anyone who would listen about my incredible pilgrimage and my encounter with golf's most historic location.

I realize this story pales in comparison to the travels made by the Magi so many years ago, but I wanted to try to relate to their journey of discovery. I failed miserably, however, because their experience goes way deeper than a fun-filled vacation.

What the Magi experienced was not a whimsical, spontaneous two-week holiday. It was a calling from God, an assignment, so to speak; an assignment that may have taken a number of years to complete. It was a calling to seek and find the promised Messiah, worship Him, and present Him with gifts of gold, incense and myrrh. What a joy it must have been after many long, hot, dusty days of travel to have finally arrived at the feet of Christ! "When they saw the star, they were overjoyed" (Matthew 2:10).

They were called from afar to a faraway place. What would compel them to answer that call? Why would these Magi, leaving family and friends behind, spend months, if not years, following a star?

Not much is said in Scripture about these Magi from the East. Most scholars

believe they were the scientists of their day. The wise men. The astronomers. Men committed to the study and observance of God's creation as it "declares the glory of God," "proclaims the work of His hands," "pours forth speech," "displays knowledge," and as its "voice goes out into all the earth" (Psalm 19:1-4). This *general* revelation from God's handiwork may have played a large part in getting the attention of the Magi.

It is quite possible that these men were familiar with God's *special* revelation as delivered in His written Word. A few hundred years earlier a man named Daniel was very instrumental in bringing the Word of God to the East. Daniel, along with many other Jewish captives, boldly shared their faith with all the inhabitants of the East. He had gained so much influence that he was made chief of all magicians, professional astrologers and others who were assigned to determine the signs of the times (Daniel 5:11).

Perhaps the Magi had become acquainted with the prophecies of Daniel. Perhaps they knew of other portions of Holy Scripture, like Numbers 24:17 which says, "A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel." Or perhaps they had read the prophecies of Isaiah: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). Or, in speaking of Christ, "I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth ... Kings will see you and rise up, princes will see and bow down" (Isaiah 49:6-7).

Regardless of how God specifically called them, the Magi took note and went

to great lengths to obey the call to find the Savior, the King. And so, using the GPS technology of their day (God's Positioned Star pointing to God's Promised Savior) they followed that calling all the way to completion. And upon finding what they were seeking, the Magi worshipped, gave gifts, and returned to their own country. When they arrived I'm confident they shared with whoever would listen about their incredible journey and their encounter with the world's most historical and life-changing individual.

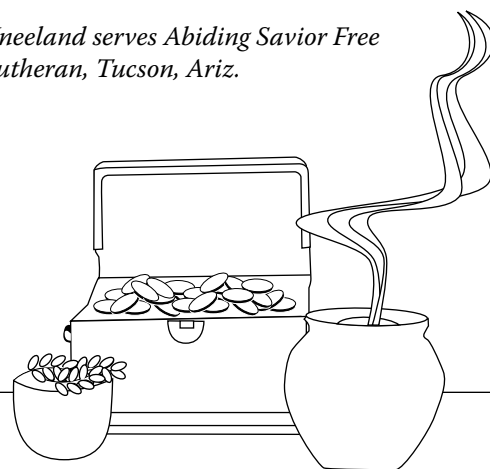
You've probably heard the phrase, "Wise men still seek Him." Do you? For some of us it may seem like a very long, hard journey. We maybe don't want to go to such great lengths as the Magi did to find Him. We maybe don't want to get out of our comfort zones and upset our normal lives. But the Bible says, "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near" (Isaiah 55:6).

If you have found the King, what have you done with that good news? We are not only called to seek Him, but we are also called to share Him. Have you returned to your people with the good news? Friends, family, fellow workers and others need to hear about what we have found. Those in other regions, other states, other countries who have never heard about the Messiah, also need to hear. "How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (Romans 10:14)

We often think Jesus is ours when in fact He is a gift for all the world. God, in His great love, chose to communicate the good news of His Son's coming to people, such as the Magi, who lived in a faraway place. How can we not do the same?

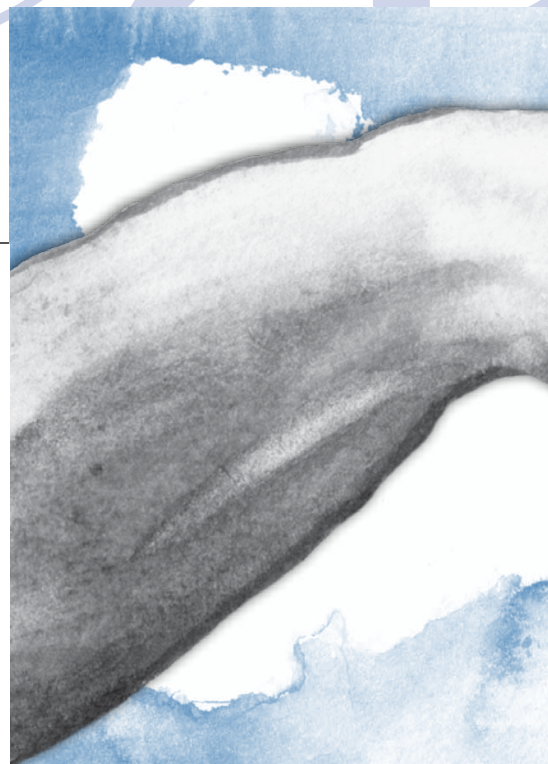
Kneeland serves Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Tucson, Ariz.

By Pastor Paul Kneeland
FaR EaST



Where HeAVeN

*What did it cost our
heavenly Father to
send His Son, Jesus?*



By Barb Long

TEN YEARS AGO WHEN OUR SON, JESSE, LEFT US FOR HIS FIRST FOREIGN MISSION TRIP TO RUSSIA, A FRIEND WANTED ME TO COUNT THE COST. SHE ASKED ME IF I WAS PREPARED TO LET HIM GO, KNOWING HE MAY NOT COME BACK. I THOUGHT FOR A FEW MOMENTS AND THEN SAID, “YES.” I ANSWERED QUITE CONFIDENTLY, BUT BELIEVING HE WOULD SUFFER NO HARM, I FELT NO ANGUISH.

“When the fullness of time” (Galatians 4:4) came, and God sent forth His Son into the world, He knew more completely than I can even imagine all that Jesus would suffer. Yet He was willing to let Him go. And just as amazing, Jesus was willing to go.

Amazing love, how can it be?

That Thou my God, should die for me!

Jesse’s first short-term mission trip was followed by many others: Mexico, Thailand, India, and more than one trip to Brazil. Then the day came when we took him to the airport for a six-month trip to Brazil. His plan was to travel with Pastor John and

Ruby Abel on their evangelistic crusades. Once he was beyond our sight, we sat down for a few minutes and a few tears fell. I wondered why we were so sad when we were still surrounded by several of our children. It hit me then: What would it be like if he was my only child, my only son? What if he wasn’t leaving to travel with dear trusted friends, but to be spitefully treated and spit upon, to be whipped and killed? Would I be willing to release him to that?

“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son ...” (John 3:16).

Not for people who deserved it. Not



to those who would welcome Him. Not to experience comfort. But to a life of sorrow, rejection and pain. What was it like for our heavenly Father to send His Son, Jesus?

I have been overcome with anguish when I have read or seen pictures of fathers and mothers mourning the death of a child they will never see again. That is a sorrow that is hard to imagine. It is a sorrow that will never end. Sometimes it keeps me awake in the night. I am blessed beyond comprehension to know that because Jesus was willing to leave His Father and come to earth, I will never have to say goodbye to my son forever.

Our Father sees every evil and pain on earth and He sees the end of those who reject Him. He doesn't desire the wicked to die and be lost forever. That's why He was willing to send Jesus. And Jesus, "because of

the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising its shame" (Hebrews 12:2). And He did it for us

In September 2006 we were again about to see Jesse off at the airport. This time it was for a year and the call was to Tanzania. I felt no sadness. Our separation will mean others will not have to be separated from their heavenly Father, or their earthly father and mother. What greater joy could there be than knowing that because my son was willing to go, precious people will be in heaven?

God has given Jesse a great partner in Ben Jore, and they are now beginning their third year in Tanzania, helping to train faithful men at the Waama Bible College and bringing the gospel to thousands who have never heard through the *Jesus* film. Our Father has raised up prayer warriors

and comforters. He Himself has been our Comforter. He has also given many precious promises to those who are willing to lay down their lives for the sake of the gospel. He has given much joy for the journey.

We serve a great God. He breathed the stars into existence. If you know how big some stars are—they dwarf our own sun—that should put us in awe. But He is not only great, He is merciful. That's why he sent His Son.

Long is a member of Atonement Free Lutheran, Arlington, Wash. (For more information about the ministry in Tanzania you can read their blog at www.benandjesse.blogspot.com.)

Where



HEROD'S PaLaCE

By Pastor Rich Carr

*God uses the halls of the mighty as
a study in contrast to the life of His son*

ONE OF THE JOYS OF TRAVELING IS SEEING THE SIGHTS. WHEN TRAVELING TO EGYPT MOST VISITORS PLAN ON SEEING THE GREAT PYRAMIDS, OR WHEN TRAVELING TO THE NORTHERN PART OF ARIZONA MANY FREQUENT THE GRAND CANYON. IF YOU WERE A TRAVELER IN BIBLICAL TIMES YOU WOULD DEFINITELY WANT TO STOP AND SEE THE AMAZING BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES THAT HEROD THE GREAT HAD BUILT. ACCORDING TO THE INTERNATIONAL STANDARD BIBLE ENCYCLOPEDIA, HEROD THE GREAT IS CONSIDERED TO BE ONE OF THE MOST EXCEPTIONAL BUILDERS OF ANCIENT TIMES. ONE COULD SAY THAT HE WAS THE FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT OF ANTIQUITY.

Herod the Great is described as a born leader who understood politics, which led him to come from very simple beginnings to become a great king. While he was very successful as a king, his true talent, according to most, was his knack for building. Just a few of the many buildings he erected were a theater, amphitheater, colossal towers, a new temple that was considered one of the wonders of the world, and a magnificent palace for himself that was rivaled in beauty only by his temple.

After Herod the Great died his palace was believed to have been used as the Roman Praetorium, or official governor's residence. It was here in this magnificent structure that Jesus was tried by Pilate, and sentenced to death on the cross. How could a location described by Jewish historian Josephus as a palace with no equal, a building that was sophisticated, stunning, and massive also be the same location where the most infamous trial of all time took place?

Perhaps God in His infinite wisdom wanted to give us the greatest study in comparison and contrasts of all time. The Jews were waiting for God to fulfill the prophecy of their Messiah. They were expecting a great King to be born to a noble family in the line of David. They were ready for their Messiah to save them from the

oppressive Roman rule. Yet Jesus met none of most of the Jews' expectations. Jesus was born to a poor teenage family, and lived a meager life as a boy and young man. As an adult He continued this lifestyle as He was homeless, and depended on the gifts of the people He ministered to for His physical needs. Perhaps most importantly for many of those who rejected Jesus, He didn't come to set the Jews free from Roman rule. They wanted liberation so they could once again be a great nation. They desired to be first, to be powerful, to be the rulers.

All through Jesus' ministry He taught a radically different lifestyle and belief structure. Blessed are the meek (Matthew 5:5), if you want to be first you must be last (Mark 9:35), to be the greatest you must be the least (Luke 9:48). Mark 10:42-45 (NKJV) gives an excellent summary of this whole concept. The disciples were upset because James and John asked for a place of honor in heaven with Jesus. Instead of shaking His head and throwing His hands up, Christ uses this moment to again teach them what honor truly is:

But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord

it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

It was fitting for Jesus' trial to be held in Herod's luxurious palace. Mankind viewed greatness through measurable objects like the amount of money in your treasury, the size of one's home, mammoth buildings or monuments, and political power. Jesus was born in a stable and lived a poor man's existence, yet He was sentenced to death in perhaps the world's greatest palace. By all human terms Christ's life and work should have been snuffed out long ago. Today we don't have anything left of Herod's great palace, but we do have a thriving, growing, movement of faith in Jesus around the world.

This Christmas worship your King and think of His lessons of humility and meekness. Whether you worship in a rundown storefront or a beautifully decorated large church building, remember that what makes a congregation is not the building, attendance, or giving. What makes the congregation are the individual saints unified in their desire to worship and glorify Jesus as their King and Savior. Have a blessed Christmas!

*Carr serves Christ Community Church,
Hagerstown, Md.*

A *flood* OF *light* AND *joy*



By Andr. Kvellestad

Rønnaug Marie was only 9 years old when she ventured forth from her home for the first time. They were 11 children at home and the father indicated that such a big girl as Rønnaug would be well able to earn her living as a milkmaid. The mother had given her considerable information about life. She must never go about with wet feet and never go to bed without praying the Lord's Prayer. In the spring she must go forth quietly in the woods when the cuckoo bird was about. If she was so fortunate as to sit under the cuckoo tree, she could make three wishes. And all three would come to pass.





*Oh, for a flood of light
and joy. The tears
of rejoicing flowed.
Her whole inmost being
was set free as when
a slave drops his chains
in freedom. Her face
was surely transformed.*

One day in May it actually happened that a cuckoo in an oak tree began to sing right over her head. Rønnaug Marie felt a chill come over her. Quick as lightning she called out to God that He would help her to remember her three wishes, for now she had forgotten them all. "And you must also bless me," she said at the end. Then the bird flew away and she never went under the cuckoo tree again.

When she was 25 years old, Rønnaug Marie met the man who became her challenge. The first time she saw him she had a feeling of abhorrence. The fact was he was drunk. And her mother had warned her against such. But, anyway, she was married to him a year later. And so began her tragedy.

It, however, only seems that her life is tragic. In reality, her life is a living illustration of Psalm 84:6: "As they go through the Valley of Baca they make it a place of springs."

The beginning of her marriage happened in the fall of 1895, thus 40 years ago.

One of the old neighbors who lived at Løkken came up to her one evening with a large new book. "This is for you, Rønnaug Marie," said the eccentric man with a smile. And then he left.

From that time on it was like something holy had come into the house. When her husband, Jon, the horse trader, fell in the door swearing and boasting, she hid herself and the Book. If Jon saw the Book opened he became furious. That's how it went until one significant Christmas night.

That stormy night everything was so gloomy and impossible for her. She felt herself forsaken both by God and man. The hard condition in her home was not the worst. She could endure that all her life if she only knew she was saved. But there didn't seem to be any hope for Rønnaug Marie.

She lay on the floor and cried out in competition with the little one in the cradle. The frightened children flew in and out. She paid no attention to anything, only to herself, and she fell lower and lower. It seemed like she was in the eternal torment.

"Go up in the loft and pray to God for me, children" she cried out.

Then it became quiet in the room. One of the daughters, who is now a missionary, has told me what the seven experienced in that cold loft. But I cannot relate it.

"I have committed a sin unto death. I am lost and must die. Save me, Lord, if You are able." The answer came to Rønnaug

Marie. As an angel message direct from heaven sounded in her soul: "Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven!" Oh, for a flood of light and joy. The tears of rejoicing flowed. Her whole inmost being was set free as when a slave drops his chains in freedom. Her face was surely transformed.

And just then her husband stood in the doorway. Only the sight of her lessened his intoxication.

"What is it that has come over you, woman?" he shouted with an abusive oath.

"I have been saved, Jon," she answered quietly.

Her fear of him was gone. The Bible lay open on the table. In that moment she could have spoken the words even if it had cost her life.

"How do you know that?" He had never talked to her so quietly for 10 years.

"Oh, it says it here in the Book I received. You can see it for yourself. And now you must look after our children, Jon. I have to go down to old Aslak and tell him."

"Tonight? Can't you wait till morning? It is dark and there are big snowdrifts. And it is Christmas Eve."

"That doesn't matter, Jon. I must go. It is so great and wonderful. If you could only know. I'll only be gone a little while."

Now Rønnaug Marie is 83. For more than 30 years she strove with God about Jon's salvation. And one night he was snatched as a brand from the fire. For 40 years she has contended with God about her youngest boy's soul. She had to follow him to prison's door when he was arrested by a sheriff. But one night he came and lay down by her and prayed to God for mercy on his life.

"Now I am even richer and still more joyful than that Christmas Eve when I hurried with effortless steps through the snowdrifts to tell Aslak about my salvation," she said. "But the memory of that first Christmas Eve tastes like honey within me."

Then a glorious smile came over Rønnaug Marie's face.

Translated from Norwegian by Pastor Raynard Huglen, this article appeared in the Christmas 1935 issue of Evangelisten. Huglen is a member of Westaker Free Lutheran, Newfolden, Minn.

Pederson named president of HCJB

Graduate of AFLTS leaves job at Moody Broadcasting

Wayne Pederson, a graduate of the Association Free Lutheran Theological Seminary, became president of HCJB Global on Nov. 1.

Pederson, HCJB Global's seventh president, has been a member of the board of directors of HCJB Global for two-and-a-half years. He also has worked with the ministry to raise money for key projects, including the launch of



Wayne Pederson

its satellite ministry in Latin America and Russia. He previously served as vice president of Moody Broadcasting.

"I have a passion to see people come to Jesus," Pederson said. "My focus has been on using the media to accomplish that. However, as I grow older, God has sensitized my heart to the physical needs of people worldwide.

"By combining HCJB Global Voice with HCJB Global Hands, we can demonstrate the love of Christ in very practical ways. That kind of caring opens the door for us to share the great spiritual truth that God cares not only for people's eternal salvation, but for their welfare in this life."

A native of Minnesota, Pederson was in the first class to graduate from AFLBS. He has a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology from the University of Minnesota and a master of divinity from AFLTS. He and his wife, Norma, live in Chicago and have two married children.

Prior to joining Moody Broadcasting as manager of WMBI, Pederson was executive director of Christian Music Broadcasters, president of the Mission America Coalition and president and chairman of the National Religious Broadcasters. From 1967 to 2002, he held various positions at Northwestern College, rising to the level of executive vice president for radio.



AFLC President Pastor Elden Nelson (right) installed Pastor David Nelson (left) at Ebenezer Free Lutheran, Humboldt, Tenn., on Sept. 21. The installation was held in conjunction with the congregation's five-year anniversary. Also pictured is Mike Nelson, deacon.

2009 Lutheran Ambassador schedule

Below is the 2009 *Lutheran Ambassador* schedule. Please be in prayer for each issue. Note the deadlines and special emphasis of each issue. If you have an idea regarding a general article, a certain issue or have an interest in writing, please contact the editors.

ISSUE DATE	DEADLINE	ISSUE THEME
January	November 25	Worry
February	December 16	AFLC Schools
March	January 26	Lent/Easter
April	February 23	Missions
May	March 23	Grace
June	April 27	Evangelism
July	May 25	Christian Education
August	June 22	Conference Review
September	July 27	Youth/FLY
October	August 24	Relationships
November	September 28	Reform./Thanksgiving
December	October 26	Advent/Christmas

Please note, information regarding the Annual Conference, scheduled for June 16-19 in Fergus Falls, Minn., will be featured in the May issue, with a deadline of March 23. This includes the conference schedule, nominees, registration and WMF convention schedule and registration information. The conference registration will also be printed in either the March or April issue. Housing information will be printed as soon as it is available.

White as snow

BY PASTOR CONNELLY DYRUD

It was a beautiful, hot muggy summer day in the middle of December 1975. We were off to Iretama in our jeep, pulling our trailer and tents for a missionary training week. It was summer vacation in Brazil. Our Bible school and seminary students were working with us in discipleship training. We'd go to visit the villages where our churches were being planted. The usual schedule was a week of intense visitation, Bible studies and meetings. The morning began with daily vacation Bible school from 8 a.m. to noon. In the afternoon, from 1 to 5, we had house-to-house visitation when we'd send our students out two-by-two. The evenings were dedicated to evangelistic tent meetings.

The week started off in heavy rains. The tent was set up between showers. Monday morning arrived and children came out in great numbers. They were told that they, too, would be missionaries for Jesus if they invited their friends to VBS. Old Christmas cards from our AFLC churches in the USA and Canada with Portuguese Bible verses on them were given to all visitors. The child who brought the most visitors would get a Bible. A 9-year-old boy brought 32 visitors in one week, winning the Bible.

The afternoon visitations were a success. The students went two-by-two throughout the village; every home was reached. I took two students and locals with me out into the country on the mud roads. One afternoon we sunk into such deep ruts that only a yoke of oxen could pull the jeep out.

The children from VBS brought their Christmas cards home to their parents to see and read. One man said to me, "So you have seen snow in America at Christmas. Tell me what snow is. How does it feel? How white is it?"

At first I choked up remembering our white Christmases with family and friends at home. But then joy overwhelmed me as I told him, "Snow is so white that on a sunny day you need sunglasses to see because of the sun's reflection." I continued by sharing, "Did you know the Bible talks about snow in Isaiah 1:18? It says, '... though your sins are like scarlet they shall be as white as snow.'"

As we talked more that afternoon we prayed and he gave his heart to Jesus.

The evening evangelistic meetings were difficult. The rain came down so heavy that the first three nights were a washout. But the last ones were a blessing. Many came forward for prayer and salvation.

The last night in Iretama was a memorable night. I tried to sleep but the rain was really soaking our tent. In the distance I heard a recording of Bing Crosby singing, "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas." A small Portuguese general store owner thought he was doing me a favor. It sure made me lonesome. But then I thought, "This truly is a white Christmas for many of the villagers who have given their hearts to Jesus."

Dyrud is the director of the Ministry Training Institute on the campus of the AFLC Schools, Plymouth, Minn.

*'Though your sins
be like scarlet,
they shall be as
white as snow.'
Isaiah 1:18*

The Second Touch

Pastor Thoreson's art featured in this issue

Pastor Ken Thoreson, Sebring, Fla., has been in the ministry for 30 years, serving churches in Minnesota and Wisconsin for 25 years. He currently serves Tanglewood Community Church, Sebring, a nondenominational church, with the permission of the AFLC Coordinating Committee. He writes of this piece:

"The background of this picture represents the eons of time and space before God created Adam in His image and touched him, giving him life, breath and his own will and placed him in the Garden of Eden. This was God's first touch to mankind. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Michelangelo painted the scene of God touching Adam on the ceiling of the Sistine chapel in the Vatican. Adam, we know, fell from God's grace by eating of the forbidden fruit in the garden. He lost his fellowship with God because of sin. That's when God promised to send a Savior to redeem mankind (Genesis 3:15).

"God kept His promise and touched mankind the second time when He sent His only Son, born in a lowly manger in Bethlehem 2000 years ago. The sad thing is according to John 1:11-12, 'Even in his own land and among his own people, the Jews, he was not accepted. Only a few would welcome and receive him. But to all who received him, he gave the right to become children of God. All they needed to do was to trust him to save them. All those who believe this are reborn!—not a physical rebirth resulting from human passion or plan—but from the will of God.'

"We also can experience God's second touch when we receive Jesus into our hearts and lives. God's first touch was to give mankind life. God's second touch was to give eternal life."



Pastor Paul Kneeland, left, was installed Oct. 12 as pastor at Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Tucson, Ariz. Pastor Elden Nelson, president of the AFLC, led the installation service and also spoke at the morning worship service.

Book detailing Abel's Brazil ministry is now available

Fifty Years Under the Southern Cross is a wonderful new book about the lifetime ministry of missionaries John and Ruby Abel and family.

John met Jesus through an evangelism effort in Canada. After joining the U.S. Navy, he was called by the Lord into foreign missions. Deep within the heart of this man of God is an ongoing desire to see people converted to faith in the Savior.

The Lord had his hand on Pastor Abel. In college he met the one who would be his lifetime teammate and co-worker, Ruby. Some of their family is still involved in mission work.

The Abels became part of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations in 1963 when they pioneered the AFLC mission work in Brazil. They still make frequent trips to Brazil. When home in the States, Pastor Abel assists various congregations that are in need of a pastor.

Fifty Years Under the Southern Cross is available from Mercy and Truth Publishers, 19594 350th Street NW, Newfolden, MN 56738-9286. The book costs \$14.50 and can be mailed for an additional cost of \$2.50. Any funds received through these contributions will be placed into a special fund, which will possibly be used to reprint the book or go to the mission field in Brazil.

By Pastor Dennis Gray

October memorials

AFLBS

Audrey Moan
Esther Danielson (3)
Vicky & Manley Miller

Esther Danielson
Myron Rostad
Pam Lewandoski

Miriam Infant Home

Howard Melrose

AFLTS

Pastor Marlyn Kruse (12)
Audrey Moan
Rudy Skogerboe

World Missions

Pastor Marlyn Kruse (2)
Alice Rokke
Orville Ulland
Ben Suelzle
Karen Weinkauff
Ardelle Ivesdal

Alaska mission

Emma Hanson

Home Missions

Leona Gimmel

ARC posts 2009 schedule

The theme for the Association Retreat Center's 2009 camps and retreats is "King of Kings and Lord of Lords," with theme verses from Philippians 2:9-11, "God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

The 2009 AFLC camping schedule is as follows:

SIDExSIDE

grades 7-12
February 6-8
Cost: \$90

Kids' Camp

Grades 1-3
June 26-28
Cost: \$75

Sno Daze

grades 4-7
February 6-8
Cost: \$90

Family Camp

July 26-Aug. 1
Family: \$465-675

Couples' Retreat

February 13-14 (15)*
Cost: \$130

Classics' Retreat (55+)

Sept. 18-20
\$75/person-\$130/couple

Women's Retreat

March 27-29
Cost: \$85

Chosen Child Conference

Nov. 6-8
Cost: \$135/person
(or family rates)

Men's Retreat

April 24-25 (26)*
Cost: \$65

Silent Prayer Retreat

December 4-5 (6)*
Cost: \$65

Fire Up Youth Camp

Grades 4-7
June 21-26
Cost: \$190

*Option of extra night
with breakfast

The Association Retreat Center is located at 2372 30th Ave., Osceola, Wis. If you would like further information regarding these camps and retreats, call 1-800-294-2877 or visit the ARC's Web site at www.arc-aflc.org.

People and places

Pastor Walter Beaman announced his retirement and has resigned from serving Hosannah Free Lutheran, St. James, Minn. He and his wife, Ellen, will live in Grand Forks, N.D.

Pastor Kerwin Sletto has resigned from his position as chaplain at Pleasantview Nursing Home, Ottawa, Ill. He has accepted a position as chaplain at Altru Health System in Grand Forks, N.D.

Pastor Brent Olson will resign from his position at Ruthfred Evangelical Free Lutheran, Bethel Park, Pa., effective Dec. 31. He plans on attending Concordia University, St. Louis, Mo.

Parish Education seeks office assistant

The AFLC Department of Publications and Parish Education is seeking a permanent, part-time office assistant with some computer knowledge to work Monday-Friday afternoons (20 hours/week) beginning in February or March 2009. Interested applicants should contact Executive Director Marian Christopherson at (763) 545-5631.

ARC hosts Pastor's and Wives Retreat

Annual AFLC event will be held in January 2009

The AFLC Pastors' Retreat will be held Jan. 20-22, 2009, at the Association Retreat Center, Osceola, Wis. The opening service, led by Pastor Joel Rolf, will begin at 7 p.m. Jan. 20. Sessions on Jan. 21 will include a Bible study by Pastor Dale Finstrom, a focus on "Renewal for Life" by Dr. James Lamb from Lutherans for Life, "Dealing with the Difficult" by Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, and "Personal Finances" by Steve Jankord. An evening banquet will feature Pastor John and Ruby Abel, Pastor Michael Brandt and Pastor Elden Nelson, followed by a service of Holy Communion. Sessions will also be held on Jan. 22, followed by AFLC departmental updates.

The cost is \$85/person. Please call (715) 294-2877 or email arcregistration@centurytel.net to register for any or all of the retreat.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES Jan. 1- Oct. 31, 2008

FUND	TOTAL (subsidy)	REC'D IN OCTOBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% TOTAL
General Fund	\$360,331	\$32,076	\$294,716	82
Evangelism	113,084	7,972	73,057	65
Youth Ministries	71,249	7,117	89,395	125
Parish Education	116,771	8,324	82,172	70
Seminary	220,252	18,217	163,447	74
Bible School	346,706	29,025	317,806	92
Home Missions	332,985	36,952	239,089	72
World Missions	288,948	38,135	255,115	88
Personal Support	457,495	44,200	387,113	85
TOTALS	\$2,307,821	\$222,019	\$1,901,909	82
TOTALS 2007	\$2,220,688	\$230,933	\$1,892,644	85

Goal 83%

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.

Leaving **HOME**

Agatunet is a village on the Hardanger fjord of Norway. It is where my grandmother was born and lived until she came to the United States in 1905 at the age of 20. The village is now a museum, where people are able to see what life was like in the 1800s.

When I visited there with some cousins we were told how the wealthy and influential people lived in the center of the village. We then set out to see the home our grandparents grew up in. It was a 40-minute walk up



Pastor Craig Johnson

the hill; a long way from the center of the village.

The view from the house is spectacular as it looks out on the beautiful fjord. But you can't clothe kids or fill empty stomachs with a view. Times were hard in Norway in the early 1900s. At that time, in that little village, the future prospects for a young lady didn't look that promising.

The community looked at my grandmother and another young lady as two young people with great potential. They thought they would have a better chance of realizing that potential if they went to America. So they raised the necessary funds and sent the two off to the New World.

My grandmother left behind her parents and her two brothers. She never saw them or Agatunet again.

The people of Agatunet were willing to let two of their best and brightest go. The two young ladies could have done a lot to help the village if they had stayed. But the village put my grandmother's future ahead of their own. They did it for her and her descendants. They did it for me.

I have also visited Ellis Island in New York. It was the first stop for many immigrants to this country. The museum that is there now tells their story. It shows pictures of the lines they stood in and the examinations they suffered through. It has on display some of the meager possessions they brought with them. I may have brought as much with me when I went to Norway for two weeks as my grandmother brought with her when she came to this country to stay.

I stood in that hall and tried to imagine what it was like 100 years ago. I tried to imagine what it was like for my grandparents. It had to be hard and humbling and a little frightening. Life wasn't that bad in Norway. Why did they do it? Why did they leave the place and the people they loved so much? Why did they sacrifice so?

They knew it wasn't going to be easy. They weren't people with unrealistic expectations. They knew it wasn't going to make their life better right away. But they did it to give their kids and grandkids a better future. They did it for me.

Jesus left not just a village on a fjord, but a palace in heaven. The Father would have preferred to have His Son remain right beside Him, but He knew He had to let Him go. He did what was best for all the generations that were to come. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16, NIV).

The Son came not to improve His

The Father would have preferred to have His Son remain right beside Him, but He knew He had to let Him go. He did what was best for all the generations that were to come.

situation in life. He did it for us. "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons" (Galatians 4:4, 5).

I am thankful for grandparents who left one place and came to a new place, so that I could have a new life. I am even more thankful, though, for the Savior who left the glory of heaven to walk the path of suffering on this earth, so that we could "have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).

something to share

BY NATHAN OLSON

A great Light

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned ... for to us a child is born, to us a son is given" (Isaiah 9:2, 8).

What do you really see? As you think about Christmas, what comes to mind? What are you focused on? Is your mind set on the presents, the food, the family, and the traditions?

I was recently talking with one of my unbelieving friends about Christmas and what his focus was during such an important time of the year. I stopped and listened to him. He explained how Christmas was such a great time for him to focus on himself and take some personal time. Not only was he able to receive some "well-deserved" gifts, enjoy some "well-deserved" vacation time from work, but he was also able to finally get some "well-deserved" food.

While I pondered the selfishness of his words, I was struck by how often this is our same response as Christians. We see the time of the Lord as a time to look to ourselves and consider how much we deserve. Instead of coming to say that we have seen a *great Light*, we often have to admit that we catch ourselves saying that we have seen a *great self*. Instead of lifting high the name of Christ—the Mighty God, Wonderful Counselor, Prince of Peace—we prefer to lift up our own name and see ourselves get the praise.

Seven hundred years before Jesus Christ was even on the scene, Isaiah the prophet foretold of the coming Messiah and what was to be revealed amidst a people of darkness. Yet even now, 2,000 years after the Messiah's coming, it is so easy to miss what Isaiah wanted us to see: The light! We get so wrapped up in ourselves, or our agenda, or our plans that we miss the reason for the season altogether.

As Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). Thus, as our thoughts are on Christmas and Emmanuel, "God with us," let us look to the Light that has come! Let us walk with Jesus and follow Him wherever He would lead us.

This Christmas I need to ask if you've seen it. Have you seen the Light? Let's not miss it!

Olson, a senior at AFLBS, is a member of Faith Free Lutheran, Shakopee, Minn.

